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Commentary, analysis and investigations
on issues affecting African Americans
www.blackcommentator.com

May 14, 2009 - Issue 324

[Contents of Issue](#)

[Click here](#)

[Home](#)

**On the War, Education, and Women's Equality
in Afghanistan and Pakistan**

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Afghanistan's Taliban under Mullah Omar allegedly harbored Osama bin Laden and his guerilla fighters before the September 11, 2001 attacks. If US mass media representation of US national security discourse is to be believed, then the Taliban (Pashto / Arabic loan word for "students") is an armed, male supremacist movement that favors immuring Afghan and Pakistani women in the home and denying them all access to education. This representation of the Taliban's gender ideology helps sell the US public on the continuing US-led international effort in the American War in Afghanistan.

There is a clear rationale for policing the Taliban(s) and their allies in Southwest Asia. It is the US national and an international interest in preventing incidents like the Mumbai attacks of November 26-29, 2008; the Madrid train bombings of March 11, 2004; and the September 11, 2001 attacks on the US World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The US-led Afghan War, and international intelligence and police agency cooperation in the "Global War on Terror" ('GWOT'), have constituted "terrorism" as the gravest criminal threat to world order. The US armed forces are functioning there, in effect, as the world police.

US mass media representations reflect US national security discourse. While the Obama administration has de-escalated the GWOT rhetoric, the "terrorist menace" allows the US military-industrial complex to just keep rolling along. The US strategy for suppressing these political movements was, and remains, an overwhelmingly military one. In marketing militarism to the US public today, gender and culture in Southwest Asia plays a peculiar role. Interestingly, the use of this justificatory discourse further

articulates the mis-education of women as a global gender crime.

Constituting the Taliban as the contemporary male supremacist ideologues *par excellence* obscures how Western Christian education systems historically disfavored the education of women. Eurocentric gender triumphalism makes us forget how women were excluded from the nineteenth century US model of education in the "classics" at all male colleges and seminaries. Elizabeth Cady Stanton as a classically educated woman intellectual was thus an extremely rare case. More recently, Lawrence Summers publicly questioned women's intellectual capacity for mathematics and science.

We note that the Pakistani Taliban calls the vestiges of the British education system that remained following Pakistani Independence from Britain "crusader education." To the extent that education in Afghanistan reflects non-Muslim educational traditions, the Afghan Taliban may also denominate it "crusader education." We make no claims regarding whether Islamic secondary and post-secondary education systems represent a better solution for these majority Islamic countries. The focus here is not on comparing non-Christian, Christian, and other education systems.

We accept, in this part of the argument, the US national security state's premise that the education provided to recruits to become fully trained combat soldiers is a valuable one. We acknowledge that the US and its allied armed forces have yet to achieve full equality for women, and urge that equal education for women in the military in all aspects of the work of the armed forces is entirely proper. Some might argue that the US military, insofar as they exclude women from full equality in combat operations, subordinate women and thus share the purported male supremacist ideology of the Taliban.

At a time of deepening economic crisis and increasing domestic social unrest, it is in the US national interest to end America's Afghan War as soon as possible. Current military spending, and servicing the federal debt for prior military spending, limits domestic social spending. The following proposed solution is simple, could save trillions of US taxpayer dollars, and reduce the loss of life and limb of US armed forces members. The proposal is: to arm and fully train in Afghanistan and Pakistan local Afghan and Pakistani women in groups as volunteer combat teams and in counterinsurgency techniques.

US historical precedents for segregated military formations while on the road to full equality exist: one thinks of the Massachusetts Volunteers in the "War of Northern Aggression," the Buffalo Soldiers in the Indian Wars, and in World War Two of the Tuskegee Airmen and Japanese American 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Such gender segregated "foreign legions" could well tip the balance against the Taliban and Al Qaeda in the American Wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan. This strategy would allow the women, literally, to fight for their own freedom, rather than depending upon "foreign occupier" male protectors.

US domestic antidiscrimination law does not preclude organizing the "International Pakistani Women's Legion" or an "International Afghan Women's Legion" in Pakistan and Afghanistan as US municipal law does not apply in foreign countries. Moreover, should the women volunteers later desire access to educational opportunities outside the home and family after their service, the male supremacist ideologues in their own

families will find it difficult to deny their daughters, sisters, and mothers, now fully trained as combat soldiers, that opportunity.

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[Contents of Issue](#)

[Click here](#)

[Home](#)

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