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Happy Anniversary Afghanistan!

Operation Enduring Misery Shambles Into its 13th Year

by MIKE WHITNEY

10/9/2013

October 7 marked the 12th anniversary of the Afghanistan War, but you wouldn't know it by reading the papers. In fact, "America's longest war" has become so unpopular that both the media and the Obama administration have done everything in their power to sweep the whole matter under the rug hoping that people just forget about it. But it's hard to forget about it when US troops keep getting blown up like they did on Sunday. Just look at this from CBS News:

"A bomb killed four U.S. soldiers in southern Afghanistan on Sunday, American and Afghan officials said. They were the latest casualties in a 12-year conflict that shows no signs of slowing down despite a drawdown in foreign forces." ("Four U.S. troops killed in south Afghanistan", CBS News)

And it's hard to forget about it when Obama keeps killing Afghan kids that are out playing tag or walking the dog. Take a look at this from Saturday's Al Jazzera:

"At least five civilians, including three children, were killed overnight in a NATO airstrike in eastern Afghanistan after they went hunting for birds with air guns, local officials said Saturday.… They were targeted and killed by a foreign forces airstrike," said Hazrat Hussain

Mashreqiwal, a provincial police spokesman…."("Afghan civilians reportedly killed in NATO airstrike", Al Jazeera)

And it's hard to forget about it when Afghanistan's President, Hamid Karzai, keeps blasting NATO in the media, like he did on Monday. Here's what he said:

"On the security front the entire NATO exercise was one that caused Afghanistan a lot of suffering, a lot of loss of life, and no gains," Karzai noted, elaborating on comments from his spokesman yesterday.

Karzai went on to say that NATO and the US had repeatedly launched operations in express opposition to his government's wishes, notably night raids, and was clearly willing to violate Afghan sovereignty whenever it suits them." ("Karzai Rejects US Security Pact, Says NATO Causing 'Great Suffering'", antiwar.com)

Karzai might be a puppet, but he did the right thing by criticizing the drone attacks and defending the nation's sovereignty. Even so, the issues here go way beyond Karzai or US casualties or even the death of innocent children. The problem is the war itself and the ongoing US occupation. It was a bad idea from the very beginning, and it is a bad idea today. War is too blunt an instrument to fight terrorism, that should be obvious by now. The American people were duped into believing that invading Afghanistan was an appropriate response for the attacks on 9-11, but it never was. It was always a stupid, wasteful, bloody idea without merit.

The war in Afghanistan has never made any sense. From the bombing of Mazar-i-Sharif in November, 2001 to the droning of children chasing birds in 2013; it's been one homicidal debacle after the other. On top of that, none of the strategic objectives have been achieved. The warlords and Taliban still control much of the countryside, the reconstruction effort has been a complete farce, women are no safer today than they were when the invasion was first launched, and the central government is a comical Potemkin regime riddled with corruption and incompetence. Oh yeah, and the dirt-poor country now produces 90 percent of the world's opium. The only area of commerce in which post-invasion Afghanistan excels is the production of illicit narcotics. Is it any wonder why the American people are sick of the whole damn thing and want to get out now?

And then there's the people who have to pay for the conflict, like the soldiers who carry the scars for the rest of their lives, and oftentimes kill themselves to escape the relentless mental darkness that war creates.

The AP reports that U.S. military suicides have surged to the highest level ever recorded:

"Pentagon figures obtained Monday by The Associated Press show that the 349 suicides among active-duty troops last year were up from 301 the year before and exceeded the Pentagon's own internal projection of 325. . . . Last year's total is the highest since the Pentagon began closely tracking suicides in 2001. It exceeds the 295 Americans who died in Afghanistan last year, by the AP's count." ("U.S. Military Suicides Exceed Combat Deaths", The Buzz)

American wars have precipitated an epidemic of suicides in the military. These costs don't appear on the Pentagon's balance sheet, but they're devastating just the same. Politicians in the US always talk about US combat troops with the greatest respect, but when these same soldiers return from active duty they are treated like garbage and can't even get the help they need for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or other brain-related trauma. (Like Traumatic Brain Injury, TBI) It's a disgrace.

Then there's the Afghan people, whose suffering is even greater than the troops. More than 200,000 civilians have been killed in the war despite the fact that the US "doesn't do body counts." Also, according to Malalai Joya, former member of the Afghan Parliament and author of the book "A Woman Among Warlords", the US occupation has made matters worse because there is "more bloodshed, more crimes, more human rights violations, more looting of our resources and changing of our country into Mafia state … Around two million Afghans are addicted (to opium), most of them are women and children … And according to UNIFEM, Afghanistan is the worst place in the world to be a woman." ("Imperialism & Fundamentalism Have Joined Hands": Malalai Joya on 12 Years of U.S.-Led Afghan War, Malalai Joya, Democracy Now!)

So all the talk about liberating women was pure gibberish, just like the nonsense about establishing a "western-style democracy". US war planners wanted to establish forward-bases in Eurasia to contain Russia and China, to be a main player in oil and natural gas extraction, and to spread US hegemony to this century's most dynamic "growth center". To that end, the US plans to maintain a significant presence in Afghanistan, including large numbers of combat forces, lethal high-tech weaponry, intel operatives, private contractors, and at least 4 military bases presumably on oil transit lines. The US is not leaving Afghanistan. It's merely abandoning the pretense that its motives are altruistic.

But whatever the motives might have been, it's irrelevant now. The war is lost and the American people know it. Check this out from the Huffington Post:

"Nearly 12 years after U.S. troops invaded Afghanistan, two-thirds of Americans think that the war was not worth the cost, according to an ABC News/Washington Post poll released Friday….. The amount of those who think the war hasn't been worth it, 67 percent, is a new high for ABC polls, and slightly exceeds those who thought the Iraq war was not worth it in April 2007." ("Afghan War Poll Finds That Two-Thirds Say That It Wasn't Worth The Cost", Huffington Post)

So there's less public support for Afghanistan now, then there was for Iraq in 2007? Amazing. No wonder the media has stopped reporting the news.

And don't kid yourself; this is Obama's war now. He supported it from the very beginning and, more important, he's got more blood on his hands than even George Bush. As analyst Nolan Finley notes, "Of the 2,144 Americans who have died in Afghanistan, 1,575, or 73 percent, were killed on Obama's watch."

It's his job to get us out of this mess. Fast. In that regard, he may want to follow the advice of the New York Times who summed it up like this in 2012 editorial:

"After more than a decade of having American blood spilled in Afghanistan…it is time for United States forces to leave … The United States will not achieve even President Obama's narrowing goals, and prolonging the war will only do more harm.

…the idea of fully realizing broader democratic and security aims simply grows more elusive … More fighting will not consolidate the modest gains made by this war, and there seems little chance of guaranteeing that the Taliban do not "come back in…

Post-American Afghanistan is likely to be more presentable than North Korea, less presentable than Iraq and perhaps about the same as Vietnam. But it fits the same pattern of damaging stalemate. We need to exit as soon as we safely can. America's global interests suffer when it is mired in unwinnable wars in distant regions." ("Time to Pack Up", New York Times)

It's time to end the killing, Mr. President. Do not shrug your duty. End the war today.