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After a public inquiry was released about 39 disturbing and barbaric alleged war crimes committed in Afghanistan by 25 Australian Defence Force personnel from 2005 to 2016, some commentators played the inquiry down, as though only committed by 'a few bad eggs', however numerous reports of massacre, murder and torture by Australians throughout the Middle East, and historically in other regions throughout the world, prove that this is a continuation of Australian participation in military aggression and violence, to maintain and further US dominance.

In Australia's longest war, the typical excuses were made to invade Afghanistan, under the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) recommendations to defend the US against further attacks in the wake of 9/11. There is clear evidence that there was a scheme developed by the US to invade several Middle Eastern countries in the lead up to this event. As General Wesley Clark pointed out, the US had plans to attack seven Middle Eastern countries starting with Iraq, and then Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and, finishing off, Iran, in a bid to reshape the Middle East to be more in line with their interests. Australia's interests in Afghanistan, participating in these barbaric acts, is to cater to the US war machine and continued plunder of the global south.

Additionally, the war is shrouded in the illusion that the US is bringing 'freedom and democracy' to these nations. Never has a phrase which sounds so innocent been used all over the world for such sinister affairs to be carried about by the US and junior imperialist partners. The US has most certainly not improved the lives of working class people in the countries they have invaded. It is clear that Australia's participation plays no role in defending Australia, and only furthers to damage Australia's reputation in global affairs.

These SAS soldiers in Afghanistan referred to some innocent Afghans as 'squirters' — a reference to villagers running away from an entering helicopter, where the Special Forces would open fire, killing men, women and children as they ran away. Excuses were used for this barbaric act, such as they 'were running away from us to their weapons caches'. These were sanctioned massacres.

Dispelling the myth further that these incidents were isolated crimes by individual soldiers, is the disturbing act of 'bleeding' which was detailed in the inquiry. 'Bleeding' is an act where junior soldiers are required by their patrol commanders to shoot prisoners to 'get their first kill in'. The report described how subordinates were pressured to comply with murdering unarmed Afghans, as the alternative would be 'a terrible one' — to be labelled as a 'lemon' and to jeopardise their careers which they had invested greatly into. The report explained that 'some of them have regretted [the crimes], and have been struggling with the concomitant moral injury, ever since.'

Whistleblower and Australian Army Lawyer, Major David McBride, who shared top-secret information about Australian war crimes with the ABC in the report titled 'The Afghan Files', made remarks that he had been gaslighted by psychologists working in the ADF into thinking that his concerns about the crimes were simply 'all in his imagination', and that there is a 'dedicated program' to make soldiers think 'it's all their fault'. He described how this was a program copied from [the US]. McBride has been charged with the theft of Commonwealth property, breaching the Defence Act, and unlawfully disclosing Commonwealth documents. He has pleaded not guilty to these charges and awaits trial, where he could receive a life sentence. His charges should be dropped.

Thanks largely to other whistleblowers like McBride, Australian military personnel have been exposed to be complicit in war crimes beyond Afghanistan, in other Middle Eastern countries such as Iraq and Syria. Just four years ago, in 2016, it was reported that a US-led attack which was supported by Australian troops 'mistakenly' massacred over 100 Syrian soldiers on the Tharda mountains. Political economist and activist, Professor Tim Anderson describes how this was in fact no mistake, as 'uncontested facts, eye witness accounts and critical circumstances' prove that the slaughter of these soldiers was an intentional operation to give control of the strategic mountain to ISIS (at the expense of the Assad Government). Although these claims may seem shocking, as Australians are told they are fighting against extremism, there are a disturbing number of terrorist organisations which have been supported by the US government, in order to bring about instability in the broader Middle Eastern

region, and regain or cement political control for their own interests. Australia has been complicit in these actions.

Nick Deane, acting as spokesperson for IPAN, the Independent and Peaceful Australia Network, said, "The invasion of Iraq by the 'Coalition of the Willing' in 2003 was, at best, a terrible mistake and quite possibly a war crime. The US, Britain and Australia colluded in the lie that Saddam Hussein possessed and was about to use "weapons of mass destruction". Iraq posed no threat to the invaders."

Like many issues which concern working class Australians, right-wing talking points have emerged in response to the report. These include excuses such as 'they're just doing their job', 'war is never pretty', 'other countries commit war crimes' or that 'civilians should stick to civilian matters'. There is no excuse for such atrocities, and the working class people of Australia should be outraged by such remarks.

First of all, it is not the job of Australian soldiers to see themselves as 'warrior heroes', as described in the report. The real question to be asked is, 'warrior hero' for who? Is it protecting the interests of the most oppressed peoples, including those in the Middle East? Or is it to further US dominance in the region? The point of view in the West is to view themselves as exceptional to those in the Global South, and this is ingrained in the psyche of many of these soldiers. Too often, people are exposed to movies coming out of the US cultural sphere, where military personnel are paraded and celebrated in this way. A TV show, 'SAS Australia' was recently released where celebrities complete a training course for induction into the army's Special Forces, in what seems to have the agenda to give the Australian population more respect for the work of these soldiers. This propaganda creates an air of exceptionalism, and a disregard for the humanity of the people in lands in which they are invading.

Secondly, the 'war is never pretty' remark completely disregards the imperialist nature of the conflict. While the sentiment of the argument may seem valid, it is clear that when soldiers are involved in attacking rather than defending, that there is already a premise to cause harm to civilian populations. The war is not even — it is about plundering already subjugated nations for continued power and dominance by the US. If an attack on Australia were to occur, it would ultimately take place on the land of some existing population. There is no humanitarian reason for Australia, or the US or other nations for that matter, to be in Afghanistan, causing such harm to so many people. Since 9/11, it is estimated that more than 43,000 civilians have been killed in Afghanistan alone. The civilian death toll of Middle Eastern people in wars Australia has participated in since 2001 is in the millions. It is about reshaping the Middle East for their advantage.

Thirdly, while it is clear that other countries commit war crimes, it makes sense for Australians to focus on what is within their means by organising to oppose such complicity with US international policy.

The final excuse of civilians sticking to civilian matters, shows a complete disregard for how involvement in imperialist wars actually affects the civilian population. At first, the ADF is made up of civilians, who, as mentioned previously, often return with 'moral injury', that is, mental health issues, and/or are completely unable to integrate into society again. Secondly, by continuing to behave as lapdogs for the US empire, put their security at risk. The US ruling elite have little to no interest in defending Australia from external forces, and as shown by the US's expectation for Australia to show hostility towards its greatest trading partner, China.

Recently, the US has created a new NATO-type alliance, the Quad, which focuses on the containment of China and includes the four countries, India, Japan, the US, and of course, Australia. It refers to this alliance as an 'Indo-Pacific' partnership, so as to remove Asia, (therefore, China) as a focal point, out of the equation. This can only certainly lead to worse trade relations for Australia with China. Australia should quit the Quad!

The attitude of the Australian government supporting the US over Australian people's interests is not new. John Howard's government was first complicit in sending the Australian troops to the Middle East, and no government in Australia since has questioned its legitimacy.

Efforts to improve the imperialist nature of Australia within US politics are doomed to fail while Australians maintain their posture as a junior imperialist aggressor. The reality is that even the most noble soldiers are likely to be turned into monsters — either that, or retreat back home — when participating in horrific acts such as 'bleeding'.

Even through reform of the Australian Armed Forces, the only way Australia could change this turn of events in a lasting way, would be to forge a new path in foreign policy, which is not linked to US aggression. The Australian Defence Force would be required to be completely defensive in nature, as its name suggests. Australia would also need to act in concert with its local trading neighbours, resolving any minor differences through diplomacy.