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Never Forget Victims of the Drone Program

As the mainstream press spent this past weekend once again ensuring that Americans never forget the fear and anger of 9/11 which prompted 20 years of war, 10 of the latest victims of 9/11 were being wiped from historical memory. Just two weeks before the 20th anniversary of 9/11, a US drone killed the Ahmadi family, including seven children. In the US-centric writing of history, they have already been forgotten.

The US military surveilled 43-year-old Zemari Ahmadi throughout his final day. He went about his normal routine as a Kabul-based employee of the aid group Nutrition and Education International. Ahmadi dropped off his co-workers at various locations throughout Kabul, filled water cartons at his office, and drove home to a residential compound where he lived with his family and his brother's family. As his own children and his brother's children ran to greet him, a US air force Reaper drone launched a missile at his car, incinerating him and the nine loved ones gathered around him.

This is the story that *The New York Times* uncovered through extensive interviews with Ahmadi's neighbors, colleagues, and medical experts. The *Washington Post* did its own extensive reporting and reached the same conclusion of the events. The story that US joint chiefs of staff chair, Gen. Mark Milley, gave to the public to justify the strike is very different.

Milley claimed that the attack was a "righteous strike" against ISIS-K members. Our military fed the lie to reporters that there was a second blast following the drone strike, proving that Ahmadi had explosives in his car which he was planning on using to launch a second terrorist attack on Kabul Airport. Those "explosives" were, in fact, the water cartons Ahmadi was bringing to his family. *The New York Times* and *Washington*

Post both found that there was no second blast, just the one directed by the US military that incinerated seven kids.

Responding to *The New York Times*' reporting on Twitter, Matthew Hoh, a disabled combat veteran and anti-war activist put it best: "This very well sums up the last 20 years: fear, barbarism, ineptitude and lying."

This drone strike follows the same logic that 20 years ago turned 9/11 from a day of tragedy and violence into two decades of tragedy and violence.

20 years ago, Americans were correctly terrified and grief-stricken over 2,996 lives being snuffed out. What was never correct was the idea — pushed by politicians in the highest positions of power and media outlets with the largest platforms — that in exchange for these 2,996 lives, hundreds of thousands more needed to be taken. It was incorrect, but it was possible because the US lives taken on 9/11 were made out to be more valuable than the lives of Afghans or Iraqis.

20 years later, as US troops were finally leaving Afghanistan for good, an attack on Kabul Airport killed 13 US troops. 170 Afghans were also killed by the attack as well as shooting by US forces in the immediate aftermath. However, much like on 9/11, it's the smaller number of American lives lost that are significant to the corporate press and politicians.

It is because the lives of these 13 American troops matter more to certain sections of the American public that Biden vowed "revenge." In exchange for the lives of these 13 troops, 10 Afghan civilians, including seven children, were easy targets for retribution. Then our government lied about these victims, claiming they were terrorists. US troops may no longer be occupying Afghanistan, but if the devaluing of Afghan lives, the violence of the US war machine, and the lies from our leaders continue, it could only be a matter of time before we're dragged back into war again. Biden has already made clear his commitment to keep bombing Afghanistan.

For those who have been paying attention, it is not surprising that Biden's drone strike killed a family and it will not be surprising if additional bombing of Afghanistan kills more civilians. This is the very nature of the drone program which became a norm of US policy under the Obama administration. From January 2012 to February 2013, the US terrorized Afghanistan with Operation Haymaker, a military campaign of drone warfare in which 90% of victims were not the intended targets.

No one from the Obama administration has faced any consequences for the terror of the drone program. Nor have any members of the Trump administration faced consequences

for waiving rules of engagement for airstrikes in Afghanistan, resulting in a spike in civilian casualties.

Daniel Hale, however, was sentenced to four years in prison for having the courage to provide the public with information about the drone program and its disregard for civilians. If voices like his were not silenced behind bars, maybe there would be more public outrage, or at least public acknowledgement of the civilian toll of US bombs and drones.

The war on Afghanistan is not over until the drone program has been shut down, the Afghan people have been paid reparations with money taken directly out of the Pentagon's budget, and prison cells have swapped out whistleblowers for war criminals. Along with this full ending of the war, the United States will need a reckoning with the militaristic culture which made war on Afghanistan at first a popular demand and later a background noise that most Americans could ignore. That militaristic culture is still packed into American entertainment and news commentary, simmering until the next reason for war allows it to boil into another frenzy of xenophobic vengeance.

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