

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/investigating-foreign-military-bases-and-sexual-violence_us_59cb5c4de4b028e6bb0a66df

Investigating Foreign Military Bases and Sexual Violence in Djibouti

[HuffPost](#)

Madeleine Rees



New research from WILPF suggests link between foreign military bases and sexual violence in Djibouti. This is a screen shot from Google Maps of US military base Camp Lemonnier, taken November 2016.

On 29 January 2017, just five days after Donald Trump became President of the United States, he approved a special forces operation in Yemen. The raid on an al Qaeda compound in Al Bayda province involved US Navy SEALs and special forces from the United Arab Emirates. SEAL Team 6 used Reaper drones for cover. At least 23 civilians were killed in the raid, including nine children. One of these children was the eight-year-old granddaughter of Nasser al-Awlaki, Nawar, who was also the daughter of Anwar Awlaki, a US citizen killed by a US drone strike in 2011. The US also killed Awlaki's 17-year-old son in a drone strike in 2011. This raid follows the first drone strikes under the new Republican president on 21 and 22 January, also in Yemen. About 75 people were killed in those strikes. The drones used by the United States for surveillance and strikes in Yemen are stationed in and launched from Djibouti. Rehearsals for the 29 January raid were also staged in Djibouti in advance of the operation.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/investigating-foreign-military-bases-and-sexual-violence_us_59cb5c4de4b028e6bb0a66df

The US military base in Djibouti, Camp Lemonnier, is the biggest base in the country. But China, France, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and Italy also have built or are building military bases in Djibouti. Russia, Spain, Germany, and the United Kingdom also have troops operating out of Djibouti.

Meanwhile, about 100,00 people a year transit through Djibouti, from Ethiopia and Somalia to the Middle East and now also from Yemen into East Africa. It also hosts large refugee camps.

Djibouti has received the lowest ranking in the 2016 Trafficking in Persons Report published by the US State Department due to the high risks of trafficking in persons and lack of any effective prevention, protection, or prosecution policies.

Foreign soldiers, including those of the United States and France, have been found engaged in illegal sexual activities with women and girls. More investigation is required to understand the extent of these activities. What is known is consistent with the pattern of conduct of foreign soldiers on and near military bases abroad.

The harm caused to children, and to other civilians in Yemen from the recent drone strikes, does not begin or end with the strike itself. There are also harms to civilians, including children, related to the permanent military presence in Djibouti.

Djibouti brings in over \$300 million a year in rental agreements with the foreign militaries, but nearly two-thirds of Djiboutians live in poverty and half the labour force is unemployed. The President is considered corrupt and repressive by human rights groups and the US State Department.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/investigating-foreign-military-bases-and-sexual-violence_us_59cb5c4de4b028e6bb0a66df



A crashed US drone in Djibouti.

Human rights violations in Djibouti and the region are linked to existing conflicts in the Horn of Africa and Middle East, which are exacerbated by the militarisation of Djibouti. The launching of drone strikes and other military operations from Djibouti have increased neighbouring violence and contributed to massive refugee and migrant flows.

In Djibouti, the symbiotic economic and political relationship between the foreign governments operating there and the Djiboutian government seems to be a deterrent to any of the governments involved to confront the human rights abuses by their own soldiers or by their host government.

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) has conducted research into possible connections between sexual violence and foreign military bases in Djibouti. This report, [Remote warfare and sexual violence in Djibouti](#), builds upon the work of two investigative journalists from the Netherlands, Sanne Terlingen and Hannah Kooy. This report is not exhaustive—much further investigation is imperative. The aim of this report is to give more exposure to the situation in Djibouti to help activists, journalists, lawyers, international and civil society organisations, and other governments to take this research further and end the harms indicated here.

Demilitarisation of Djibouti, and an end to foreign military bases the world over, is key. In the meantime, all states carry with them extraterritorial obligations in relation to their militaries or other presence in a third country. States with military operations in Djibouti must: ensure training so that all troops are aware of the crimes related to having sex with

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/investigating-foreign-military-bases-and-sexual-violence_us_59cb5c4de4b028e6bb0a66df

a trafficked person and in all cases of sex with minors; ensure real investigation and accountability mechanisms are in place; and place all civilian contractors under the same regulations as military personnel through status of forces agreements.

In addition, international organisations and civil society groups must conduct more research into the laws and prosecutions involving other governments' military and contracting personnel, including investigations into the companies contracted by all of the military bases in Djibouti; the numbers and sex of workers employed by these companies; the conduct of military personnel and contractors employed at the military bases; and the restrictions placed upon them by their home governments and mechanisms to hold them to account for violations.

The peoples from states in the region will continue to flee unless and until the root causes of forced displacement are addressed, including armed conflict, poverty, and environmental degradation. States, through the multilateral system, should develop a strategic and integrated plan for the region based on the realisation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) as an alternative to militarised security policies.

WILPF has other recommendations contained with its report launched today, while the United Nations reviews the implementation of its Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons. The critical point, however, is that we have seen what happens when poverty, human rights violations, and foreign militarism intersect. In Bosnia after the conflict, it emerged that UN peacekeepers and US military contractors were directly engaged in trafficking women and girls for sex. In Japan, US soldiers have routinely been charged with sexual assault and rape of women and girls off-base. We have the opportunity with Djibouti to help prevent such a situation from emerging, and we must seize that opportunity now.