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The Military's New Recruits Are 9/11 Children

Why Won't the US Military Leave Afghanistan? (18 years later)

It has been 18 years since September 11, 2001, meaning that anyone born after the ensuing conflict began will now be eligible to serve in a war that is older than they are. The wars in Afghanistan (2001), Yemen (2002), Iraq (2003), Pakistan (2004), Libya (2011), Somalia (2011) and Syria (2014) all trace back to the Authorization for Use of Military Force passed by Congress just days after 9/11. Currently the US is threatening military action against Venezuela and Iran, which could add to the never-ending global war.

CASUALTIES OF WAR

Military recruiters target young people with promises of education and career opportunities, but usually conveniently leave out that they have to pledge eight years of their lives to the service and can't make decisions about which combat operations they will or won't participate in. The "War on Terror" has taken the lives of over 7000 Americans: 4574 in Iraq and 2437 in Afghanistan (icasualties.org), not to mention tens of thousands of wounded. The number of people killed in the 9/11 attacks was 2973. At least 183,000 civilians have died in Iraq (Iraqbodycount.org) and over 32,000 in Afghanistan (Associated Press, February 24). In the first half of 2019, more civilians were killed by the US and its allies than by other armed combatants in Afghanistan (Associated Press, July 30).



Xenophobia and Islamophobia have become widespread in the US. Money that could be spent on health care, infrastructure, jobs, and the collapsing environment instead are poured into America's bloated \$700 billion-plus military budget. The government continues to engage in spying and unlawful detentions, including 40 men still held in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. And the US military continues as an entity to be the world's #1 user of fossil fuels, contributing to climate change.

RECRUITERS GOALS FALLING SHORT, TURN TO VIDEO GAMERS

Facing a country where only about 7% of families have members in the military, recruiters have been coming up short of their goals in various branches (US Naval Institute, June 17). In October the Army will formally launch its 16-member "e-sports" team to recruit video gamers by playing games such as Call of Duty and Forntite (Military.com, August 7). As the nation debates whether video games themselves lead to real-life violence, it is important to question the military's use of video games—which lend to the dehumanization of "others" to be killed—as recruiting tools.

WHY WON'T THE MILITARY LEAVE AFGHANISTAN OR IRAQ?

In Afghanistan, the US is negotiating a withdrawal if the Taliban—which isn't officially in charge of that country—meets certain expectations of preventing violence by groups like Al Qaeda and the Islamic State ("ISIS"). However, the US expects to bring home just 5000 troops, which will leave nearly 9,000 in Afghanistan (USA Today, August 29). After a planned withdrawal of most US troops from Iraq in 2011, about 5000 military personnel remain today (Associated Press, August 26), even after the proclaimed defeat of ISIS. One can understand why people might feel their countries are being occupied after so many years of having foreign troops on their soil. While the military's explanation is that they want to help train local forces and maintain stability, the reasons are most likely the \$1 trillion of minerals estimated to be in Afghanistan (NBC, September 5, 2014) and the world's fifth-largest oil reserves in Iraq (Economy News Baghdad, June 18).

WHAT CAN WE DO?

The US' seven active wars continue as background noise for most Americans. Even though the last known drone strike in Pakistan occurred in July 2018, the US has conducted almost 3500 airstrikes/drone strikes in Afghanistan, roughly 50 in Somalia and 10 in Yemen to date in 2019 (TheBureauInvestigates.com). The "War on Terror" has made life more difficult for many Arabs, Muslims and immigrants in the US with increasingly blurred lines between law enforcement and immigration regulation, and the rise of hate groups. The estimated costs of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are nearly \$6 trillion (Watson Institute, November 14, 2018). It is way past time for Americans to call for an end to state-sanctioned murder in the name of "national security" and agree to support international law, human rights, and civil liberties. We can work to turn the US military economy into a peace economy, with money for human needs, and a public who will never again allow its own government to conduct illegal and immoral wars.