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Aftermath for Afghanistan

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14 March 2002

Retrieved on 16th December 2021 from struggle.ws
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'Terrorism'

As for the promised reduction in 'terrorism', a way of dealing with the 'terrorist threat', we have had one kidnapping/murder of an American journalist, one attempted bombing of an trans-Atlantic flight, one attack on the Indian parliament, and one attack on a train in India.

Also apparently one plot to poison the Rome water supply – foiled, but the bombing of Afghanistan appears to have had no impact on it (unsurprisingly in my opinion).

That's just what I can think of off the top of my head, there were also some incidents which were possibly 'terrorist' attacks.

Remember this intervention was justified by the S11 atrocity, plus the need to prevent further 'terrorism', stifle heroin production and remove the repressive rule of Islamist fanatics.

What it has done is match the New York atrocity with an Asian atrocity, and has had no positive impact on the other problems enlisted to win popular support to the war effort.

Rather than being a 'failed state' the situation in Afghanistan is the product of two decades of successful competition between states, a competition which continues in the region today.

Rather than being a solution to any of these problems the Imperialist intervention is part of the problem.

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“A planeload of food and medicine provided by UNICEF landed Thursday in the border city of Termez intended for Afghanistan, but border guards refused to open the bridge across the Afghan frontier until the Taliban are forced out of Mazar-e-Sharif.”

Now why would that be? Because the aid would be possibly seized by bandits or Taliban (and therefore not worth risking any effort to deliver)?

Well there is a greater extent of banditry now, and we have seen on our T.V.s the American food aid air dropped into Northern Alliance held areas being taken by Northern Alliance troops (rather than used to provide for hungry civilians).

More plausible is to consider that this was part of a policy of starving the enemy into submission. As is suggested by earlier reports “Pakistan has the power to strangle the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, without American help.

It can cut off it’s fuel, shut down it’s bank accounts, prevent the flow of food, and clamp down on the black market trade that is the militia’s lifeline. These are all measures, it is reported here, that American officials have asked the Pakistani government to take.”⁹

Total disaster was averted by the downfall of the Taliban and consequently the restriction of American bombing to specific areas mostly in the east plus it’s lessening in intensity.

It is impossible to gauge the amount of deaths resulting from this apparent ‘submission by starvation’ policy (which actually had little effect on the Taliban) as due to decades of conflict and three years of drought malnutrition was already claiming many victims.

As it is Oxfam still report crisis conditions and their efforts are threatened in some areas by the new wave of banditry.

⁹ Independent, (London), September 16th, 2001.

clude the lives of Americans are of greater value than the lives of Afghans, or perhaps a two or three to one ratio of value.

You cannot argue that one is right and the other is wrong, either it is wrong to slaughter people in the 'wrong place at the wrong time' in revenge for their rulers slaughtering other people in the 'wrong place at the wrong time' or it is not.

The Heroin Trade

As well as the internal rule of the Taliban, and S11 a further claim was made to support the Anglo-American war effort & heroin production in Afghanistan.

However we now have headlines like "MI5 fears flood of Afghan heroin".

"UN officials last month confirmed that poppy production fell in 2001 in Afghanistan by 91% – from 82,172 hectares to 7,606 hectares, with most of that grown in areas controlled by the Northern Alliance."⁸

The Taliban actually suppressed opium production, and now with them out of the way, law enforcement circles expect of bumper crop of Afghan heroin

Hunger

On November 8th 2001 Associated Press reported that aid was being prevented from entering Afghanistan by the border guards of Uzbekistan "a key ally of the U.S.-led coalition against terrorism"

⁸ Guardian, (London), February 21st, 2002.

Since the 1970's Afghanistan has been shredded by bloody conflict between rival gangs of rulers and the regional and global imperialisms which subsidise them. The infrastructure of the society ruined, lives and bodies maimed, millions forced over the border into miserable refugee camps and hundreds of thousands of people cut down by hunger or high explosive.

In this Afghanistan is unfortunately far from unique. The same is true today of the Congo, the Horn of Africa, Angola, and many other places. There were few countries not ravaged by the hand of destructive warfare in the century just passed. No "tribal savagery" of a "warrior race" makes Afghanistan unique.

It is quite possible that Afghanistan will soon again be held on the rack of competing hierarchies.

It is certain that in the future other lands will be.

The Defeat of the Taliban

The most surprising thing about the fall of the Taliban was the extent to which many people found it surprising. There was a close link between Taliban military successes and the considerable support they received from the ruling elite of Pakistan. Starved of that, even without American bombing they would have crumbled albeit somewhat later.

As it was no tin pot rag bag force could withstand the mailed fist of a superpower. There's nothing novel about that either, the machine guns and artillery of the late 19Th. Centaury Empires rarely met defeat from the spears of the natives and this is just the modern day equivalent.¹

¹ Of course the prospects of a guerrilla force, with outside support, would be different entirely. But this was not the case in this conflict and thus any analogies with say, Afghanistan in the 1980's would not be applicable.

One eyewitness relates “Vast craters dotted their defensive lines, while the village of Karabah which housed their headquarters looked like it had been blow-torched from above. Mud buildings are flattened and trees reduced to eerie twisted stumps, the result of repeated B-52 strikes on one day, when I saw bombers come in every five minutes to blast the same area with their sticks of bombs.”²

Imperialist Rivalry

Over the years the Afghan wars have been fuelled by the USSR on the one hand and the U.S.A. on the other and then with Iran, India and Russia backing up the Northern Alliance while Pakistan did the same for the Taliban.

The conflicting interests of rival imperialisms are still at play in Afghanistan.

This is addressed in the accompanying article (Empire in Central Asia), but for now I’ll look at how this is affecting the internal situation in Afghanistan.

With Marines on the ground and B52’s in the sky the American influence is apparent and in a development without precedent the U.S. now has bases in what was formerly territory of the “Soviet” Union, to the north of Afghanistan.

The new Afghan government consists of two halves, one the Northern Alliance, and the other the Rome group, which is to say formerly exiled monarchist figures close to Zahir Shah, the deposed King.

The monarchist faction is dependant on U.S. support, being as unlike any of the splinters forming the Northern Alliance, it doesn’t have an Army and didn’t play any real role in the overthrow of the Taliban.

lions of dollars worth of weaponry by the U.S., Pakistan, etc., with the intent that they take over the country.

In short neither Islam nor Uncle Sam can wash their hands of the Taliban.

As the Revolutionary Association of Afghan Women put it:

“In our opinion, the Taliban and other jihadi fundamentalist cliques of Rabbani, Sayyaf, Masoud, Khalili, Hekmatyar and their like are brothers in arms. They are all of the same hue, because:

All of them have a Klashnikov in one hand and the Quran in the other to kill, intimidate, detain and mutilate our people arbitrarily.”⁶

The Victims

As no one is counting on the ground, even if such a thing were possible, estimates of the civilian deaths vary widely. One ‘Washington Post’ article, arguing that ‘it was worth it’ claimed that the figure could be in the 8,000 to 12,000 range. This was after some research done on the matter, by American academic Professor Marc W. Herold, established the estimate of 3,767 for the first two months of the bombing.⁷ As he points out this represents in proportion to population the equivalent of 38,000 deaths in the United States. Since then the bombing has continued, despite the ousting from power of the Taliban.

This figure does not include deaths caused by a disruption of food aid supplies, and there is some evidence to suggest that this disruption may have been deliberate, to which I will turn to later.

The killings on S11 are held up as justification of the bombing of Afghanistan, a logic we can only agree with if we con-

² The Spectator 17 November 2001.

⁶ www.rawa.org

⁷ www.cursor.org

So much has changed that merchants are even talking of a dramatic increase in the sale of burkas, the total veiling enforced not just by the Taliban's Saudi Arabian funded religious police but also by the dead weight of tradition.

From outside the good versus evil view presented by the propaganda of the war party this is not surprising. Although they presented the downfall of the Taliban as a liberation, in reality the splinter groups making up the Northern Alliance were always much the same as the Taliban.

It must be remembered that the "warriors of God" began their rebellion in the 1970ies, before the arrival of any Red Army tanks, over various un-Islamic activities such as women being without veil in public and education for girls.

In 1990 representatives of all the main Mujaheddin factions (united!) issued to issue a fatwa banning women and girls from an education, similar fatwas were issued enforcing the hijab or banning women from working by different elements of the movement then characterised as "freedom fighters" by the governments of the West.

Even the Taliban's aversion to Buddha statues was no innovation – such artefacts had previously been blown up by Mujaheddin.

They had fought bloody feuds for control of the heroin trade during the anti-Russian war, and when they finally overthrew the "communists" they carved a bloody path of mass murder, rape and looting, turning the entire country into a shooting gallery. Destroying the secular urban society brick by brick.

Such is the heritage of most of the components of the Northern Alliance, the rest were the foot soldiers of the Kremlin backed puppet regime. A regime whose practises included burning alive entire villages.

The Taliban did not land from outer space, but were sculpted from a stone which was one part age old authoritarian religious tradition and one part the arming of Islamist radicals with mil-

The King, despite, or perhaps because, he hasn't been involved in the country for thirty years, is a genuinely popular figure.

Of late the U.S. military have been openly supporting various sides in warlord disputes.

Herat in the east is the fiefdom of Ismael Khan, a Mujaheddin warlord deposed by the Taliban and recently reinstalled with a considerable Iranian subsidy.

Gulbuddin Hikmetyar another Mujaheddin warlord, who has been promising jihad on the infidels since the September is being kept on a leash in Iran itself. He has recently offered to leave Iran if that would help ease tensions between it's government and that of the U.S., but given that his intended destination is Afghanistan perhaps the world could do without his help.

While the Hazari militias of the Hizb-i Wahdat have long had a relationship with Iran, this must be somewhat strained at the moment as allegations are surfacing that Khan is supply Iranian arms to General Dostum, their rival for control of Mazar-e-Sharif.

On the 18th of January Associated Press reported that:

"U.S. special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad stopped short of directly accusing Iran of interference but cited unspecified reports that Afghan fighters and money were being sent from Iran into the extremely volatile country to build opposition to Prime Minister Hamid Karzai."

And that:

<quote "Since the Taliban collapsed last month, Iran, Pakistan, India and other countries in the region have been competing for influence among the various Afghan factions." </quote

Recently allegations have surfaced that Khan's forces have been the victims of American cruise missile strikes and a lot

of the American military effort in the country at the moment would seem to have more of a purpose if it's intent was reminding the various other factions what happens to people who displease the global cop.

Furthermore there have been low level guerrilla attacks on American and British forces. Who is responsible for them? (this included attacks in Kabul – not a Taliban stronghold)

Whatever the case is there is certainly the potential for further conflict, not just because of imperialist rivalries but because:

<quote “these sold-out warlords will have no scruples in once again putting themselves up for sale at a cheap price to old and new proxy-seeking powers, and consequently will once again invite the interference of their foreign masters if their sordid parochial and personal ambitions and interests are fundamentally compromised”³ </quote

Under the Northern Alliance.

At the moment “Northern Alliance” rule is taking a form along similar lines to the situation between '92 and '96 — prior to the Taliban, when the country was last in the hands of the factions which now make up the Alliance.

A pattern of endemic banditry, persecutions, and barons shaping up for turf wars. A change from one despotism to a hundred despotisms. But thus far with nothing like the extent of the bloody carnage inflicted in the four years of in fighting before the rise of the monolithic and uncompromising Taliban forced the rival mini kingdoms to unite.

³ Revolutionary Association of Afghan Women website
rawa.fancymarketing.net

In other words with out the Taliban to unite them and the war to occupy them they seem to be returning to their old ways.

One of Kabul's policemen fell victim to the roaming gangs of soldiery and outlined his feelings to a British reporter:

“these people are looting and plundering the city,” he said. “They are all bad people. They have no human sentiment and no mercy — from the highest commander to the very lowest ranks.”⁴

They are particularly singling out as victims, Pashtuns, the ethnic group from which the Taliban come.

Barely one Month after the establishment of the power sharing executive and in an article headed “We felt safer under the Taliban” the Hindustan Times read “Murders, robberies and hi-jackings in the capital, factional clashes in the north and south of the country, instability in Kandahar and banditry on roads linking main centres are beginning to erode the optimism that greeted the inauguration of the interim administration on December 22.”⁵

Also in moves not suggestive of an end to armed conflict something of an arms race is under way with rival forces drawing new recruits from desperate refugees. The principal infighting has been around Mazar-e-Sharif. A three way struggle with General Dostum, a former military commander of the pre-'92 “Soviet” backed regime in one corner, the Hizb-i Wahdat militia, formerly close to Iran in another and then supporters of the former President Rabbani, all jostling for control.

Refugee Camps have been divided up along ethnic lines, with persecutions and expulsions of whoever is the minority. Similar squabbles over the division of the victor's spoils have taken place in other cities.

⁴ The Observer , January 13, 2002

⁵ Hindustan Times, January 25, 2002