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British War Crimes Shouldn't Go Unpunished

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Just the other day, the UK Prime Minister Theresa May hand in hand with the British Defense Secretary Michael Fallon has sharply criticized the possibility of criminal prosecution of British soldiers that were fighting abroad, especially in [Iraq and Afghanistan](#). This practice has been described by Mae and Fallon as a “witch hunt”, therefore both of them on behalf of the ruling Conservative Party urged the government to protect British military personnel from any sort of criminal investigations, especially if those are being charged with the violation of the European Convention on Human Rights in combat zones.

It must be pointed out that the UK government summoned a group of investigators that is now known as Iraq Historic Allegations Team (IHAT) back in 2010. It was tasked with investigating allegations made by Iraqi civilians against the British military personnel. According to the official data, IHAT examined a total of 1.5 thousand cases in a bid to establish justice. It's been reported that the budget expenditures on these procedures have reached a total of 100 million pounds (about 130 million US dollars).

However, British officials and generals dismiss any claims that British soldiers could victimize the local population during the occupation of Iraq, while claiming that greedy lawyers are wrongly accusing veterans of war crimes in an attempt to profit. As noted by The Guardian, this is an [orchestrated narrative](#), since cases are carefully selected and dropped into the public domain, and the press and public lap them up. The reality, of course, is somewhat different.

The idea that the claims are largely false is just nonsense. The UK Ministry of Defence has already paid out 20 million pounds in compensation to victims of abuse in Iraq, for a total of [326 cases](#). Anyone who would go as far as to sue the UK Ministry of Defense would know that it only pays up if a case is overwhelming or the ministry wants to cover something up.

Moreover, allegations have been made about abuse of prisoners and civilians from the outset of the Iraq war in 2003, and it has already been revealed that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) – the most respected body in the world in matters of international humanitarian law – complained about prisoner abuse.

It's clear that the UK government is scared that some of its members may be prosecuted in connection with these investigations, since there's evidence against the Ministry of Defense itself. It's been reported that military interrogators were using the so called “five techniques” in Iraq, the very techniques that were banned in 1978 by the Geneva conventions. In turn, the interrogators claim that they were following direct orders, which means that the UK Ministry of Defense ordered its soldiers to torture people in Iraq.

But these fears are not only connected with Iraq, since there's an [investigation](#) that must determine whether British-made weapons are being used by Saudi Arabia to commit war crimes in Yemen. It's been announced that the Committee on Arms Export Control will probe whether export control rules have been broken – after the United Nations warned of a “humanitarian disaster” and widespread attacks on civilians in the assault of Yemen.

According to The Independent, in a three-month period late last year figures released by the business department showed the sales of bombs and munitions to Saudi Arabia by British firms increased from 9 million pounds to over 1 billion pounds. All arms exports from the UK are actively sanctioned by the Government, which issues licenses for deals after scrutinising them.

It should also be noted that the UN report into Saudi-led strikes in Yemen raises the questions of London's guilt in this affair, since experts concluded that Saudi-led coalition conducted widespread airstrikes against civilian targets in violation of international law. A United Nations panel investigating the Saudi-led bombing campaign in Yemen has uncovered “widespread and

systematic” attacks on civilian targets in violation of international humanitarian law, still the UK carry on its arms exports to Saudi Arabia and sends its British military advisers to Yemen.

According to the Campaign Against the Arms Trade, UK arms sales to Saudi totalled 2.95 billion pounds for the first nine months of 2015 , reaching the level of 7 billion pounds during Cameron’s term in office, including a contract for 72 Eurofighter Typhoon jets. London has already confirmed that British officers were operating in the Saudi command and control centres that coordinate the strikes on Yemen, but it denies that the forces have an operational role. Ironically, in a ministerial statement in March 2014, the UK government said explicitly that it “will ... not grant a licence if there is a clear risk that the items might be used in the commission of a serious violation of international humanitarian law.”

The UK government has been repeatedly [warned](#) by leading lawyers and diplomats that it could be prosecuted for war crimes over missiles sold to Saudi Arabia that were used to kill civilians in Yemen. Britain is at risk of being prosecuted for war crimes because of a growing body of evidence that missiles sold to Saudi Arabia have been used to target civilians explicitly.

However, the Ministry of Defence of the United Kingdom has been [routinely trying](#) to close any investigation that may come to the conclusion that the unlawful killings and torture of civilians has any connection with its activities. Curiously enough, back in 2014, the then Prime Minister David Cameron announced London’s withdrawal from the European Convention on Human Rights to avoid the prosecution for the war crimes he committed, announcing instead that the UK would introduce a British bill of rights.

There’s hardly any doubt that war crimes should not go unpunished no matter how hard British politicians would try to escape responsibility, trying to get their soldiers and those who gave them criminal orders off the hook. This issue is currently of great importance in a situation when the UK is planning a military campaign in Syria. Instead of trying to pretend that no war crimes has ever been committed, British politicians would be better off starting a discussion of the role that the kingdom played in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, providing those interventions an objective legal assessment, along with the assessment of the role that London plays in Syria without UN authorization or a request issued by the authorities of this country, that is, in clear violation of international norms.