

Report reveals torture and murder of Afghan civilians by Navy SEALs

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The New York Times Thursday published a lengthy investigative report based on a probe by the Naval Criminal Investigative Service into the torture and murder of detainees by Navy SEALs in Kalach, Afghanistan in May of 2012. While the official report, obtained by the *Times* through the Freedom of Information Act, details horrendous accounts of torture, resulting in the death of a detainee, charges against all four SEALs were dropped.

On May 31, 2012, a local Afghan police officer was killed after a bomb went off at a checkpoint in Kalach in southern Afghanistan. In response, the Afghan Local Police unit rounded up suspects from the local marketplace and brought them to the American outpost where the Navy SEALs were stationed. The detainees were local villagers and scrap merchants. On the way to the outpost, detainees were beaten with the butts of rifles and car antennas, with one detainee saying, "Along the road, they were beating us with stones and rifles."

Upon their arrival at the outpost, the detainees were questioned and tortured by Navy SEALs. Witnesses claimed that members of the SEAL team fired their handguns next to the heads of detainees and stepped on their abdomens while dropping heavy stones on them. Witnesses further stated they had seen detainees lying on their backs as SEAL members poured water on their faces, effectively waterboarding them.

The torture continued as one detainee had his legs forced apart as a SEAL dropped a large rock onto his crotch. Another witness recalled seeing a SEAL stand "maybe eight to 10 times" on a detainee's head, stating, "When he would step on the guy's head, I could see the detainee's legs move a little." Furthermore, one witness stated he had seen a SEAL "straddling the detainee over his upper torso area and

pouring water on the detainee's head."

Following their torture, the detainees were ordered to walk separate directions, with the scrap merchants told to walk up a hillside while the villagers were told to walk an opposite direction. One of the scrap dealers, Mr. Hashem, had suffered such severe injuries that he could barely move. Blood was running from the top of his head due to a wound, and his back had suffered severe injuries due to beatings from rifle butts and rocks. Moving only a short distance, Mr. Hashem collapsed.

Mr. Assadullah, one of the other scrap merchants, stated that Afghan militiamen came to them and began beating them. He recounted them saying: "Why can't you climb? Why aren't you climbing the mountain like we said?" He said that he responded, "I could not carry him because I was also beaten."

Mr. Assadullah said that some unknown American arrived with water and a stretcher. Mr. Hashem was lifted onto the stretcher and dragged on a dirt road causing him to moan from pain. Every time they stopped, for what one can only assume was to alleviate the pain of Mr. Hashem, they were fired upon from the base. Eventually, they were able to get far enough from the base and rest out of sight. Soon thereafter, Mr. Hashem died.

The soldiers at the station who would go on to report the horrendous acts of the SEAL team were told to keep their mouths shut. The interpreter at the outpost later admitted that he withheld information about the incident because "he was afraid of getting hurt from the guys on the SEAL team." Meanwhile, military experts who reviewed the evidence of the NCIS report recommended an Article 32 hearing to decide whether a court-martial was justified. Such a hearing would be public, allowing lawyers to openly question witnesses

and present evidence.

But the four Navy SEALs implicated in the incident face no such public hearing. Instead, the case was handled privately by Capt. Robert E. Smith through what is known as a “captain’s mast.” All charges would be dropped for the four accused SEALs.

The *Times* report states, “In the wake of the Abu Ghraib torture scandal in Iraq, American military leaders recognized the ethical perils and strategic damage prisoner abuse could wreak and made its prevention a priority.” This is a lie. What these leaders have made a priority is the coverup of any evidence revealing the ongoing torture and other war crimes by US personnel. In June, the US government concealed approximately 14,000 images showing the Central Intelligence Agency’s (CIA) web of secret “black site” torture and interrogation centers established after the events of September 11, 2001.

In 2013, US Special Forces were accused of torturing 15 civilians in raids in the Wardul province of Afghanistan. Commenting on these events, the WSWS wrote, “The use of such methods, far from being an aberration, flows from the logic of the US occupation itself. Facing intractable popular resistance, the US-led forces respond with the same murderous tactics used in countless ‘dirty wars,’ in Algeria, in Vietnam, in Central America, and in Iraq. Death squads are deployed, torture becomes standard operating procedure, and civilians are rounded up indiscriminately.”

With US forces remaining in Afghanistan, being sent back into Iraq and now operating in Syria as well, these dirty colonial-style wars continue, and with them the inevitable atrocities like those revealed in the *Times* report.



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