

# How the story of David McBride dismantled a conspiracy of silence all over the world



David McBride isn't just a whistleblower, he is a man who started a modern day information revolution. He is a former military lawyer, a veteran, and now an advocate for human rights and press freedom. David went to the country of Afghanistan 3 times, 2 times for the Australian military. In Afghanistan he was a witness to horrible crimes against innocent people. When he saw what happened, he didn't want to stay silent.

At first he tried the "official channels", but he was eventually forced to go public through the media. After a long struggle (and even a [raid](#) by the Australian Federal Police on the ABC headquarters in 2019) he was successful in getting the information out. And today, while he is still constantly being targeted by those who want to silence him, his support network is growing rapidly. Not a surprise because David is an eloquent speaker who knows what he's talking about. To me he became a good friend, and he's the type of guy you just don't want to interrupt.

**Watch the first interview I did with David here:**

**A timeline of events:**

- Between 2014 and 2016, former Australian Defence Force lawyer, David McBride leaked material alleging war crimes by members of the Australia's Special Operations Task Group in Afghanistan to two journalists at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), Dan Oakes and Sam Clark. McBride's lawyer maintains he did this after reporting his concerns through the chain of command. In 2017, the journalists Oakes and Clark reported in the "Afghan Files" multiple incidents of special forces troops killing unarmed civilians including children and raised wider concerns around the so called "warrior culture" of Australia's special forces.
- David McBride was charged with multiple counts of unlawfully communicating military information contrary to s73A(1) of the Defence Act 1903, theft of Commonwealth property and unlawfully disclosing a Commonwealth document contrary to s70(1) of the Crimes Act 1914.
- Then, in May 2019, McBride pleaded not guilty to the charges on the grounds that his disclosures were in the public interest.
- Last November 2020, the Australian Chief of Defence Force released the findings of the Inspector General of the Australian Defence Force Afghanistan Inquiry Report by Major General Paul Brereton, a judge of the Supreme Court of New South Wales (the Brereton Report). In this Brereton Report there is evidence for 23 incidents committed by 19 individuals resulting in the deaths of 39 civilians and the cruel treatment of 2 others.
- The Australian Government established a new Office of the Special Investigator to investigate criminal charges arising from the Brereton Report and also an Oversight Panel to investigate broader cultural and organisational

issues.

Even though the Australian Federal Police went as far as raiding the HQ of a news organization over the so called Afghan Files that David McBride bravely leaked, his actions resulted in the start of global investigations. First in Australia. The [Brereton inquiry from 2020 found "credible" evidence](#) implicating 25 current or former ADF personnel in the alleged unlawful killing of 39 individuals and the cruel treatment of two others. The Australian Department of Defence eventually "accepted" all 191 findings of the Brereton report, but uses different language in regards to the 143 recommendations, saying it is addressing all of those.

An example from the Afghanistan Inquiry as taken from the document found [here](#) on the Defence.gov.au website: "On 15 September 2011 Alexander Blackman, then an Acting Colour Sergeant in the Royal Marines, fatally shot a badly wounded insurgent in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. One of the insurgents was fired on by a helicopter in an open field. A foot patrol of around eight marines, led by Blackman, was then sent out to carry out a battle damage assessment. Video evidence shows the patrol having found the insurgent still alive.

The marines drag the insurgent to the side of the field, picking him up and dropping him several times. At Blackman's suggestion they move him out the sight of the helicopter. One of the marines suggests shooting the insurgent. Blackman responds that they should not shoot him in the head because it will be too obvious. One of the marines radios the helicopter to say that the insurgent is dead. Blackman asks where the helicopter is and on being told that it's gone away, immediately crouches down and aims his pistol at the centre of the insurgent's chest, fires once at point blank range and immediately stands back up. As the insurgent dies, Blackman can be heard saying "It's nothing you wouldn't do to us. Obviously this doesn't go anywhere fellas. I've just broke the

Geneva Convention””.

Fiona Nelson, senior legal adviser at the Australian Centre for International Justice, said Australia must make good on its obligations to the Afghan people following the ADF’s withdrawal. She said:”This includes ensuring that survivors of war crimes are treated with dignity and provided with effective and prompt reparation.” Also Manizha Isaar, of the Transitional Justice Coordination Group said the Afghan people had “gone through enormous difficulties” and reparations were “important to victims as one way of achieving some measure of justice”.

Dr Samantha Cromptvoets, a military sociologist whose work helped trigger the inquiry said cultural reform wasn’t part of a “woke agenda”, but was about ensuring the ADF is as strong and resilient as possible. Cromptvoets said a flawed culture would diminish Australia’s defence capability. “We owe it to men and women who serve, and our veteran community, to ensure these reforms are not compromised.” She also said the government must now ensure an “unrelenting spotlight” on reform, including examining the flawed power structures within the ADF. “We can’t afford for the conditions and culture subsequent misconduct that was exposed to fester again.”



Suddenly there were new developments last year, vindicating

the story of David McBride. Some readers might be aware of the fact that the Dutch preceded the Australian military in the Uruzgan area in Afghanistan. Whistleblowers from the Dutch military spoke up: "Dutch soldiers may have killed civilians while firing on two houses in the Afghan province of Uruzgan in 2007", former soldier Servie Holzken told the Dutch newspaper Trouw. The Ministry of Defense called his story very serious. Holzken explained that he and his colleagues went on patrols in the Chora Valley in 2007 to track down so called improvised roadside bombs.

Then one night, his unit was driving past inhabited areas when his commander intercepted walkie talkie traffic believed to be from the Taliban. The unit was ordered to shoot at two houses with heavy machine guns to see if there was a reaction, the Dutch veteran said. The commander heard the alleged Taliban fighters talking about the machine gun fire through the walkie talkies and people came running from the second house. Holzken was ordered to shoot them all, he said. "I am convinced that we shot and killed civilians." There was no gunfire from the other side and he saw no weapons. "I think we went through five or six boxes of ammunition, we fired until we saw no more movement." he said. He called the shooting unjustifiable.

One of Holzken's comrades confirmed a large part of this story, but asked to not be mentioned by name. Without a doubt, this entire situation would be in violation of the Dutch army's rules of engagement in Afghanistan, under which force can be used only in self defence.

And then there was Daniel Hale. On July 27, 2021, Judge Liam O'Grady sentenced "drone whistleblower" Daniel Hale to three years and nine months in federal prison. But because of Hale, the public learned that during a five month period in Afghanistan, 90 percent of the people killed by US air strikes were not the intended targets at all. Next to classified documents about the United States global assassination program, he also disclosed unclassified guidelines for the US

terrorist watch list. And as a result, individuals were able to successfully [challenge](#) their placement on the No Fly List. Daniel Hale was officially charged under the Espionage Act, a highly controversial 1917 law that has become a favored tool of federal prosecutors pursuing cases of national security leaks.

But Daniel Hale's lawyers argued that the former intelligence analyst's motivations were self evident, even if the government refused to recognize them. "The facts regarding Mr. Hale's motive are clear," they said. "He committed the offense to bring attention to what he believed to be immoral government conduct committed under the cloak of secrecy and contrary to public statements of then President Obama regarding the alleged precision of the United States military's drone program." And Harry P. Cooper, a former senior official in the CIA, who maintains a top secret clearance and has trained top level officials at the agency, including the director of the CIA, said that while some of the documents did constitute so called national defense information, "the disclosure of these documents, at the time they were disclosed and made public, did not present any substantial risk of harm to the United States or to national security."

Now, prosecutors at the International Criminal Court in The Hague are also conducting a broader investigation into possible war crimes committed by the Taliban, government forces and American soldiers and intelligence people in Afghanistan. According to a 2016 report by the prosecutors, there are good grounds to believe that people have been tortured in secret CIA detention centers.

As the United States is officially withdrawing their army from Afghanistan, Amy Goodman from Democracy Now asked in a [recent interview](#) with award winning journalist Matthieu Aikins: "Thousands of mercenaries will remain there, and other what the U.S. calls support staff. Is this war just going to

become much more secret and much more, even less accountable than it is?" Aikins answered: "I think that the U.S. role in this war is definitely going to become more secret and less accountable, because it's going to be largely carried out by the CIA and special operation forces that are operating under secret, covert authorities. So we're going to know less about it, certainly. And at the same time, though, I think that it's going to become a much more of Afghan war. There's not going to be the same presence that we had before. So, it's very difficult to say what the U.S. will be doing, because we're not going to have a lot of visibility on it."

After years of struggle, David McBride is being vindicated all over the world, with journalists, leakers, veterans, victims and whistleblowers telling their, often similar stories. But he still needs your help, because this is far from over. The people in power need to be held accountable for their crimes, and that takes a lot more than just media exposure and inquiries.

**He's got a fundraiser up here: [50 years in jail for whistleblowing on the ADF](#)**

**David can be found on Twitter: [David McBride](#)**