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## Australian Special Forces Killed Afghan Children, Tried to Cover It Up

Jason Ditz

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Adding to evidence of the humanitarian nightmare the Afghan War has become, Australia is now investigating soldiers from their special forces related to evidence that at least twice in raids in Kandahar Province, those troops killed children in rural areas, then tried to cover up their deaths.

“Cover it up” might be overstating it, really. Indeed, the evidence suggests that the Australian forces who were present at the killings just plain never reported them up the chain of command, and it was only because local villagers found the bodies that those deaths became public knowledge.

This comes as Australia’s Inspector General is already investigating the special forces over other unlawful killings, and that those special forces were killing so many civilians they routinely carried spare “drop weapons” with them just to



plant on the corpses to make it look like they were combatants.

The investigations serve as just another embarrassment from the perspective of Australia's military, but also appears to be the result of broad changes in the priorities and tactics of the US and its coalition allies in fighting in Afghanistan, as they moved away from the "clear and hold" tactics of the war's first decade.

Those familiar with the situation say that once "clear and hold" was abandoned, the collateral damage of raids stopped being a major concern for the troops, since they weren't going to be there after the operation anyhow, and that often helicopter-based raids became "land, kill, and leave."

This attitude was plainly in evidence when the Australian forces engaged in the raids in question, heading into rural Kandahar in the middle of the night and shooting anything that moved, even if they weren't in a combat situation yet. If the slain turned out to be children, the expectation was that this could simply be swept under the rug.

It is this same attitude that has other nations involved in the operations facing similar question, from New Zealand's probes into "revenge raids" to US special forces desecrating the bodies of slain enemies. It's also the latest in a long list of reasons why they aren't "welcomed as liberators" and aren't anywhere near winning the war.