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The next justification for war

BY JASON DITZ

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The continuation of the war in Afghanistan, some nine years after the U.S. invasion, rests upon endlessly redefining the goals and purposes of the conflict. With the WikiLeaks documents providing growing evidence of the catastrophic state of the conflict, Time magazine has jumped in, as it so often has, with a story designed to convince Americans that the war must continue.

The cover of Time's Aug. 9 edition features a shocking photo of an 18-year-old Afghan woman whose nose was brutally cut off by the Taliban. The stories associated with the photo assure us that this will be the fate of many, if not all, Afghan women if the U.S. does not continue its occupation ad infinitum.

Of course using the canard of women's rights as the justification for continuing this war is nothing new, but with the war growing more unpopular by the minute it is forcing war enthusiasts to ratchet up the rhetoric, and scare the American public, by hook or by crook, into abandoning their opposition to the conflict in the name of protecting human rights.

Ignoring for a moment the massive number of civilians – men, women and children – being killed regularly by the 150,000 U.S.-led international troops in the nation, one must remember that while Time has spun the photo as “what will happen if the US leaves,” the tragedy of young Aisha did not happen in some fictional, future Afghanistan unfettered by U.S. occupation. Rather this girl has lived 9 years, half of her life, in U.S.-occupied Afghanistan, and the violence against her happened in U.S.-occupied Afghanistan.

As Time magazine's staff tours the TV talk circuit they are forever claiming that the U.S. military can and must be the guarantor of human rights, saying paradoxically that enormous progress has been made for women and Afghanistan while publicizing a photo that shows the fruits of that nine years of "progress" as something quite else entirely.

This is just another attempt to change the narrative in the face of the massive number of U.S.-inflicted civilian deaths, the full view of which we are finally beginning to see, and portray the opponents of the conflict as mean spirited and perhaps more than a little misogynistic.

Yet when I see the picture of young Aisha on the cover I don't see a casus belli for the continuation of America's ill-conceived adventurism in Central Asia. Rather, I see the ugly reality of nine years of failed nation building. America's war has failed not only the American people, it has failed the Afghan people, and perhaps none quite so much as Aisha.

Violence against women in time of war is a virtual constant, and the solution to this violence cannot possibly be more of the same war that has for the past nine years failed to accomplish this goal, and failed to accomplish any of the other goals for which it is nominally being fought. Before we are cowed, once again, into accepting the "necessity" of this war, it is time to examine critically what we are being presented with.