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European Languages

زبانهای اروپائی

29 January 2018

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31.01.2018

## US involvement in enslavement and rape of Afghan children

A report released Monday revealed the United States' long-term complicity in widespread sexual violence against Afghan boys. Between 2010 and 2016 alone, there were nearly 6,000 accusations of child sexual abuse reported by American military personnel, with no actions taken in response.

In a practice known as *bacha bazi*, or “boy play,” high-ranking Afghan elites use boys between the ages of 10 and 18 to entertain them as dancers, dressed in make-up and girls' clothing. They then hold the boys hostage, raping them and forcing them to engage in other sexual acts over extended periods of time. Once these boys escape their enslavement, they are left with deep psychological, emotional, and social trauma.

The US military has been aware of these abusive practices for years, but has worked to hide them from the public eye in order to proceed with its cooperative relationship with the Afghan police and military.

Completed in June 2017, the report was to remain classified as “Secret//Not Releasable to Foreign Nationals” until 2042. The Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR) was well aware that the incidents were in violation of domestic and international human rights law, but the Pentagon continued to funnel billions into their operations through a loophole called the “notwithstanding clause.”

The decision by the Obama administration to commission the report in 2015 only arrived after an article by the *New York Times* recounted reports from soldiers and commanders in the US military, some of whom had been dismissed for their attempts to intervene in the

crimes. Captain Dan Quinn was one of those who left the Special Forces, telling interviewers, “ We were putting people into power who would do things that were worse than the Taliban did.”

Despite the number of reports of military personnel being told to ignore the incidents for the sake of privacy or cultural differences, the SIGAR report reiterates that they found “no evidence that U.S. forces were told to ignore human rights abuses.” Instead, it primarily blames the lack of clearly defined procedures in reporting incidents, and the apathy of the Afghanistan government.

While the promises of Afghan leaders to crack down on these child rapists have gone unfulfilled, they do not carry sole responsibility. Gul Agha Shirzai, an Afghan politician who was backed by the CIA, is deeply involved in bacha bazi, and currently works as the minister of border and tribal affairs. In another case, contractors who worked for DynCorp—an aviation, weapons, and law enforcement company that conducts nearly all of its business with the US government—were found to have bought drugs and “dancing boys” with their Afghan policemen in 2010.

Since 2001, the United States has funneled over \$70 billion straight into Afghan military and police forces and easily over \$1 trillion more broadly. The country has faced great destruction, with at least 175,000 Afghan casualties and millions displaced as refugees. Poppy production and the drug trade now have a huge influence over the national economy, elevating the same government officials, warlords, and elites that participate in child enslavement and rape.

The American military machine also has its own history of sexual violence, against its own forces and civilians. Rape has been used as an act of war against women, children, and prisoners of war throughout every major conflict in the past century. This is no exception for the United States interventions in the Middle East. In one striking example, a Preliminary Examination Report from 2016 documented 82 individual detainees of the CIA who were tortured, abused or raped in Afghanistan and the “black sites” of Poland, Romania and Lithuania.

After a brief hiatus at the start of 2016, the Pentagon has intensified operations in the Afghanistan. Civilian casualties are higher today than at any point since the first invasion, caused in part by a 300 percent increase in air strikes and artillery barrages. At least 16,000 US troops are now on the ground, just a fraction of the total forces throughout the Middle East.

Countless photos, videos, and stories of the killing and suffering of children and women have been circulated by the media to justify the wars in the Middle East. Accompanied by crocodile tears, these alleged violations of human rights by those targeted by the US military are seized upon as justification of wars of aggression.

This SIGAR report is just one more confirmation that the “human rights” politics of the US ruling establishment are shot through with hypocrisy and deceit.