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Afghanistan: The 11-Year War

By Matthew Rothschild
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Today, marks the eleventh anniversary of the Afghan War.

Eleven years!

That's three times as long as the United States was in World War II.

That's more than six times as long as the United States was in World War I.

And it's a war that never needed to happen.

Afghanistan didn't attack the United States. Osama bin Laden, a Saudi, masterminded the attack. An Egyptian, Mohammed Atta, was the ringleader. Fifteen Saudis were among the 19 hijackers. Not a single Afghan was among them.

What's more, the government of Afghanistan had offered to apprehend bin Laden and turn him over to a third country for trial. But George W. Bush would have none of it. He wanted to assert his machismo, he wanted to get revenge, and there were deep geostrategic reasons for the war, as well, which I'll get into in a bit.

But first, let's look at the toll this war has taken.

To avenge the loss of nearly 3,000 civilian lives in America on 9/11, the United States has now destroyed at least 7,000 civilian lives in Afghanistan, and that's a conservative estimate. These civilians were killed with our bombs, our bullets, and our drones—some of which were wedding presents.

Many thousands more Afghan civilians have died indirectly as a result of the war, from starvation or disease. And tens of thousands have been wounded.

As for the United States, we've lost more than 2,000 members of our armed services there, and more than 16,000 have been wounded, many of them catastrophically. That's almost 20,000 families that will never be the same again.

These human costs, on the Afghan and American side, weigh the heaviest.

But there are also the financial costs. This Afghan War has cost the U.S. Treasury \$600 billion in out-of-pocket expenses, not to mention the costs of medical care for our Afghan War vets. We are squandering \$2 billion a week over there.

It is now Obama's war.

He tripled the number of U.S. troops there, and he is responsible for the increase in U.S. deaths there.

It took a little more than eight years of war to claim the first 1,000 U.S. soldiers and Marines. And it took the next two and a half years to slay the second thousand.

And while Obama has started to bring some troops home, there are still more than twice as many U.S. service members in Afghanistan today than on the day George W. Bush left office.

Why are they still there?

First, we were told they were there to fight Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. But by the CIA's own admission, fewer than 100 Al Qaeda members have been in Afghanistan for the past several years.

And bin Laden? He's dead. And he wasn't even killed in Afghanistan. The Navy Seals knocked him off, unarmed, in Pakistan, our supposed ally that we've given almost \$20 billion since 9/11.

Now we are being told that we're in Afghanistan to train its army. But increasingly, our soldiers are being killed by Afghan soldiers, who are supposed to be our friends. So why are we over there if even our so-called friends are killing us?

The last ditch argument is that we're there to prevent the Taliban from taking power again and abusing the women of Afghanistan.

But Karzai himself has endorsed a code of conduct by the country's Islamic council that approves of husbands beating their wives under Sharia law.

Let's be clear: The United States is not still at war there to help the women of Afghanistan. We're at war there to help the empire of the United States.

Just look at a map.

Afghanistan borders Iran to the West and China to the East: two countries in the Pentagon's sights.

And the United States is in Afghanistan because it is a transport route for oil from the former Soviet Union republics in central Asia down to the Arabian Sea.

These are the real reasons the United States is at war with Afghanistan. But these are not legitimate reasons for letting 2,000 U.S. service members perish or for killing 7,000 Afghan civilians.

This 11-year war must end. And it must end now.

It is not doing anything but causing more death and destruction and sowing more ill will toward America.

And if Obama hadn't been worried about being called weak on defense four years ago, he never would have said that he would escalate the war in Afghanistan.

Unfortunately for all, that's one campaign promise he actually kept.