

Imperialism in the garb of human rights:

## Washington seeks to exploit outrage over attack on Pakistani schoolgirl

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The Obama administration, the media and Washington's stooges in Pakistan are seeking to manipulate the outrage over the attempted assassination of 14 year-old schoolgirl Malala Yousafzai to legitimize intensification of imperialist military operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Yousafzai first came to public prominence when, aged eleven, she wrote a blog for the BBC's Urdu service decrying the Pakistan Taliban's suppression of female schooling during the period, in the spring and summer of 2009, that they controlled her native Swat Valley.

On October 9, Yousafzai was shot in the head when members of the Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat e-Mohammadi, one of the groups that comprise the loosely allied Pakistan Taliban, ambushed the van in which she was travelling home from school. Two other schoolgirls were wounded in the attack.

Yousafzai, who for several days was in a medically induced coma, was transported Monday to England for specialist medical care. According to news reports, the initial evaluation of her British doctors is that she will survive.

Within hours of the October 9 attack, the US establishment and its Pakistani clients were mounting a propaganda offensive, aimed at using the Taliban atrocity to counter the mass opposition to the NATO occupation of Afghanistan in both Pakistan and North America and to condition the public for a fresh military offensive against Taliban-aligned groups in Pakistan.

Obama condemned the Taliban's actions as "barbaric." Secretary of State Hillary Clinton denounced "extremists who don't want girls to have an education and ... to speak for themselves." Americans, she declared, "should be dedicating our efforts to brave young women" like Malala Yousafzai.

While Obama and Clinton publicly posed as defenders of the rights of women and children, a *New York Times* editorial pointed to the administration's real agenda—further bloodshed aimed at stabilizing the US' puppet regime in Afghanistan. "Malala has shown more courage in facing down the Taliban than Pakistan's government and its military leaders," said the *Times*. "The attack was an embarrassment for the Pakistani Army, which has boasted of pushing the Taliban from Swat. ...

Words only have meaning if they are backed up by actions."

Pakistan's military and the government led by the Pakistan People's Party have mounted a parallel propaganda campaign. The head of Pakistan's armed forces, General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, rushed to Yousafzai's hospital bedside last Wednesday, declaring that the schoolgirl "has become a symbol for the values that the Army is fighting for ... an Islamic society based on the principles of liberty, justice and equality of man."

The next day, Prime Minister and Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Raja Pervez Ashraf and ministers representing all of the PPP's coalition partners met with Yousafzai's family at a Rawalpindi hospital. Meanwhile, in a series of editorials, the *Dawn*, the country's leading liberal daily, urged the government and military to "make the most" of the popular revulsion against Yousafzai's attempted assassination by launching military action. "This is not a moment Pakistan can afford to waste," it declared.

The Taliban's attack on Yousafzai attests to their reactionary Islamic fundamentalist politics.

That said, the attempt of US imperialism to use the Pakistan Taliban's murderous assault on Yousafzai to posture as defenders of the rights of girls and women should evoke only disgust and contempt from class-conscious workers and youth.

The moral sensitivities of the US elite are remarkably selective and inevitably correspond with the pursuit of its predatory foreign policy.

Where was the US media outcry when NATO warplanes killed nine young women collecting firewood on a mountainside near Kabul, Afghanistan, an atrocity the US-led occupation forces initially tried to cover up with the claim it had killed insurgents?

Obama invokes the Taliban's obscurantist views as regards women to muster popular support for his drive to subjugate Afghanistan, yet for decades the US has been the staunchest ally of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states whose semi-feudal rulers deny women fundamental rights.

Moreover, repeating the modus operandi it used in fomenting opposition to the Soviet-backed regime in Afghanistan in the

1970s and 1980s, Washington is currently arming right-wing Sunni Islamist forces in Syria, including al-Qaeda, through Saudi Arabia and Qatar, plunging that country and potentially the entire region into sectarian civil war.

While Obama feigns outrage over the attempted murder of Yousafzai, he himself bears direct responsibility for the deaths of untold numbers of Pakistani women and children through the illegal Predator missile drone attacks the United States routinely carries out inside Pakistan.

These strikes, as a recent academic study documented, have terrorized people across the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Yet so contemptuous are the Obama administration, the Pentagon and the CIA of the Pakistani people, they refuse to give any accounting of the drone strikes, not even the number of persons killed.

Obama fulminates about the “barbarity” of the Taliban, but through administration-organized leaks to the *New York Times* he has let it be known that he takes relish in choosing the targets for drone-strike assassination at the weekly meeting of a national security team specifically charged with this gruesome and patently illegal task.

None of this excuses, let alone justifies, the Pakistan Taliban’s targeting of the 14 year-old Yousafzai. But the reality is that it is imperialism that is mainly responsible for the endless nightmare that is contemporary Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Beginning in the 1950s, the US supported a succession of right-wing military dictatorships in Pakistan, which was a “frontline” state in Washington’s Cold War confrontation with the Soviet Union, and encouraged Islamabad in its reactionary geo-political rivalry with India.

In the late 1970s, Washington supported General Zia ul-Haq’s military coup and soon after consolidated a close partnership with Zia in which Pakistan served as the principal conduit for US and Saudi arms to the Islamic fundamentalist forces that opposed the Soviet-backed government in Kabul. These CIA-funded forces, which were boosted by foreign fighters recruited by American and Saudi intelligence, ultimately spawned the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and the warlords and militias that constitute the key internal support of the US-installed regime of Hamid Karzai.

While arming the *mujahedeen*, General Zia pursued an “Islamicization” policy within Pakistan, promoting religious fundamentalism as a bulwark against the working class and fueling sectarian divisions.

In the quarter century since Zia’s death, Pakistan has lurched from crisis to crisis. The US in league with the International Monetary Fund have imposed successive waves of economic restructuring that have devastated social infrastructure, including public education, and deepened poverty. Meanwhile, Afghanistan and much of northwestern Pakistan have been transformed into a killing field as the US seeks to subjugate Afghanistan and thereby secure a strategic foothold in oil-rich

Central Asia.

For the past eight years Pakistan’s military has been waging a brutal counter-insurgency war in the FATA and adjacent areas, including the Swat Valley, forcing millions from their homes, leveling villages with carpet bombing, and “disappearing” and torturing thousands. Yet the constant refrain from Washington has been that Pakistan must “do more” to support the US occupation of Afghanistan.

For the past year, Washington has been pressing for Pakistan to launch a military offensive in North Waziristan, headquarters of the Haqqani network, a militia that once served as US proxies in Washington’s drive to unseat the pro-Soviet government in Afghanistan but is now allied with the Afghan Taliban.

On Friday, Pakistan’s Interior Minister Rehman Malik, invoking the attack on Yousafzai, indicated such an offensive was under active consideration.

Workers in Pakistan, the United States and around the world should oppose the attempt to cloak an expansion of the AfPak War in the guise of defending human rights and women’s rights. A US-directed Pakistani military assault on North Waziristan will only result in the killing and wounding of thousands, masses of new refugees and the destruction of hospitals and schools, and set the stage for intensified NATO military operations in Afghanistan.

The Taliban and allied forces are a byproduct of the predatory foreign policy of Washington and Islamabad and of the extremely backward social structure, fusing capitalist and semi-feudal elements, that imperialism has created and sustains in Afghanistan, Pakistan and across South Asia. The defeat of such forces on a progressive basis is only possible on the basis of an international socialist strategy for the mobilization of the working class against the Afghan War, imperialism, and its national bourgeois agents.



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