

West conditioned to ignore barbaric behaviour



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Inside Defence

A couple of notable news stories from last week serve to illustrate just how effective modern propaganda can still be.

The first of these is the shocking video of United States Marine Corps snipers in Afghanistan laughing as they urinate on the corpses of Taliban fighters.

Once the video went viral on the Internet, the Marines made all the right

noises by vowing to investigate the matter thoroughly and to punish the perpetrators if their identity could be established.

Captain Kendra Hardesty, a spokeswoman for the Marines, told reporters “the actions portrayed are not consistent with our core values and are not indicative of the character of the Marines in our Corps.” Going one step further, US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta described the desecration of the Afghan dead as being “utterly deplorable.”

While the news headlines and official reaction registered the correct tone of shock and revulsion, it was distressing to see that those sentiments did not resonate from all members of the American public.

The online comments posted were overwhelmingly supportive of the US Marines’ actions. More disturbingly, the total disrespect shown to the dead combatants seemed to inspire a bizarre sense of US nationalism.

On the *Washington Post* website, one reader responded, “I don’t see any problem here. In fact, when they peed, they peed for me too.” Another wrote, “I know this is bad. But really, are we to respect the Taliban terrorist and honour their dead bodies, too? Probably, yes, but it is just a piece of meat, albeit rotten.”

Taking matters even further, American activist Pamela Geller, co-founder of the Stop the Islamization of America organization, posted on her blog: “I love the Marines. Perhaps this is the infidel interpretation of the Islamic ritual of washing and preparing the body for burial.”

What is amazing about all of this rhetorical hate is the fact that Western propaganda has so demonized the Taliban over the past decade that some elements of our society now applaud

the American troops’ barbaric behaviour.

Even at the height of World War II, with animosity torqued to the max by propaganda against the Japanese and Germans, Allied soldiers were not urinating on enemy corpses. And if they did, it would never have been celebrated by civilians on the home front.

While some apologists for these Marines see their behaviour as justified payback for the killing of American civilians on 9/11, under no circumstance does one act of inhumanity justify another.

Furthermore, the response to this incident from some members of the American public only serves to illustrate the media’s success in blurring the line between the international terrorist network of al-Qaeda with the primitive, illiterate, fundamentalist Afghan recruits in the ranks of the Taliban.

The Afghan corpses being defiled were likely killed in the vicinity of their own small village, in which they would have toiled out a barren existence for their entire lives. Unable to read a map, let alone understand the complexity of a world globe, the average Taliban fighter had no idea what an American was until their country was invaded in 2001.

The second disturbing incident, although on an entirely different scale, has far more ominous potential repercussions. The killing

of an Iranian nuclear scientist on the streets of Tehran last Wednesday resulted in a similarly misguided response from Western pundits.

Thirty-two-year-old Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan was a chemistry expert involved with Iran’s secretive nuclear arms program. He was killed when a motorcycle-borne assassin affixed a magnetic bomb to the door of his car on a busy downtown street. Roshan is the fourth high-profile member of the Iranian nuclear project to

be killed in the past two years.

While the US has categorically denied involvement in the plot, the Israeli intelligence service has all but openly admitted responsibility.

Other than Iran, no one is condemning the

assassination. Many Western defence analysts are claiming it to be a successful tactic in delaying the Iranian quest for nuclear warheads. While no one wants the Tehran regime to possess such a capability, it is a slippery slope to embark upon the calculated execution of civilian scientists.

Doesn’t the use of terrorism to fight terrorists make us terrorists as well?

And for the record, only one nation in history has ever employed nuclear weapons of mass destruction against civilian targets.

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A leaked video appears to capture United States Marine Corps members urinating on corpses.

YouTube screenshot

Lessons learned from CSR counsellor



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According to Natural Resources Canada, Canadian mining investment overseas has surged in the past decade: from about \$30 billion to over \$130 billion in 2010. Virtually all of that growth has come in Africa and Latin America, and much of it in countries that the global risk assessment firm Maplecroft labels “high or extreme risk,” particularly on social or political metrics. Yet, these are also the countries actively courting resource investment as critical to poverty reduction, employment growth, and tax revenue.

In these environments, Canadian companies face increased social risk and social conflict. A recent research paper from the Corporate Social Responsibility Initiative at Harvard University points out that the costs of social conflict in the extractive industries are extremely high, for all sides. Companies may experience project delays, reputational damage, investor skittishness, and legal costs. But of special note is that in one-third of the cases the paper looked at, social conflict also resulted in loss of life.

Faced with this reality, I believe we must explore every available option to resolve conflict and do much more to enhance effective conflict prevention.

Nearly two years ago, we opened the doors of the Office of the Extractive Sector CSR Counsellor, the first office of its kind in the world, as part of the Canadian government’s corporate social responsibility strategy for our international mining, oil, and gas sectors. Just before Christmas, we tabled



Canadians from the extractive sector CSR counsellor’s office conduct a roundtable in Mali.

Office of the Extractive Sector CSR Counsellor Photo

our second annual report to Parliament, sharing some of what we’ve learned so far.

The CSR Strategy sets out voluntary performance guidelines that Canadian mining, oil, and gas companies are encouraged to work with in order to improve performance and manage emerging risks. These voluntary standards go beyond what host country laws might require, covering issues ranging from management of private security forces to biodiversity to labour conditions.

Dialogue-based approach

Canadian companies recognize that CSR is not about philanthropy or random acts of kindness. Rather, it is a strategic response to an accelerating and material business risk: the constant challenge of securing and maintaining the social licence to operate. Compliance with the law, while absolutely necessary, is no longer sufficient.

The office’s two key roles are to resolve corporate-community disputes and to help improve CSR performance. Working closely with other elements of the CSR Strategy, the office raises awareness of standards and

good practice for implementation. Overseas communities can approach the office to help facilitate constructive dialogue with a Canadian company. Because our process was built for use outside of Canada, we’ve spent a great deal of time over these past two years listening and learning from communities and civil society groups overseas. Overwhelmingly, they have endorsed such a dialogue-based approach as useful in driving positive change on the ground.

How can dialogue help? What we’ve learned in our hundreds of conversations—from Mali to Mexico, from Peru to Burkina Faso—is that many communities seek the benefits that constructive dialogue can potentially bring. Opportunities to build trust, explore win-win options, enhance learning, and share information are all key ingredients in building relationships.

In a project that lasts 10, 20, or 30 years, communities and companies need to find ways to continuously improve relations and resolve issues that arise. And since many issues of concern to communities are not ‘legal’ in nature, lawsuits may not help. It is

difficult to regulate, for example, perceptions of adequate consultation, or trust in the credibility of scientific evidence, or mutual respect. Lawsuits can be costly, lengthy, and accentuate resource imbalances.

What we heard, time and again, is that the courts are often a poor mechanism for ordinary people affected by Canadian corporate practice. For those interested in relatively rapid response, this office offers one avenue to access. And, it’s free to use for communities. But it is meant to be just one tool among many.

One hopeful sign is that similar approaches have demonstrated real and positive results. A recent video produced about the Tintaya Dialogue Table in Peru powerfully demonstrates the value in dialogue. Unfortunately, in many countries, there are no existing platforms for multi-stakeholder conversation. The office’s approach therefore has been widely endorsed as “practical” and giving “new ways of supporting the community and the miners.” We’ve been discussed as a model for other countries.

We’ve also seen tremendous appetite for learning across all sectors. Our office responded to more than 200 requests for information and expertise last year, and demand is increasing.

This year, we are working to put more information into the public domain through our Learning Partnership with Ryerson University, a monthly Canadian Mining Journal column, occasional discussion notes, and our many outreach activities.

Given that the key trends are likely to continue, opportunities for Canadian leadership and innovation abound. We must continue to seek new and constructive ways to enhance corporate-community relationships.

Marketa Evans is the government of Canada’s extractive sector CSR counsellor. The CSR counsellor is a special adviser to the minister of international trade. The counsellor has no policy-making role and does not represent government of Canada policy positions.

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