

Afghanistan. The Other Lost War

By [Stephen Lendman](#)

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In his important new book *Freedom Next Time*, dealing with “empire, its facades and the enduring struggle of people for their freedom,” John Pilger has a chapter on Afghanistan. In it he says that “Through all the humanitarian crises in living memory, no country has been abused and suffered more, and none has been helped less than Afghanistan.” He goes on to describe what he sees as something more like a moonscape than a functioning nation. In the capitol, Kabul, there are “contours of rubble rather than streets, where people live in collapsed buildings, like earthquake victims waiting for rescue....(with) no light or heat.” It seems like it’s always been that way for these beleaguered people who’ve had a long history of conflict and suffering with little relief. In the 19th century, the Afghan people were victimized by the “Great Game” struggle pitting the British empire against Tsarist Russia for control of that part of the world. More recently in the 1980s, it paid dearly again when a US recruited mujahideen guerrilla army battled against a Soviet occupation. It forced the occupiers out but at the cost of a ravaged country and one forced to endure still more suffering and destruction from the brutal civil war in the 1990s that followed the Soviet withdrawal. Then came 9/11, the US attack, invasion, occupation and further devastation that’s ongoing with no end in sight and now intensifying in ferocity.

In his book, Pilger explains that Afghanistan today is what the CIA once called Vietnam – “the grand illusion of the American cause.” There’s no assured safety even in most parts of the capitol now where for a brief time after the US invasion the people of Kabul enjoyed a degree of freedom long denied them by the Taliban. Now there’s neither freedom nor safety almost anywhere in the country as the brutal regional “warlords” rule most parts of it, and the Taliban have begun a resurgence reigniting the conflict that for a time subsided. Today the nation is once again a war zone and narco-state with the “warlords” and drug kingpins controlling everything outside the capitol and the Taliban gaining strength and fighting back in the south trying to regain what they lost. In Kabul itself, the country’s selected and nominal president Hamid Karzai (a former CIA asset and chief consultant to US oil giant UNOCAL) is a caricature of a man and willing US stooge who functions as little more than the mayor of the city. Outside the capitol he has no mandate or support and wouldn’t last a day on his own without the round the clock protection afforded him by the US military and the private contractor DynCorp.

When they ruled most of the country in the 1990s, the Taliban at least kept order and wouldn’t tolerate banditry, rape or murder, despite their ultra-puritanical ways and harsh treatment of the disobedient. They also virtually ended opium production. Now all that’s changed. The US – British invasion in 2001 ended the ban on opium production, allowed the “warlords” to replant as much of it as they wanted, and the result according to a report released by the UN is that cultivation of this crop is spiraling out of control. Antonio Maria Costa, the UN anti-drug chief, said this year’s opium harvest will be a record 6,100 tons (enough to make 610 tons of heroin) or 92% of the total world supply and 30% more than

the amount consumed globally. Costa went much further in his comments saying southern Afghanistan “display(s) the ominous hallmarks of incipient collapse, with large-scale drug cultivation and trafficking, insurgency and terrorism, crime and corruption (because) opium cultivation is out of control.” He directed his comments at President Karzai for not acting forcefully to deal with the problem saying provincial governors and police chiefs should be sacked and held to account. He also accused government administrators of corruption.

The reason why this is happening is that illicit drug trafficking is big business with an annual UN estimate gross of around \$400 - 500 billion or double the sales revenue from legal prescription drugs the US pharmaceutical giants reported in 2005. Those profiting from it include more than the “kingpins” and organized crime. The illicit trade has long been an important profit center for many US and other banks including the giant international money center ones. ([See Michel Chossudovsky, September 2006](#)). It’s also well-documented that the CIA has been involved in drug-trafficking (directly or indirectly) throughout its half century existence and especially since the 1980s and the Contra wars in Nicaragua. Today the CIA is partnered with the Afghan “warlords” and criminal syndicates in the huge business of trafficking heroin. It guarantees the crime bosses easy access to the lucrative US market and the CIA a large and reliable revenue stream to augment its annual (heretofore secret) budget disclosed by Mary Margaret Graham, Deputy Director of National Intelligence for Collection, to be \$44 billion in 2005.

Why the US Attacked and Invaded Afghanistan

The now famous (or infamous) leaked Downing Street (or smoking-gun) memo on the secret July, 2002 UK Labor government meeting discussed how the Bush administration “wanted to remove Saddam, through military action (and) had no patience with the UN route. (So to justify it) the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy.” It doesn’t get much clearer than that, and the high UK official (Richard Dearlove, head of British intelligence MI6) had to know as he sat in on the high-level secret meetings in Washington at which the plan was discussed. So to help out in serious damage-control, the US corporate media, in its customary empire-supportive role, either called the document a fake or ignored it altogether. It was no fake, and as such, got front page coverage in the European press after the Rupert Murdoch-owned London Sunday Times broke the story in their online edition on May 1, 2005.

The US war on Afghanistan was also planned well in advance (at least a year or more) of the 9/11 attack that provided the claimed justification for it. It was part of the US strategic plan to control the vast oil and gas resources of Central Asia that former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski under President Carter explained the importance of in his 1997 book *The Grand Chessboard*. In it he referred to Eurasia as the “center of world power extending from Germany and Poland in the East through Russia and China to the Pacific and including the Middle East and Indian subcontinent.” By dominating this region including Afghanistan with its strategic location, the US would assure it had access to and controlled the vast energy resources there.

Early on the US was very willing to work with the Taliban believing their authoritarian rule would bring stability to the country without which any plan would be in jeopardy. Their religious extremism, harsh treatment of women and the disobedient, and overall human rights abuses were of no concern and never are anywhere else despite the pious rhetoric from Washington to the contrary. It was only in 1999 when the Taliban failed to stabilize the areas they controlled and negotiations broke down trying to convince them to bow to US

interests that official policy changed and the decision was made to remove them. Initially the plan to do it was to be a joint US – Russia operation, and at the time, meetings were held between US officials and those from Russia and India to discuss what kind of government should be installed. The US needs stability in Afghanistan and control of the country for the oil and gas pipelines it wants built from the landlocked Caspian Basin to warm water ports in the south. It wants them gotten there through Pakistan and Afghanistan as the prime transshipment route to avoid having them cross Russia or Iran.

September 11, 2001 provided the US with the pretext it needed to begin the war it intended to wage using whatever reason it decided to pick to justify it. It began a scant four weeks later on October 7 as a joint US – British intensive aerial assault against a country unable to put up any kind of defense against it. It then ended a second scant 5 weeks after that on November 12 when the Taliban fled from Kabul allowing the Northern Alliance forces the US had recruited to replace them to enter the city the following day.

The intense but brief conflict came at an enormous cost to the Afghan people already devastated by the effects of almost endless war and internal turmoil for over two decades. It displaced as many as about six million or more people fleeing to neighboring countries or becoming internally displaced persons and being categorized as IDPs. About half to two-thirds of those refugees have now returned home but most are unable to find much relief from where they'd been. Refugees International interviewed returnees to Kabul in 2002, where conditions are much more stable than elsewhere, and learned that while people were happy to be back they found conditions there to be terrible – no shelter, no schools, no work, no medical care, no security, and for many little or no food.

Things are no better today, and according to UK-based Christian Aid are likely to become worse. It recently assessed conditions in 66 villages in the west and northwest of the country and learned millions of Afghans face hunger because draught caused complete crop failures in the worst hit areas. It reported people are already going hungry and without considerable aid famine is a real possibility. Things are all the harder because the internal conflict resumed beginning with the resurgent Taliban (discussed below) that began slowly in late 2002, grew significantly by mid-2003 and has been building in intensity since.

It all began with the US-led attack on Afghanistan that from the start took a great toll in injuries and deaths, mostly affecting innocent civilians. Marc Herold of the University of New Hampshire estimated between 3,100 – 3,600 deaths resulted from the 5 week conflict or as many as over 600 more than those killed on 9/11 in the US which was the pretext used to go to war. Herold continues estimating deaths and injuries to Afghans and occupying forces since and believes as of July, 2004 about 12,000 Afghan troops and civilians have been killed in the conflict and about 32,000 seriously injured. As things have intensified since, those numbers increase daily and are now considerably higher but it's not known to what level. And what's not included in any of the estimates is the many unknown number of thousands who've died since October, 2001 from the crushing poverty causing starvation and disease.

US “Liberation” Brought No Relief

For a brief time after mid-November, 2001, the Afghan people were free from the repression forced on them under Taliban rule, but what replaced them was no improvement nor did the US “liberator” intend it to be. The US-installed so-called Northern Alliance is terminology

used to identify the United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan that prior to October 7, 2001 controlled less than one-third of the country. They never were in the past or were they to be now the “salvation” of anything but their own self-interest. The Alliance is comprised of about five dominant mujahideen factions each led by a thugish “warlord” ruling over a band of murderers, brutes and rapists whose criminal acts Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have condemned.

As a result, the brief respite from conflict the Afghan people enjoyed was short-lived under their new rulers. With them back in charge in the regions their respective “warlords” controlled, murder, rape and mayhem became common again as it was under their previous rule that gave rise to the Taliban in the first place. So while the Taliban initially faded away after mid-November, 2001, defenseless against the US-led onslaught against them, growing anger and discontent with the present rule has allowed them to regroup and begin a campaign of resurgence. That campaign is gaining strength and looking more all the time like it may turn Afghanistan into a Central Asian version of the conflict in Iraq that cooler civilian heads in Washington and at the Pentagon know is out of control, a lost cause and only will end when the occupation does under a future US administration. The Bush administration, that’s usually wrong but never in doubt, makes it clear it will “stay the course” and not “cut and run.”

Conditions In Afghanistan Today

Life in Afghanistan today is surreal. In parts of Kabul an opulent elite has emerged many of whom have grown rich from rampant corruption and drug trafficking, and the city actually has an upscale shopping area catering to them offering for sale specialty products like expensive Swiss watches and other luxury goods. They can be found at the Roshan Plaza shopping mall and Kabul City Center plaza that has three floors of heated shops, a cappuccino bar and the country’s first escalator. The rutted streets are locked down and deserted at night, but during the day luxury jeeps and four-wheel drive limousines are seen on them. There are also upscale hotels including the five-star Serena, built and run by the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), offering luxury accommodations for visiting dignitaries, Western businessmen and others able to afford what they cost in an otherwise impoverished city still devastated by years of conflict and destruction. The arriviste class there can, mansions are being built for them, foreign branch banks are there to service their needs, and an array of other amenities are there to accommodate their extravagant tastes and wishes. In a country where drug trafficking is the leading industry and corruption is systemic, there’s a ready market for those able to afford most anything, even in a place as unlikely as Afghanistan.

There’s also a ready market provided by the array of well-off foreign ex-pats, a well-cared for NGO community (with their own guest houses for their staff), colonial administrators, commercial developers, mercenaries, fortune-hunters, highly-paid enforcers and assorted other hangers-on looking to suck out of this exploited country whatever they can while they’re able to do it. So far at least, there’s nothing stopping them except the threat of angry and desperate people ready to erupt on any pretext and the growing resistance gaining strength and support from the resurgent Taliban. There’s also no shortage of alcohol in a fundamentalist Muslim country where it’s not allowed, high-priced prostitutes are available on demand with plenty of ready cash around to buy their services, a reported 80 brothels operate in the city, and imported Thai masseuses are at the luxury Mustafa Hotel where the owner is called a Mr. Fix It, an Internet Cafe is located on the bottom floor offering ethernet and wireless connectivity, and the restaurant fare ranges from traditional Afghan

to steaks, pizza and “the best burger in all of Kabul.” The impoverished local population would surely not be amused or pleased comparing their daily plight to the luxury living afforded the elite few able to afford it. Their city is in ruins, and desperation, neglect, despair and growing anger characterize their daily lives.

This Potemkin facade of opulence doesn't represent what that daily life is like in the city and throughout the country for the vast majority of the approximate 26 million or so Afghans. For them life is harsh and dangerous, and they show their frustration and impatience in their anger ready to boil over on any pretext. As in Iraq, there's been little reconstruction providing little relief from the devastation and making what work there is hard to find and offering little pay. The result makes depressing reading:

- Unemployment is soaring at about 45% of those wanting work.

- The half of the working population getting it earns on average about a meager \$200 a year or a little over \$300 for those involved in the opium trade which is the main industry in the country.

- The poverty overall is overwhelming and about one-fourth of the population depends on scarce and hard to find food aid creating a serious risk of famine.

- The life expectancy in the country at 44.5 years is one of the lowest in the world.

- The infant mortality rate is the highest in the world at 161 per 1,000 births

- One-fifth of children die before age five.

- An Afghan woman dies in childbirth every 30 minutes.

- In Kabul alone an estimated 500,000 people are homeless or living in makeshift and deplorable conditions.

- Only one-fourth of the population has access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation.

- Only one doctor is available per 6,000 people and one nurse per 2,500 people.

- 100 or more people are killed or wounded each month by unexploded ordnance.

- Children are being kidnapped and sold into slavery or murdered to harvest their organs that bring a high price.

- Less than 6% of Afghans have access to electricity available only sporadically.

- Women's literacy rate is about 19%, and schools are being burned in the south of the country and teachers beheaded in front of their students.

- Many women are also forced to beg in the streets or turn to prostitution to survive.

In addition, lawlessness is back, Sharia law has been reinstated, the internal conflict has resumed, and no one is safe either from the country's warring factions or from the hostile occupying force making life intolerable for the vast majority of the Afghan people.

Afghanistan, Inc. - The Lucrative Business of War-Profitteering

Those wondering why the US engages in so many conflicts (aside from the geopolitical reasons) and is always ready for another might consider the fact that wars are so good for business. Corporate America, Wall Street and large insider investors love them because they're so profitable. It shows up noticeably on the bottom line of all contractors the Bush administration choose to "rebuild" Iraq and Afghanistan. It's also been a bonanza for the many consultants, engineers and mercenaries working for them who can pocket up to \$1,000 a day compared to Afghan employees lucky to earn \$5 for a day's work when they can find it.

In both Iraq and Afghanistan, huge open-ended, no-bid contracts amounting to many billions of dollars were awarded to about 70 US firms including the usual array of politically connected ones whose names have now become familiar to many - Bechtel, Fluor, Parsons, Shaw Group, SAIC, CH2M Hill, DynCorp, Blackwater, The Louis Berger Group, The Rendon Group and many more including the one that nearly always tops the list, Halliburton and its subsidiary Kellogg, Brown and Root. Since 2001, this arguably best-connected of all war-profiters was awarded \$20 billion in war-related contracts the company then exploited to the fullest by doing shoddy work, running up massive cost-overruns and then submitting fraudulent billings.

Halliburton and other contractors have managed to build permanent military bases in Iraq and Afghanistan for the Pentagon and prisons to house and torture whomever US authorities choose to arrest and for whatever reason. But their work is nothing short of shoddy and sloppy when it comes to assessing the job they've done rebuilding both countries. In Iraq Halliburton did such a poor job repairing the country's oil fields the US Army estimates it's cost the country \$8 billion in lost production. It also botched the simple job of installing metering systems at ports in southern Iraq to assure oil wasn't being smuggled out of the country.

No Serious US-Directed Effort To Rebuild Two War-Torn Countries

Far more important for most Iraqis and Afghans, there's been no serious effort to rebuild these war-torn countries across the board. That effort is desperately needed to restore the essential infrastructure destroyed in both conflicts like power generating stations and water and sewage facilities, but the funding for them has been poorly directed, lost in a black hole of corruption or wasted because of inefficiency, design flaws, construction errors or deliberate unwillingness to do much more than hand out big contracts to US chosen companies then able to pocket big profits while doing little for the people in return for them. It also shows in the state of the countries' basic facilities like schools, health clinics and hospitals that are in deplorable condition with little being done to improve them despite lofty promises otherwise. One example is the US pledge of \$17.7 million in 2005 for education in Afghanistan that turned out, in fact, to be for a private for-profit American University of Afghanistan only available to Afghans who can afford its cost - meaning none of them but the privileged few.

It's clear the US occupier has no interest in helping the people it said it came to "liberate" unless by "liberate" it meant from their freedom to be able to exploit and abuse them in service to the interests of capital which is all the Bush administration ever has in mind. Just as Iraq has the misfortune of having a vast oil reserve beneath its sand the US wants to control, so too Afghanistan happens to be strategically located as part of a prime

transshipment route over which the Caspian Basin's great oil and gas reserves can be transported by pipeline to the warm water southern ports the US wants to ship it out from to countries it will allow it to be shipped to. These are the reasons the US invaded both countries, and that's why no serious effort is being made to do any reconstruction or redevelopment to help the people. There are also reports, unconfirmed for this article, that hydrocarbon reserves have been discovered in the northeast of Afghanistan amounting to an estimated 1.5 billion barrels of oil and from 15 - 30 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. If this proves accurate, it will be one more curse for the Afghan people who already have an unbearable number of others to deal with.

There isn't likely to be relief for them in reconstruction or anything else as long as the US occupies the country and remains its de facto ruler. It's sole funding priority (besides what it ignores lost to corruption) is to its chosen contractors and the bottom line boosting profits they get from being on the corporate welfare dole. A revealing window into this and how reality diverges from rhetoric is seen in a June, 2005 report by the well-respected Johannesburg based NGO Action Aid. It documents what it calls phantom aid that's pledged by the US and other countries but never shows up. At most, maybe 40% of it does while the rest never leaves the home country. It goes to pay so-called American "experts" who overprice their services but provide ineffective "technical assistance" for it. It also obliges recipient countries to buy US products and services even when cheaper and more accessible ones are available locally. The report goes on to accuse the US to be one of the two greatest serial offender countries (France being the other one) with 70% of what it calls aid requiring receiving countries to get from US companies (and much of that is for US-made weapons) and that 86% of all the US pledges turn out to be phantom aid. So, in fact, so-called US donor aid to rebuild a war-torn country is just another scam to enrich politically-connected American corporations by developing new export markets for them. Iraq, Afghanistan and other recipient countries get nothing more than the right to have their nations, resources, and people exploited by predatory US corporations as one of the spoils of war or one-way trade agreements.

All of this has caused deep-seated mostly repressed anger that erupted in Kabul this past May in the worst street violence seen in the capitol since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. It happened after a US military truck speeding recklessly smashed into about a dozen civilian vehicles at a busy intersection killing five people in the collision. It touched off mass rioting in angry protest against an already hated occupier with crowds of men and boys shouting "death to America, death to Karzai" and blaming the government and US military for what happened. People set fires to cars, shops, restaurants and dozens of police posts. They also attacked buildings and clashed with US forces and Afghan police on the scene throwing rocks at their vehicles. US troops responded by opening fire on unarmed civilians killing at least 4 and leaving many others injured. When it finally ended, eight people were reported dead and 107 injured. This uprising in the Kabul streets showed the great anger and frustration of the people breaking out in mass rage in response to one dramatic incident that symbolized for them everything gone wrong in the country now under an unwanted occupier, the oppressive US-installed Northern Alliance "warlord" rule, and the deprivation of the people suffering greatly as a result. There's no end of this in sight, and it's almost certain the resistance will only intensify in response as it's now doing.

Growing Resistance Against Repression and War Crimes

Like the mythological phoenix rising from the ashes, the Taliban have capitalized on the turmoil and discontent and have reemerged to reclaim most parts of southern Afghanistan.

This part of the country has long been ungovernable and is known as an area too dangerous even for aid agencies. The Taliban now openly control some districts there, have set up shadow administrations in others, and have moved into the province of Logar located just 25 miles from Kabul where they have easy access to the capitol. For the British who know their history, it should be no surprise. Sir Olaf Caroe, the last British governor of North West Frontier Province bordering Pakistan spoke of it when he said: "Unlike other wars, Afghan wars become serious only when they are over." Surely the former Soviet occupiers also could have told George Bush in 2001 what he'd be up against. The Brits could have as well.

The Taliban are now gaining supporters among the people fed up with the misery inflicted on them by the US and multinational force invaders and the Northern Alliance rule that's even more repressive than the Taliban were during their years in power. It led to their 1990s rise and conquest of over two-thirds of the country in the first place. It happened in the wake of the vacuum created in the country following the withdrawal of the defeated Soviet forces. During the decade-long conflict while they were there, the Afghan resistance fought the West's war with its funding and arms. It was heroic and the darling of the US media. But once the war ended and the Soviet Union collapsed, Afghans were abandoned and left on their own to deal with the ravages of their war-torn country and the chaos of warlordism and civil war that erupted in its aftermath. Out of that despair and with considerable aid from Pakistan, the Taliban fighters emerged and by 1996 had defeated the competing warlords to control most of the country.

Today it looks like déjà vu all over again as many Afghans apparently prefer Taliban rule again they see as the lesser of the only choices they now have. The result is that daily violence has erupted into a growing catastrophic resistance guerrilla war, slowly becoming more like the one in Iraq, that's intensifying and making the country unsafe and ungovernable. It's led the international policy Senlis Council think tank, that does extensive monitoring of Afghanistan, to issue a damning report called: Afghanistan Five Years Later: The Return Of The Taliban. The report blamed the occupying forces for doing nothing to address the crushing poverty, failing to achieve stability and security, and claims Afghanistan "is falling back into the hands of the Taliban (and their) frontline now cuts halfway through the country encompassing all of the southern provinces" (that have) limited or no central government control." Emmanuel Reinert, Executive Director, concluded "The Taliban community are winning control of Afghanistan (and) the international community is progressively losing control of the country." He added that Afghanistan today is a humanitarian disaster, and that there's a hunger crisis with children starving in makeshift unregistered refugee camps because of lack of donor interest.

It's fueling the Taliban guerrilla resistance that's close to critical mass, and, despite official reports to the contrary, the US-led occupying force won't likely be able to contain it. It's what always happens in one form or other eventually under any kind of foreign occupation and system of governance unwilling to address the basic needs of the people - extreme poverty and desperation demanding relief, without which people can't even survive. It's also a response to the brutality of this occupation where war crimes are just standard operating procedure and an outrageous strategy used to contain the growing resistance. One example of it, most people in the West wouldn't understand, was the public burning of supposed Taliban fighters killed by US soldiers. This is forbidden under Islamic law, and the images of it provoked outrage in Afghanistan and throughout the Muslim world that views the US occupiers as barbarians. This is just one of many instances of deliberately inflicted offenses against Islam including defiling the Koran, arbitrary and unlawful indefinite detentions as

well as humiliations, torture and other atrocities committed routinely against Afghans taken prisoner for any reason. The same things happen in most parts of Iraq as well.

Amnesty International documented some of the crimes and abuses it learned from former detainees. Just like in Iraq they reported being made to kneel, stand or maintain painful positions for long periods, being hooded, deprived of sleep, stripped and humiliated. They were also held without charge and denied access to family, legal counsel or any kind of due process. In December, 2004, US officials acknowledged eight prisoners died in US military custody with little detail as to why. Earlier in October, the US Army's Criminal Investigation Division recommended that 28 US soldiers be charged with beating to death two prisoners at the Bagram air base after autopsies found "blunt force injuries." At year end only one of the soldiers was charged with any offense, and it was just for assault, maltreatment and dereliction of duty.

One other report in September showed US Special Forces beat and tortured eight Afghan soldiers for over two weeks at a base near Gardez killing one of them. The US military refused calls for independent investigations of torture and deaths of those held in custody and instead went through the motions of conducting them under the auspices of the US Department of Defense (DOD) – meaning, of course, they were whitewashed. US authorities also routinely refuse requests by human rights groups, NGOs, and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) for access to detainees to assess their condition and treatment. Amnesty also reported on death sentences being meted out, secret trials in a special court held without the right to counsel or any form of due process, and many cases of Afghan refugees returning home and being unable to recover land or property stolen from them.

Amnesty also reported on the many civilian deaths resulting from randomly targeted US air strikes supposedly directed at "armed militants." These attacks are frequent killing many hundreds of innocent Afghans and always claimed by the US military only to have been directed against Al Qaeda or Taliban fighters. The evidence shows otherwise. On one dramatic occasion early in the conflict in December, 2001, US airstrikes against the village of Niazi Kala in eastern Afghanistan killed dozens of civilians resulting in the London Guardian and Independent each running front page stories with headlines: "US Accused of Killing Over 100 Villagers in Airstrike" in the Guardian and "US Accused of Killing 100 Civilians in Afghan Bombing Raid" in the Independent. Even the Rupert Murdoch-owned London Times reported "100 Villagers Killed in US Airstrike." In contrast, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) reported the New York Times (known as the nation's newspaper of record) could barely get itself to headline "Afghan Leader Warily Backs US Bombing." Instead of accurately reporting what happened, the NYT instead merely mentioned these villagers had been killed as background information in an article about whether the nominal Afghan leader (and former CIA asset) Harmid Karzai was holding firm in "his support for the war against terrorism." As it usually does, the NYT plays the lead role in directing the rest of the US corporate media away from any disturbing truths replacing them with a sanitized version acceptable to US authorities. They call it "All The News That's Fit To Print."

There was also no account at all in the US corporate media, beyond the usual distorted version, of the killing of about 800 captured Taliban prisoners in November, 2001 at Mazar-i-Sharif by Northern Alliance soldiers shooting down from the walls of the fortress-like prison at the helpless Taliban fighters trapped below. It was never explained in the US corporate-run media it was in response to a revolt they staged because they were subjected to torture

and severe maltreatment. US Special Forces and CIA personnel were on the ground assisting in the slaughter by directing supportive air strikes by helicopter gunships and fighter-bombers in an act of butchery. It recalled many like it earlier in Vietnam at My Lai, the many thousands murdered by the infamous Phoenix assassination program in that war, the CIA organized and financed Salvadoran death squads in the 1980s and earlier that killed many thousands more, or the later many thousands of Fallujah residents killed along with mass destruction inflicted on this Iraqi city in November, 2004 in a savage act of vengeance and butchery following the killing of four Blackwater USA paramilitary hired-gun enforcers earlier in the year. There was also no report on 3,000 other Taliban and innocent civilian non-combatant prisoners who were separated from 8,000 others who'd surrendered or had been picked up randomly. They were then transported in what was later called a convoy of death to the town of Shibarghan in closed containers lacking any ventilation. Half of them suffocated to death en route and others were killed inside them when a US commander ordered a Northern Alliance soldier to fire into the containers supposedly to provide air but clearly to kill or wound those inside who couldn't avoid the incoming fire.

The response from people suffering the effects of these attacks and atrocities or knowing about them is what would be expected anywhere but especially in a country known for its history of determined resistance by any means to free itself from an oppressive occupier. It happened in Afghanistan during the 19th century "Great Game" period and then during the decade of Soviet occupation in the 1980s. It's now happening again and getting especially intense as described by General David Richards, the British commander of NATO forces in the country. In early August he described the fighting as some of the worst, most prolonged and ferocious he knew of in 60 years with his forces coming under repeated "hit-and-run" and other attacks by Taliban guerrilla fighters engaging in machine gun and grenade battles before dispersing and later regrouping for more attacks. He said: "This sort of thing hasn't really happened so consistently, I don't think, since the Korean War or the Second World War. It happened for periods in the Falklands, obviously, and it happened for short periods in the Gulf on both occasions. But this is persistent, low-level, dirty fighting." One has to wonder if the general thinks cluster-bombing and using other terror weapons from 30,000 feet to kill innocent civilians in villages is fighting clean.

The kind of intense fighting the general is talking about was reported in the London Observer on September 17 on what relatives of British troops serving in Afghanistan's southern Helmand province have to say. They're raising grave concerns for their loved ones safety claiming they face "intolerable" pressures and dangers, relentless fighting, inadequate supplies of rations and water, having to get by on three hours sleep a night, having no body armour, and so shattered and exhausted by the experience they can't function properly. With this to expect, why would any sensible foreign leader heed NATO's request for more troops to help a failed mission guaranteed to get numbers of them killed and wounded and frighten and anger their own people at home in the process. So far only Poland, likely under intense pressure, agreed to do it in any meaningful numbers in a high-level decision it may end up regretting.

The result of recent fighting on the British alone is that 33 of their soldiers have been reported killed in the last two months up to late-September - including 14 killed on September 2 in a warplane the Taliban claim they downed over Banjwai and Kandahar province and 22 known killed since September 1. The reported number of deaths and injuries are likely understated as a good many of the wounded later die but aren't added to the official count. It's known and documented this kind of sanitized casualty reporting is the

way it's done in Iraq. No doubt it's handled the same way in Afghanistan as well.

It's happening because the Taliban resistance is gaining strength fueled by the repressive occupation and brutality of the Northern Alliance "warlords," making a growing number of Afghans determined to fight back. It's also because of the extreme level of desperation and deprivation Afghans now experience resulting from the so-called neoliberal Washington Consensus model the US has imposed on the country just like it wants to do everywhere else it can get away with it. It's a model solely beholden to the interests of capital, ignores the essential needs of the people desperate for relief and help, but in an impoverished country like Afghanistan, that's a recipe for pushing people toward Islamic fundamentalist leaders promising something better than their current state of immiseration. It makes it easy for them to get recruits to join the struggle to end it. Apparently growing numbers of them are doing just that as they have been for the past three years in Iraq to fight back relentlessly refusing to quit until the occupation ends which it likely will eventually in both countries.

The US Plan to Pacify Afghanistan and Control It As A Neocolonial State

The Bush administration has no sense of history judging by its plan to control Afghanistan by neutralizing any resistance in it to make the country one more de facto pacified US colony. It failed to heed the lessons learned in Vietnam where the US was defeated or even in Korea before it where the war there ended in a standoff. It's proceeding anyway in spite of the information from the Pentagon's latest quarterly progress report on Iraq to the Congress. In it Pentagon officials paint a grim assessment of a lost war where the same tactics now used in Afghanistan have failed. Those facts, however, don't deter US planners who won't admit they're wrong and intend to keep repeating the same mistakes no matter how many times before they haven't worked. It's part of the Bush administration's Messianic mission of madness under which the thinking must be if at first you don't succeed, try again by making things worse with another misadventure. It's also part of the misbegotten belief that superior air power, high tech weapons, and a little help mostly from a proxy force on the ground can solve all problems. High-level military strategists once again intend to try proving it in Afghanistan even though they know it hasn't worked in Iraq.

The Afghanistan plan involves the use of overwhelming US air power that can quickly send down a reign of death and destruction against any area or resistance it wishes to attack. It's to be done by concentrating its hub activities at two large, permanent US-constructed bases, Bagram and Kandahar, while it wants NATO forces to operate a large new base under construction in Herat that can accommodate about 10,000 troops. In 2005, the US Air Force spent about \$83 million upgrading the two bases it will use in the country.

The plan is also to have US forces maintain about 30 smaller, forward operating bases with 14 small airfields housing highly mobile air and ground forces secured in fortified areas and only used for special search operations leaving routine patrol missions for the local satraps to handle. The plan calls for a reduction in US ground forces with NATO troops replacing them, especially in the more volatile Kandahar, Helmand and Urzagan provinces. In its "first (ever) mission outside the Euro-Atlantic area" NATO forces took command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan in August, 2003 "to assist the Government of Afghanistan....in maintaining security....and in providing a safe and secure environment (for) free and fair elections, the spread of the rule of law, and the reconstruction of the country." This was pious rhetoric belying the reality on the ground that all occupiers are there only as enforcers to make Afghanistan safe for corporate predators

wanting to exploit the country and its people for profit.

The US is also recruiting, training and wants to employ a local proxy Afghan National Army and Police to perform the same role by doing much of the routine patrolling and to engage in ground combat when necessary. This is a common US tactic to use a surrogate force of expendable locals to do as much of its fighting and dying for it to keep its own casualties to a minimum. It intends to support them with its tactical air strength mostly out of harm's way and sell the whole package apparently to the Afghan people and US public by using what the Bush administration calls "strategic communication" – aka well-crafted propaganda, disinformation and carefully sanitized versions of the truth to suppress an honest account of it from ever coming out so that the perception they're able to craft replaces the reality they wish to conceal.

When it comes to deploying overwhelming conventional military superiority including the most highly developed and destructive high-tech weapons and a vast array of almost limitless air power, no competing force can challenge the US. The Pentagon is now deploying those air assets round the clock across the country using its most sophisticated bombers and other aircraft deployed from its bases in Diego Garcia. They're on call at all times for tactical support and heavy strike missions as needed. In addition, unmanned Predator and Desert Hawk aerial drones are also airborne over the country at all times, especially in areas thought to be most hostile. The Predator is able to launch rocket attacks on targets while the tiny Desert Hawk is a spy plane used for surveillance around US bases. Put it all together and this is what an unwanted foreign occupier has to do to keep a population in check after it "liberated" it. The plain fact is it hasn't worked in Iraq and likely won't fare any better in Afghanistan.

But there's more to this story though as reported on September 5 in the online publication Capitol Hill Blue titled Has Bush gone over the edge? It explains that Republican and Bush family insiders including the President's father and former President are worried George Bush may be heading for a "full-fledged mental breakdown" judging by his bizarre behavior at times. Jeffrey Steinberg writing in Executive Intelligence Review said G.H.W. Bush fears G.W. is obsessed with his Messianic mission and is "unreachable" even by some of his closest advisors like Secretary of State Rice. Prominent psychiatrist Dr. Justin Frank, who wrote Bush on the Couch: Inside the Mind of the President, agrees and believes: "With every passing week, President Bush marches deeper and deeper into a world of his own making. Central to Bush's world is an iron will which demands that external reality be changed to conform to his personal view of how things are." He goes on to say Bush needs psychiatric analysis and help. These observations explain a lot – that George Bush indeed has a Messianic mission and intends to pursue it no matter how failed it is because he believes it's the right thing to do. And apparently he has enough close advisors around him reinforcing this view making it very likely there will be no Middle East or Central Asian policy change as long as he's President. It helps explain why the policy that's failed in Iraq is still being followed, why it's the plan for Afghanistan as well even though it isn't likely to succeed there either, and why this administration wants to go even further and is willing to compound the disaster it already created.

George Bush announced his policy intentions in a speech he made on September 5 to an association of US military officers in which he virtually declared war against the entire Muslim world. In it he used the kind of inflammatory language that should give the senior Bush far greater cause to worry whether his son has lost his senses entirely. The speech was more of the administration's rhetoric to rebrand the "global war on terror" to what it now

calls the “long war with Islamic fascists” and the threat of “Islamic fascism” that must be confronted by its reasoning (and by implication) where it’s centered in Tehran. It was also George Bush’s apparent attempt to rescue his failing presidency by appealing to his most extremist backers, shore up his base, and scare everyone else to death enough to support his “long war” agenda on November 7 by reelecting Republicans to Congress many of whom see him as radioactive and keep their distance.

No doubt the Svengali hand of Karl Rove is behind this. It can’t be dismissed because it signals another reckless step toward a widened “long war” crusade against Islam. It further angered the nearly 1.8 billion Muslims worldwide who were even more enraged by Pope Benedict’s inflammatory September 12 quote of a 14th century Byzantine Christian emperor who said (during the Crusades at that time) that the Prophet Muhammad had brought the world only “evil and inhuman” things. Despite his disingenuous claim of being misunderstood, Popes don’t make accidental comments, especially in an age of instant worldwide communication, so clearly this one made his with another purpose in mind. It may relate to why he disturbingly chose to withdraw from the interfaith initiatives begun by his predecessor, John Paul II. He did it at a time when such efforts are more needed than ever and tells Muslims he believes in the myth that Islam is a violent faith, war and occupation of Muslim lands is the way to counteract it, and he’s part of the West’s new crusade against them.

Put another way, Pope Benedict’s comment was a clear papal genuflection and declaration of fealty to the exploitive and racist war on the Muslim world policies of the Bush administration. He added resonance and, in effect, gave his blessing to an out-of-control US President’s belief in the same notion only made worse by George Bush’s further public pronouncement that dissent is an act of terrorism, saying it solely on his own authority, and effectively abrogating the First Amendment that prohibits the criminalization of speech. This kind of assertion reinforces George Bush’s earlier in the year self-anointment as a “Unitary Executive” giving himself absolute power to suspend the Constitution and declare martial law to protect the national security any time he alone decides a “national emergency” warrants it. Unless the public refuses to accept this reckless endangerment of our sacred constitutional rights and enough prominent public figures join in as well to denounce this kind of talk, there’s a real danger this administration is moving toward “crossing the Rubicon” to tyranny on the false pretext of protecting us from an Islamic terrorist threat that doesn’t exist.

Looking Ahead In Afghanistan

US directed repression of the Afghan people aided by its brutal Northern Alliance regional “warlord” proxies has led to the beginning of a growing insurrection against an intolerable situation that’s unsustainable. It has the upper hand in Iraq and is fast becoming more of the same in Afghanistan. It’s what always happens because no unwanted occupier is ever accepted by the people it subjugates, especially one whose prime mission is to terrorize the civilian population to pacify it. The mission is doomed to fail as eventually it becomes inefficient, ineffective and people back home no longer will tolerate it. By now it would seem cooler heads in Washington and at the Pentagon would have made some headway convincing the hard line neocons behind this growing misadventure and the out-of-control one in Iraq that it was time to cut losses, pull out, and go another way. Those among them with enough good sense have to realize even the most powerful military in the world has no chance to defeat a determined guerilla force gaining strength because it has most of the people in the country behind it. And there have to be at least a few high-level mandarins

with a sense of history to understand they saw this script before, and it has a bad ending. It brought Rome to its knees a millennium and a half ago and did the same thing more recently to the Nazis with delusions of grandeur who thought their way would prevail for 1,000 years. They only missed by 988.

So it goes for the modern-day Romans in charge in Washington led by a President who believes his cause is just and the Almighty is directing him. They also feel with enough super-weapons they can rule the world forever as long as they don't miscalculate and blow it up instead (a very real and disturbing possibility). It didn't work for the original rulers of ancient Rome, and it's also not working now for those in charge in Israel apparently under the same illusions, who also have no sense of history except their own false version of it. It won't work for the US rulers either who want their dominion to be all of planet earth.

It's high time some clear-thinking high-level insiders went public convincingly to drive home this point the ones in charge with "delusions of grandeur" won't ever see without help and unless forced to. The plain fact is the war in Iraq is lost militarily and politically. The longer US forces stay there the greater their losses will be, the larger the number of alienated countries no longer willing to support us will become, the more likely the enormous and unsustainable cost will move the nation closer to economic bankruptcy, and the harder it will be to reverse the mind-set of the majority of countries that already see us as a moral pariah and terror state. Conditions are no less true in Afghanistan where the resistance is close to critical mass and the situation is fast becoming another lost cause because the momentum carrying it there is almost irreversible.

It's never easy changing the hearts and minds of the privileged elite riding high and mesmerized by their own self-adulation and that heaped on them by the corporate media, PR flacks, and assorted hangers-on portraying their cause as just. Charting a new course with that kind of strong tailwind is like trying to get a battleship to make a quick U-turn - darn-near impossible. It makes for the same likely conclusion just as in the past. Empires ruling the waves, and having it their own way, almost never spot the time when the tide begins to turn and they're swimming against it. Sooner or later, they're wrecked on the shoals of their own hubris, a new force is rising to replace them, and an old familiar refrain is heard again - the king is dead, long live the king.

Stephen Lendman lives in Chicago and can be reached at lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net. Also visit his blogspot at www.sjlendman.blogspot.com.

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About the author:

Stephen Lendman lives in Chicago. He can be reached at lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net. His new book as editor and contributor is titled "Flashpoint in Ukraine: US Drive for Hegemony Risks WW III."

<http://www.claritypress.com/LendmanIII.html> Visit his blog site at sjlendman.blogspot.com. Listen to cutting-edge discussions with distinguished guests on the Progressive Radio News Hour on the Progressive Radio Network. It airs three times weekly: live on Sundays at 1PM Central time plus two prerecorded archived programs.

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