

In Cold War fashion, the CIA along with the Pakistan Intelligence Service recruited and funded (\$3 billion) the *mujahedeen*, or “holy warriors”, including Osama bin Laden, to fight the Soviet “Evil Empire.” At the time, the US referred to the mujahedeen as “freedom fighters,” even though they were as brutal as the Nicaraguan contras and were partially funded through the drug trade. In 1979 a Soviet-backed coup installed Babrak Karmal along with Soviet military occupation. The US, the USSR, Pakistan and Afghanistan signed a peace agreement in 1988, and Soviet troops were withdrawn in 1989.

More than 1.5 million Afghans died and countless more were injured during the ten-year war against Soviet occupation.

Islamic fighters ousted President Najibullah in 1992, and civil war then ensued between various groups including the Taliban and those now known as the Northern Alliance. The Taliban, whose members were mostly trained in Pakistani Islamic schools, captured Kabul in 1996 and extended control to Mazar I Sharif in 1998. The US continued to support the Taliban until at least 1998.

Osama bin Laden

Bin Laden was born into a wealthy Saudi Arabian family. He is a veteran of the 1980s US-backed anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan, which resulted in the expulsion of Soviet troops. Working in alliance with the CIA, he led the Arab section of the *mujahedeen* in that campaign and collected funds for his operations from affluent Saudi citizens. He later became an active critic of US foreign policy in the Middle East. He was a prime suspect in the 1998 bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

The Afghan People

Afghanistan has about 20 million people in an area one-third larger than Texas. It includes a number of ethnic groups with their own languages, including Pushtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, and others. The Taliban is mainly supported in Pushtun areas and the Northern Alliance is mainly supported in Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara areas, but many people support neither group. Due to continued war, the country was already in ruins before the U.S. bombing, and most people live in poverty without access to services. Before the current bombing, there were already 3.5 million Afghan refugees living in poor conditions in Pakistan, Iran and other countries. Afghanistan is the most heavily mined country in the world with more than 10 million land mines in place. 20 to 25 people are blown up by land mines every day.

Enemies, Power and Oil Connection

US policy of aiding dictatorships to “fight communism” has shifted to aiding repressive regimes against Islamic fundamentalism. In both cases, the underlying purpose is to extend US hegemony and to open markets and natural resources for the benefit of transnational corporations.

The U.S. war in Afghanistan is supposedly fighting the terrorist attacks of September 11th, but is really intended to demonstrate U.S. power as a warning to other governments. In addition, the U.S. will thereby gain access to oil and natural gas, and make the region safe for transnational corporations.

The Caspian Sea is reputed to have more oil than the Persian Gulf. The Soviets exploited Afghan oil and natural gas during their occupation, importing natural gas directly to their energy grid

through Uzbekistan. Transnational oil companies want to build a pipeline from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Arabian Sea, but the Taliban made this impossible. From 1997, the Unocal Oil Corporation spent \$20 million on this project. They hosted Taliban delegates in Texas and provided funding for a job-training program in Kandahar. Unocal also hosted some of the Northern Alliance warlords. Their spokesperson said, “If the Taliban leads to stability and international recognition, then it’s positive.” A US Energy Information Administration report September 2001 emphasizes the potential importance of such a pipeline.

US Security and Foreign Policy

We can take precautions against certain kinds of terrorism, but in the most basic sense our security depends upon just policies at home and towards the rest of the world.

Hatred of the US Government and its financial institutions doesn’t arise from nowhere, and is not usually based on religious or cultural antagonisms. Rather, the extremism that leads to suicidal attacks derives from very real and concrete policies.

US policy in the Middle East has supported repressive regimes from Saudi Arabia to Iran, Iraq and Israel. The US overthrew the democratically elected leftist government of Iran in 1953 and installed the Shah. The Shah’s repressive regime destroyed the left, setting the stage for the 1979 uprising, which installed an anti-American fundamentalist government. US support for Saddam Hussein in Iraq strengthened his brutal regime and even encouraged Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait. Now, long-standing US sanctions against this same government have resulted in over one

million civilian deaths and continue to kill 4500 children per month. Putting large numbers of US troops into Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War has angered Saudis who view this as sacrilege to their holy sites. Bin Laden has exploited these feelings to raise large amounts from wealthy Saudi families. Massive U.S. support to Israel, including billions of dollars and the most advanced weapons, enables that country to maintain and strengthen its occupation of Palestinian territories. And when Israel and Palestine are inflamed, the whole region is also inflamed.

The Results of War

The war in Afghanistan may result in a coalition government, but the various factions within the Northern Alliance have shown their inability to cooperate with each other and their profound disrespect for human rights when they were in power from 1992 to 1996.

Although the Taliban has a record of brutal treatment of women, so does the US-supported Northern Alliance. The internationally recognized leader of the Afghan women's movement, the Radical Association of Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), was excluded from the talks that formed the new interim government.

It is likely that the Taliban will continue fighting a guerilla war.

What was left of Afghanistan's infrastructure is now being destroyed, and thousands have been displaced, killed or injured. It is unclear whether those civilians left will have a better quality of life after the bombing is over. Whether or not Osama bin Laden is captured or killed, his terrorist network will remain.

Those aggrieved by U.S. bombing and ground warfare may form a new generation of terrorists.

A military success in Afghanistan will likely lead to US military actions against other countries, possibly Somalia, Yemen and Iraq. Furthermore, US actions have emboldened the Israeli Government to increase military attacks against Palestinians and reoccupy areas of the West Bank and Gaza. These increasing tensions may have devastating unforeseen consequences.

What Can We Do?

We must raise our voices for ending military strikes, promoting peaceful negotiations, and providing massive humanitarian assistance for the people of Afghanistan. We must loudly urge that all further actions be taken by peaceful means through the International Criminal Court or similar international judicial institutions. And we must oppose all attempts to restrict our civil rights in the name of national security. It is critical that we speak out now to oppose further military strikes, the destruction of more countries, the killing and maiming of civilians, and the erosion of civil liberties in our own country.

AWARE

Anti-War Anti-Racism Effort



All are welcome: Sundays at 5 PM at the Independent Media Center, 218 W. Main in Urbana.

www.anti-war.net

E-mail: aware@grex.org

Tel.: 217-352-3670 or 586-6938

December 2001

The War Against Afghanistan

This pamphlet seeks to put the current U.S. "war against terrorism" in context and give an alternative interpretation than that found in the mass media and mainstream newspapers. We hope it will give readers a chance to think about the deeper issues behind the current war and related "anti-terrorism" legislation.

Afghanistan's Troubled History

Afghanistan has been the victim of invaders from all sides since its earliest history. For example, the territory has been ruled by Alexander the Great (329-327 B.C.), numerous Arab invaders (7th century A.D.), Genghis Khan (c1220), and Tamerlane (14th century). It first became a united state in 1747 under Ahmad Shah who founded the Durani dynasty. Great Britain vied with Russia for control of Central Asia in the 19th century. Britain fought two wars of conquest (1838-42 and 1878-81), and formally took control of Afghanistan's foreign affairs in 1907.

Emir Amanullah won independence back from Britain in 1919, established a monarchy in 1926, and began a modernization program. The last

Anti-War Anti-Racist Effort -- AWARE

king, Muhammad Zahir Shah, was overthrown in 1973 by Lt. Gen. Muhammad Daoud Khan who proclaimed a republic. Daoud was overthrown in a coup in 1978, which established a reformist and pro-Soviet government under Noor Taraki.