

# The American Occupation of Afghanistan and the Birth of a National Liberation Movement

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*Edited Transcript of a Public lecture by professor Marc Herold, Massachusetts Institute of Technology M.I.T., Cambridge, Mass. August 2010*



Kabul, August 1996 before the Taliban entered. An old man in his neighborhood that was destroyed by years of inter-factional fighting, following the withdrawal of the Soviets in 1989. Photo by photo-journalist anthropologist, Teun Voeten (from <http://www.teunvoeten.com/> )

I shall discuss ten points:

- The Taliban entering Kabul on September 27, 1996. Who were they?
- Arrival of "the guest" (Osama bin Laden) in May 1996 and Al Qaeda's agenda (very different from that of the Taliban);
- 9/11 and the implementing of the neo-conservatives' Project for a New American

Century (PNAC);

- US aerial attacks during Oct-Nov Dec. 2001 (release of my first Dossier on Dec. 10, 2001 documenting the slaughter civilians, families, etc...) beginning of armed opposition to the invader;
- Crucial battles in the northern plains of Afghanistan during Oct-Nov 2001 and what each side learned. Mullah Omar retreats on a motorcycle into the mountains north of Kandahar on Dec 8, 2001;
- Begin of slow reconstitution of the Taliban, 2002-4. US anti-guerrilla operations alienate increasing numbers of common Afghans. By early 2004, I could write about the "Taliban's Second Coming":
- Key point: the way the Americans (and later NATO) fought the Afghan resistance built a national liberation movement. People who fight a foreign occupation are a resistance, not terrorists. Provide lots of concrete examples of this;
- Analysis of what I mean by the three words in the Afghan "*national liberation movement*." Differences exist with other national liberation movements as in Algeria and Vietnam;
- The primary struggle now is to oust the foreign occupiers;
- End with three stark photos depicting maiming, abduction and fear.

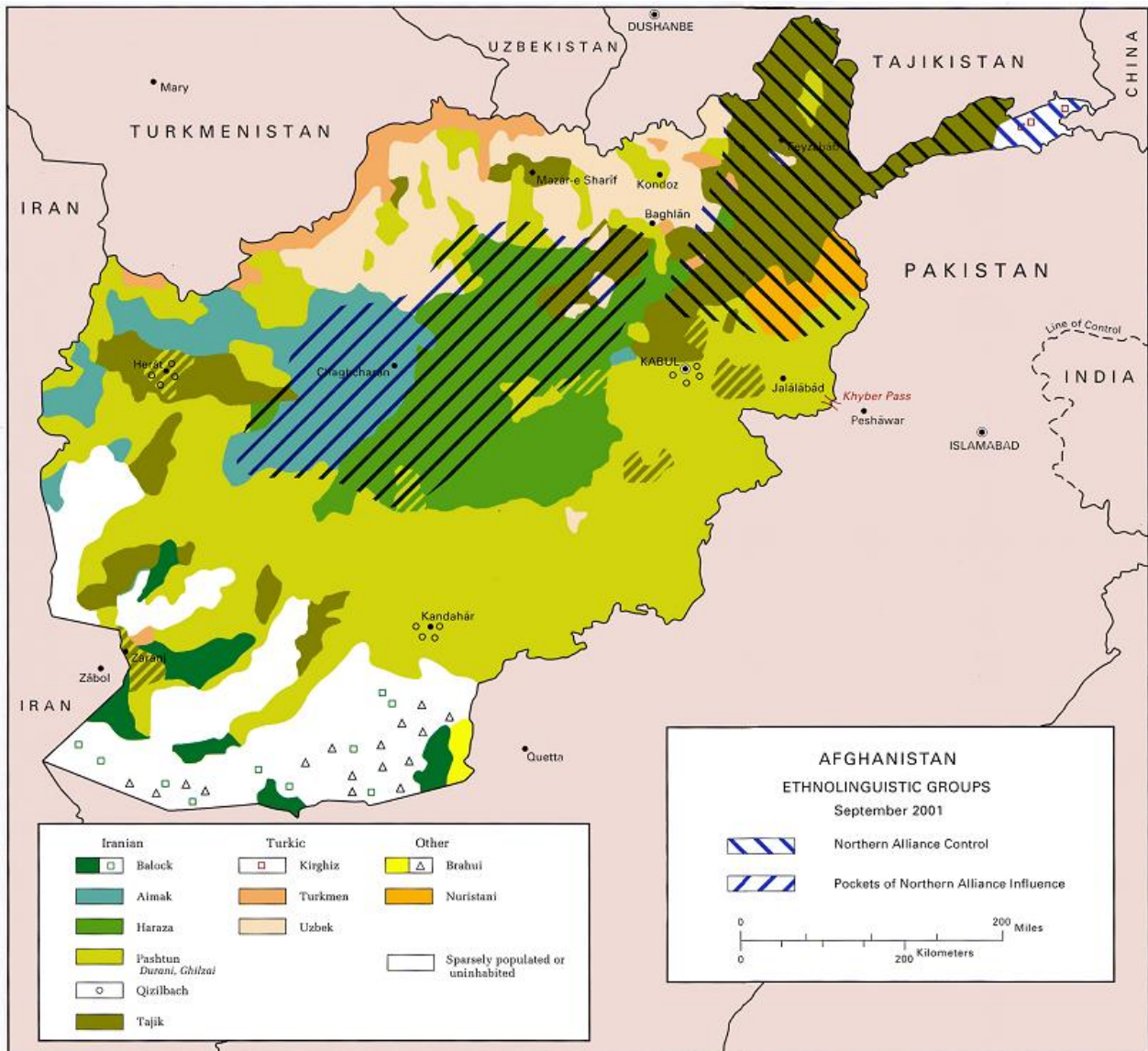
Let me, in the words of Richard Nixon, "be perfectly clear" about some matters which I do not wish to speak about. I am not defending the Taliban and/or the Afghan resistance, but keep in mind that as far as retrograde social practices, the Taliban hold no monopoly on that in Afghanistan. [1] Secondly, much of Western denigration of the Taliban is inspired, sadly, by that old practice going back to the British Empire's thieves of feminist language, i.e. "feminism as imperialism." [2] Lastly, pre-modern forms of social failure are much more naked or visible than complex subtle modern forms. It is easy to critique the burka, but less so the bikini. [3] Or, civilians get killed in suicide bombings as they do in even deadlier U.S./NATO "precision" air strikes. [4]

The great African revolutionary leader Amilcar Cabral connected culture to national resistance,

Whenever Goebbels, the brain behind Nazi propaganda, heard anyone speak of culture, he pulled out his pistol. That goes to show that the Nazis who were and are the most tragic expression of imperialism and its thirst for domination even if they were, all of them sick like Hitler, had a clear idea of the value of culture as a factor in the resistance to foreign domination. [5]

The Taliban marched into Kabul after a ten month siege on September 27, 1996. [6] The Taliban received strong Pakistani ISI support.

The reach of the Pashtun Taliban was never national with areas in the north (Tajik, Uzbek), center (Hazaras) and the west resisting. During October 1996-October 2001, bloody fighting continued across northern and central Afghanistan. The divides were largely along ethnic fault lines. The following map indicates the situation in September 2001:



Source:

[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/bb/US\\_Army\\_ethnolinguistic\\_map\\_of\\_Afghanistan\\_-\\_circa\\_2001-09.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/bb/US_Army_ethnolinguistic_map_of_Afghanistan_-_circa_2001-09.jpg)

The brunt of the Taliban’s conservative, patriarchal social policies was felt in Afghanistan’s more westernized urban areas – a small part of the country. In most of the rural regions, life went on as it had for decades, nay centuries, based upon traditional village structures and practices.

Former mujahideen, disillusioned with the chaos that had followed their victory in 1989, became the nucleus of a movement that grouped around Mullah Mohammad Omar, a former minor mujahid from Kandahar province.[7] The group, many of whom were madrasa (Islamic school) students, called themselves Taliban, meaning “students”. Others who became core members of the Taliban were commanders in other predominantly Pashtun parties, and former Khalq PDPA members. Their stated aims were to restore stability and enforce their strict interpretation of Islamic law. But, the original Taliban came mostly from religious schools and refugee camps in the Pakistani border regions and were not former members of the mujahideen who had fought the Soviets (1980-89).

The Taliban inherited a devastated country, torn apart during six years of warlord in-

fighting. Few state structures or institutions existed. Moreover, the background of the Taliban hardly prepared them for national governance. Close to a half of Kabul looked like this, destroyed by the factions once united in their fight against the Soviets:



A woman and her son walk along Kabul's main avenue. Once a bustling thoroughfare lined with

merchants, the avenue was destroyed by four years of fighting. 1996 © Didier Lefevre (Source: [http://www.lensculture.com/weblog/mt\\_files/archives/2004/12/](http://www.lensculture.com/weblog/mt_files/archives/2004/12/) )

During 1994-96, no relations existed between the Taliban and Osama Bin Laden. But a new element had been introduced in 1996: bin Laden arrived in Jalalabad, Afghanistan on May 18, 1996 after being expelled from the Sudan which bowed to U.S. pressure. Initially, bin Laden stayed in an area not controlled by the Taliban, who were fighting for control of the country. But by the end of September 1996, the Taliban conquered the capital of Kabul and gained control over much of the country. Bin Laden then became the guest of the Taliban. The Taliban, bin Laden, and their mutual opportunistic ally, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, then called for a jihad against Ahmed Shah Massoud, who retained control over a small mountainous area along Afghanistan's northern border.

Osama bin Laden arrived in Jalalabad with 180 Arab followers on a chartered Ariana Boeing 727 cargo jet from the Sudan in May 1996. The pilot of Ariana, the Afghan national carrier, remembered flying to the Sudan and back in 1996.<sup>1</sup> Sayed Hashimi said his crew waited for five days in Khartoum for their 'cargo.' They realized they had transported the bodyguards and the families of bin Laden's inner circle to Jalalabad when at midnight at Jalalabad airport, all sorts of important people came to greet the 'cargo' of 90 persons.<sup>3</sup> Bin Laden and his followers were welcomed by Haji Abdul Qadir and his lieutenant, Engineer Mahmood, the man who had extended the invitation to bin Laden. Bin Laden took up residence in



Jalalabad with Mahmood. Tora Bora had been Mahmood's headquarters during the 1980s anti-Soviet war.[8]

As bin Laden established a new safe base and political ties, he spoke about attacks on Western military targets in the Arabian Peninsula. Such attacks took place on U.S. embassies in East Africa in 1998. 9/11 was a clear consequence of bin Laden's original fatwa of August 1996 about the "Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places". In turn, 9/11 provided the Bush regime with the perfect pretext to launch the neo-conservatives' plan to establish unilateral U.S hegemony - or what was called at the time in the academic literature, America's unipolar moment - in the twenty-first century. I have written extensively on that and why the U.S. decided to bomb Afghanistan in the fall of 2001.[9] 9/11 was the wished-for Pearl Harbor (trigger event) of the PNAC document.

The launching of the neoconservatives' PNAC plan (or grand design) meant that no compromise with the Taliban would be accepted. Once the U.S bombing had begun, Mullah Omar made a couple serious attempts at compromise. All were immediately rejected by the Bush gang. Details may be found in my manuscript, Blown Away.

Aerial attacks such as the one in October 2001 by an AC-130 upon entire Afghan villages contributed to a growing sense amongst common Afghans that the foreigner was terrorizing the nation.[10] By the way, this was nine years before WikiLeaks in 2010 released the video, "Collateral Murder" of the U.S Apache helicopter assault upon innocent Iraqis.

During October - December 2001, some 3,000 innocent Afghan civilians - about the same number as died on 9/11 - were killed upon impact by U.S bombs (to which many others need be added - injured who later died, refugees in camps who froze to death or starved, etc.). The Taliban quickly lost territory faced by an unreachable onslaught of U.S air power, purchased mercenaries/thugs of the Northern Alliance, and some 400 U.S Special Forces and CIA operatives on the ground pinpointing targets with lasers. The technological asymmetry between the U.S aggressors and the Taliban defenders was stark and militarily decisive in the short-run: Toyota pickup trucks or Soviet-era tanks (photo below) stood no chance against F-16s, F-18s, B-52s, B1-Bs, F-15s and laser/GPS positioning technologies.

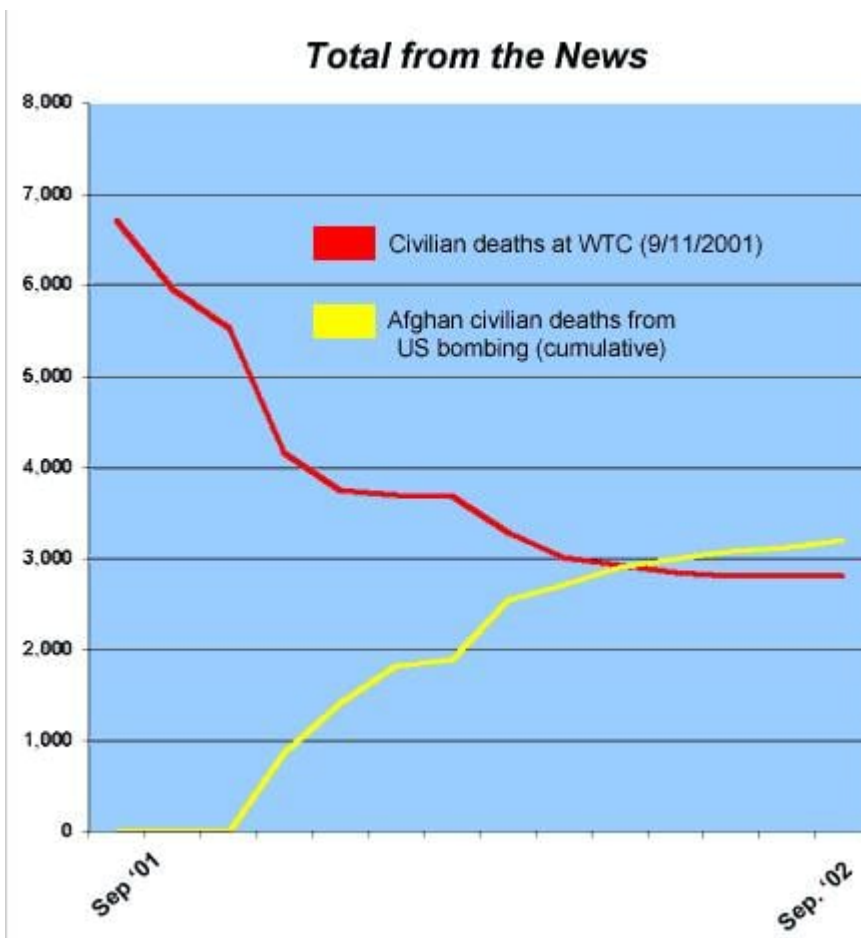


Source:

<http://www.registan.net/index.php/2009/09/01/the-case-for-afghanistan-recent-historical-considerations/>

The following chart plots the civilian victims in each tragedy. As the body count of the World Trade Center [WTC] was revised downward from the initial high of 6,700 to the 2,819 in 2002, that in Afghanistan rose from 20-37 on October 8th to 3,215. The twin lines of ignominy cross around January 15, 2002. But in truth, the Afghan civilian casualties far exceeded the WTC deaths already during the second week of the U.S. airstrikes in real terms - experienced pain parity - that is in terms of *the collective pain equivalent* felt by a society. Why? The U.S. population was 13 times larger than the Afghan one [2001] and hence to make Afghan casualties relevant in U.S. terms we need to multiply Afghan numbers by thirteen. A calculation of the twin tragedies then reveals 2,819 dead at the WTC and an equivalent pain parity of 41,795 dead Afghan civilians.

The Twin Tragedies: Cumulative Civilian Deaths



Arundhati Roy added an important point:

The bombing of Afghanistan is not revenge for New York and Washington. It is yet another act of terror against the people of the world. Each innocent person that is killed must be added to, not set off against, the grisly toll of civilians who died in New York and Washington.[11]

Conventional-style ground battles raged across the northern plains of Afghanistan during October-November 2001 pitting Taliban ground forces supplemented with Pakistani volunteers against the Northern Alliance backed up by U.S. Special Forces and CIA

operatives with formidable air firepower. The Taliban lost 3-4,000 troops. Each side believed it had learned a lesson. The Taliban realized that they could no more marshal conventional ground forces to face the awesome firepower of the United States, a different enemy than the Soviets fifteen years earlier. *They became true believers in asymmetric warfare, later superbly perfected with the use of IEDs and suicide bombers.* For its part, the United States' penchant to rely upon technological fixes/solutions was reinforced, leading to the certainty that the Taliban would soon be routed by U.S. firepower. One might say the U.S. was blinded by its success, thereby laying the foundation for its subsequent slow defeat.

Mullah Omar and the Taliban leadership "did the right tactical thing" to abandon Kandahar on December 8, 2001. Omar allegedly rode off into the Afghan dust on the back of a motorcycle headed into the mountains of Helmand evading hundreds of U.S. troops searching for him.[12] For his part, bin Laden hiked across the Tora Bora or Spin Ghar Mountains southeast of Jalalabad into the Pakistan border area and then disappeared (I personally believe he is up in the Pakistan-Chinese mountainous Pamir border region). *Mullah Omar's comeback journey is nothing but extraordinary: from fleeing sitting on the back of a motorcycle in December 2001 to leading a movement which today exerts significant control in 80% of Afghanistan.*

What had been the Taliban government quickly disintegrated. Slowly three groups reconstituted themselves – one led by the veteran anti-Soviet fighter and brilliant tactician, former Minister of Border Affairs in the Taliban government, Jalaluddin Haqqani, and the other a loose grouping based in Quetta, Pakistan what later would be called the Quetta Shura with Mullah Omar as leader. A third group slowly re-aligned itself with the Taliban, that of the particularly oppressive fundamentalist Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (the Hizb-i-Islami or the HIA). These three groups remain independent today, belying the silly notion of a unified resistance.

I want to now make and document a critical point: *the way the U.S. carried out its occupation of Afghanistan and its campaign against the Taliban, transformed what was a low-intensity guerrilla campaign as of 1/2002 into a full-fledged war of national liberation by 2006.* For now almost nine years, I have been documenting how the U.S. has waged its Afghan war and the consequences for average Afghans. This transformation from a low-intensity conflict during 2002-4 took place because of certain deeply felt, ingrained, Afghan cultural beliefs of independence, pride, and responsibility (by the way, beliefs I cherish too). For example, to take revenge for ill done to a family member is expected. Estimates suggest that for every Afghan killed by the foreign occupiers, 3-5 members of the resistance are created.

But other factors played as well: (1) violation of the sanctity of Afghan homes by marauding U.S. ground forces; (2) widely publicized desecration of the Koran; (3) mistreatment of Afghan female family members by occupation forces; (4) the abducting and/or beating of Afghan family members; (5) the old U.S. practice going back to Indochina of secretive night-time assassination raids carried out by U.S. special operations forces[13]; and (6) systematically labeling civilians killed by US/NATO occupation forces as "insurgents" or Taliban



In some small Afghan village in 2004, U.S. occupation forces break into another Afghan home (photo from <http://images.wn.com/i/4a/c310f3e1aeeb70.jpg> )

The heavy-handed U.S. search-and-destroy forays over time swelled the ranks of supporters, as the battle for Afghan hearts and minds tipped in favor of the Taliban. U.S. aerial 'decapitation raids' frequently devastate small villages and families. In January 2004, two U.S. raids killed 15 children and not a single Taliban was either captured or killed. The reality of living daily in fear is captured in the words of a young girl in Loi Karez, Zabul:

Whenever these tall people with blue eyes come to our village, we become very scared," said eight-year-old Saira Bibi as she fetched water from a well in Loi Karez. "They take away people and ask us about the Taliban. I haven't seen the Taliban. I don't know who these Taliban are.

A similar perspective is offered in Qalat, Zabul province, in January 2004:

... For many people a much more visible aspect of American intervention is the steady stream of civilian casualties. And in Qalat, there is hostility to patrols by American Special Forces. From a Humvee a man gets out wearing a Stetson and sheriff's badge, and proceeds to have a loud argument with a colleague carrying a sawn-off shotgun. As they move away, the locals stare after them. "We are so unhappy when we see them," says Rahmatullah, a bearded 29-year-old shopkeeper watching from across the road. "When the Russians came here we fought to save our liberty and independence. So also Americans came... and so we will be fighting them.

During a search of the village of Atel Mohammed in Kandahar by U.S. Special Forces (and their allies of the Afghan Militia Forces) in the summer of 2003,

Scared Afghans in the southern province of Kandahar hid holy Quran and other religious items before United States troops searched their village, afraid the



Americans would kill them for being Muslims.



U.S. occupation forces of the 82nd Airborne raided homes in the village of Salar in Ghazni province, December 2007 (photo by Tyler Hicks)

Afghan woman waits as U.S. Marines attached to the 2nd Battalion 2nd Marines from Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, rest during a search of her residence during an operation

I am proud to have helped publicize the following rare photo. A collection of 1,000 photos of Afghanistan under the U.S. occupation boot can be seen on my website under "Scenes of Afghanistan" at <http://pubpages.unh.edu/~mwhero1d>)



Photo 128. Member of 82nd Airborne, Stacey White, body searches Afghan women in a village in the Baghran valley, Helmand province, as U.S. forces moved northward village by village, house by house carrying out searches, confiscating items, going through houses and personal belongings, February 24, 2003 [A.P. photo, Aaron Favila].



A female American soldier frisks Afghan women at a village during Operation Deliberate Strike, some 40 miles north of Kandahar. The mission involves hundreds of U.S. troops on a sweep through southern Afghanistan to counter operations by the resurgent Taliban and allied groups (Monday, May 19, 2003) Source: Kamal Kishore (Reuters)

The following shots by German photo journalist Perry Kretz were published in the German weekly, Der Stern:







These photos by German war photographer, Perry Kretz, were taken in the fall of 2004 during a raid by U.S. occupation forces in Paktika Province. The first shows a raid in-progress by the Wolfhound unit of the 3rd Platoon, 25th Infantry Division. The second depicts the same unit photographing a homeowner, Amir Mohammad, another example of the sexual humiliation perpetrated by the U.S. occupation forces upon Afghan villagers.

A French journalist visiting Kandahar in December 2003 wrote:

One quiet afternoon in Kandahar, a convoy of U.S. military vehicles passed by. In the pharmacy where I was making a purchase, men who had been chatting animatedly stopped and watched the personnel carriers drive slowly by carrying young American soldiers chewing gum and pointing their rifles defensively at the locals. After the last armored vehicle passed, one of the Afghans spat in their tire tracks, and mumbled, "Inshallah, they will leave soon.

An apocryphal story tells of a Taliban leader in the mountains where Afghanistan meets Pakistan, looking at his wrist and saying to a Western visitor: "You have the watches, but we have the time." [14] That may be the Taliban's most powerful weapon against the Americans.

By 2004, the Taliban were showing signs of a second coming as I wrote about in February 2004:

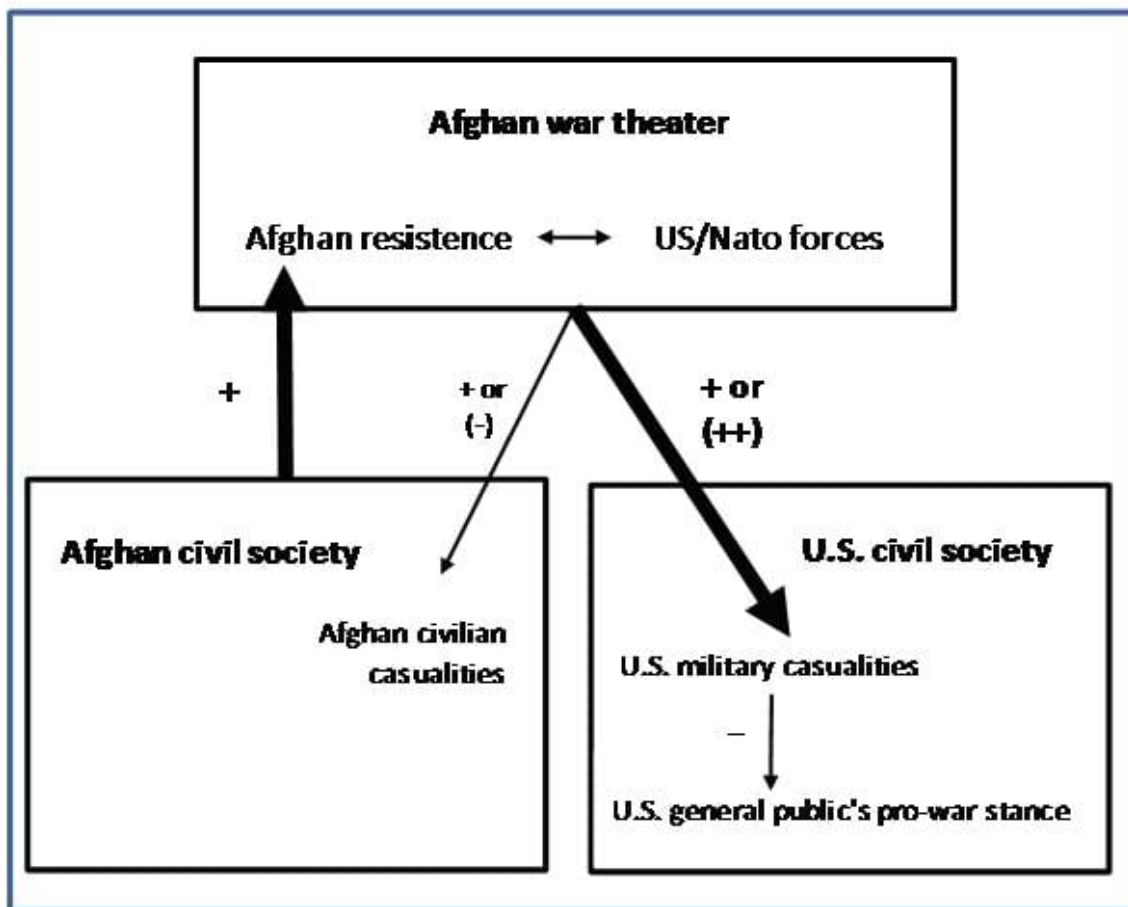
#### "The Taliban's Second Coming"

The specter of Vietnam began taking shape in 2002 with U.S. raids upon compounds, villages, and neighborhoods of cities. The forced entries, frisking and abuse of persons (including women and children), the ransacking of

homes, and the abductions merely served to heighten Afghan animosity towards the foreign occupier. John Pilger saw evidence of new Vietnams in: U.S. servicemen saying that once they leave their secured base, they are in a combat zone; renewed “search and destroy” missions carried out in villages across Afghanistan; and in the targeting of civilians (for arrest or execution). Daniel Bergner who accompanied a U.S. force into the countryside south of Kandahar, reports the enemy is everywhere and nowhere, and Liz Sly wrote about the same thing in eastern Afghanistan. Nick Meo provided a superb first-hand account of the sheer unknown, the dangers and frustrations experienced by young American soldiers on a nine-month tour of duty in Afghanistan. Others noted the resurgence of the Taliban and its allies - Al Qaeda and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s Hezb-i-Islami group - by mid-2003. In June 2003, the Taliban publicly named a new 10-man leadership council, including such veterans as former Defense Minister Mullah Obaidullah, Minister and Commander Jalaluddin Haqqani, and Commanders Mullah Dadullah Kakar and Mullah Akhtar Usmani. Mullah Usmani led Taliban forces in the south in late 2001 and was named in 2001 as successor to Mullah Omar should he perish. Dadullah harks from Uruzgan and Usmani from Helmand. (Source: Marc W. Herold, “The Taliban’s Second Coming, Cursor.org (February 29, 2004) at <http://cursor.org/stories/secondcoming.html>)

Both Usmani and Dadullah were later killed in U.S air strikes. The rest is history: soaring Afghan civilian, escalating violence, local military and US/NATO occupation forces deaths.

The following systems’ chart highlights the essential feedback elements at work in the America’s Afghan war:



The essential link is that America’s Afghan war causes civilian casualties which, in turn, fuel



the Afghan resistance which, in turn, causes more U.S casualties. No link exists between Afghan and U.S civil societies, i.e. rising civilian casualties in America's foreign wars have never caused the U.S general public to become anti-war.[15] Thirdly, McChrystal's alleged effort to reduce Afghan civilian casualties (-) was a trade-off for rising U.S military casualties (++) as I demonstrated a year ago.[16] *The graph makes an essential point: the United States can pursue its war but the result will be either soaring Afghan civilian casualties or escalating U.S. military deaths.*

A recent video of how the U.S/NATO military actions contribute to the building of a movement of national liberation to oust the foreign occupiers was released by the Brave New American Foundation which confirms what NATO forces repeatedly denied: U.S. and allied forces in Afghanistan killed dozens of people in the Sangin district of Helmand Province on July 23, 2010.[17] Mohamed Ahmadzai, a resident of Sangin where this U.S attack took place, explained clearly what happened. He told [independent reporters](#) how he was forced to bury two daughters, his sister and wife after a rocket fired by coalition forces hit a soft target: a house full of woman and children who had fled to the nearby village of Regai to avoid a firefight between the Taliban and occupation forces. His story described a reality that cannot be found in the mainstream U.S media or in a UNAMA report.

"We gather(ed) all of the body parts, some were missing legs or heads, we placed them in a bag and buried them," Ahmadzai said. "We were able to identify them through the clothes they were wearing and by their shoes. The body parts we couldn't identify we put into a piece of cloth and then buried them. Those chunks of flesh, blood and bone were from so many people not just one, but we couldn't identify them so we put those body parts into an individual grave and buried them as though they belonged to one person..."

On July 1, 2002, I reported on the U.S aerial attack less than one hundred miles away from Regai upon a wedding party in Kakarak, Uruzgan province in which 63 civilians were massacred.[18] Nothing changes. But where were The Nation magazine, the Brave New Foundation, the Tom Engelhardts, etc. nine years ago when I was documenting at Cursor.org the human carnage resulting from U.S military actions in Afghanistan?[19] Answer: all cozily housed inside the humanitarian imperialist tent alongside the likes of Laura Bush, Samantha Power, and Michael Ignatieff. Rare voices of dissent in America could only be read in Z Magazine, Counterpunch, Antiwar.com, etc. It's easy to be anti-war today when humanitarian imperialism has visibly failed in Afghanistan.

As I wrote two years ago,

The perceived poison of a foreign occupation, the rampant corruption, the all-too-frequent desecration of Islam by the occupiers, the sheer folly of the US/NATO seeking to extend the writ of a central government to the Pashtun tribal regions, the spiraling count of civilian deaths has shifted the Afghan struggle towards a war of national liberation. Anatol Lieven of King's College (London) put it aptly. Afghanistan is 'Becoming a sort of surreal hunting estate, in which the U.S. and NATO breed the very "terrorists" they then track down'.[20]

I realize that my use of the phrase "*national liberation movement*" may not sit well with some people.[21] How can a national liberation movement exist in a largely pre-modern, rural society? Isn't a national liberation movement or front part of the anti-colonial struggle? The West had no qualms labeling Afghan resistance to Soviet occupation as a "war of national liberation." [22] For example, the legal scholar W. Michael Reisman cited the 1949

Geneva Conventions which argued that peoples engaged in resisting the suppression of their right of self-determination are fighting what has come to be known as a “war of national liberation.”[23] The phrase illustrates the contest over assigned meaning. America’s duplicity is mind-boggling: when common Afghans fight the evil Soviet Union, it is a war of national liberation; when a dozen years later common Afghans fight the American invader, they are terrorists.

Let me briefly discuss the three terms – national, liberation and movement. The current Afghan resistance *movement* comprises various factions: the Quetta Shura led by Mullah Omar; the Haqqani group based in eastern Afghanistan, the Hekmatyar group, as well as some smaller organizations based in the Pakistani border regions. The dominant goal of this gradually constructed “coalition” comprised mostly of Pashtuns became the ouster of U.S and NATO occupation forces from the territory of Afghanistan. In that sense, this is a *national* movement; national does neither necessarily imply everyone is on board nor that the result will be a socialist society.[24] American neo-colonialists effectively sought to use ethnicity to divide-and-rule in Southeast Asia; the British colonizers did the same in British West Africa.[25] The national liberation of Angola from Portuguese rule was deeply divided along ethnic lines. The national liberation movement (the FLN) in Algeria, however, was a unified oppositional force. In Afghanistan, the U.S. employed the surrogates of the Northern Alliance. The Afghan resistance was not built through hard organizing work of the Taliban and associates, but rather by the actions of the US and later NATO.

The resistance differs greatly from other national liberation movements like those in Algeria, Vietnam, Angola, or Peru (Sendero Luminoso) insofar as it lacks a national political vanguard party. In Algeria and Vietnam, the armed struggle against the occupier began with the formation of a national liberation front. In Afghanistan, on the other hand, the national liberation movement *emerged de facto* after the aggressions of the foreign occupiers. This reflects the particular specificity of Afghanistan wherein family-clan-tribe-ethnic group form the primary social cohesion blocks. Afghanistan never was a secular nation-state; instead a figurehead, royal sovereign reigned over the little urban island of Kabul (just as Karzai, the ‘mayor of Kabul,’ has since 2002).

We saw the fragile unity at the national level in the Taliban movement in its tenuous relationship with the Al Qaeda group. The latter had clear national and international political agendas, whereas the Taliban’s focus was upon strengthening the Islamic emirate of Afghanistan proper inspired by the Deobandi interpretation of Islam, removing un-Islamic foreign influences. As I mentioned earlier, the Taliban were even willing to hand over Osama bin Laden in early October 2001 in return for a cessation of the brutal U.S. bombing. The Haqqani hard-line faction within the Taliban maintained a greater affinity and working relationship with Al Qaeda (it also remains the cutting edge in military terms of the Afghan resistance).

What the U.S-led occupation did was to provide the glue during 2003-6 to bring together disparate groups *united in a fight against the foreign occupier* (and his obvious corrupt, puppet regime in Kabul), i.e. *liberation from* the foreign occupation. In effect, this is a replay of the anti-Soviet struggle in which a variety of mujahideen groups *aligned themselves against the Soviets*. And just as when the Soviets withdrew in 1989, the disparate members of the current temporary national liberation movement will disband once the US/NATO exit and pursue their own regional agendas. In other words, I use the word “liberation” here in a

very constrained way: this is no implied social liberation from multiple forms of social oppression. There is no guarantee what *emerges after*: Islamic Sharia, a bourgeois democracy, or a socialist state. The mujahideen anti-Soviet national liberation war resulted in six years of deadly civil war. Those who wish to conflate national and social liberation (however defined) may do so at their own intellectual peril. I would caution, however, against whining about a lack of “democracy” in post-occupation Afghanistan. Samir Amin has argued that the term “democracy” – or the ‘democratic question’ (whose essence is of course the caricature of ‘multi-party elections’) has been and continues to be employed by the Triad of collective imperialism (and its academic point men/women) as a battering ram in its geopolitical struggle to open up the world to the dictates of the market.[26] But, democracy in its essence is about accountability and traditional societies whether Native American Indian or rural Afghan may have community structures of responsibility and/or accountability, admittedly sometimes imperfect (respectively constrained here by money and there by religion). We whether bourgeois democrats or Marxists, might not like this national movement but that should not cloud our analysis. As Julian Assange recently stated, “the Taliban is part of the will of Afghan people.”[27]

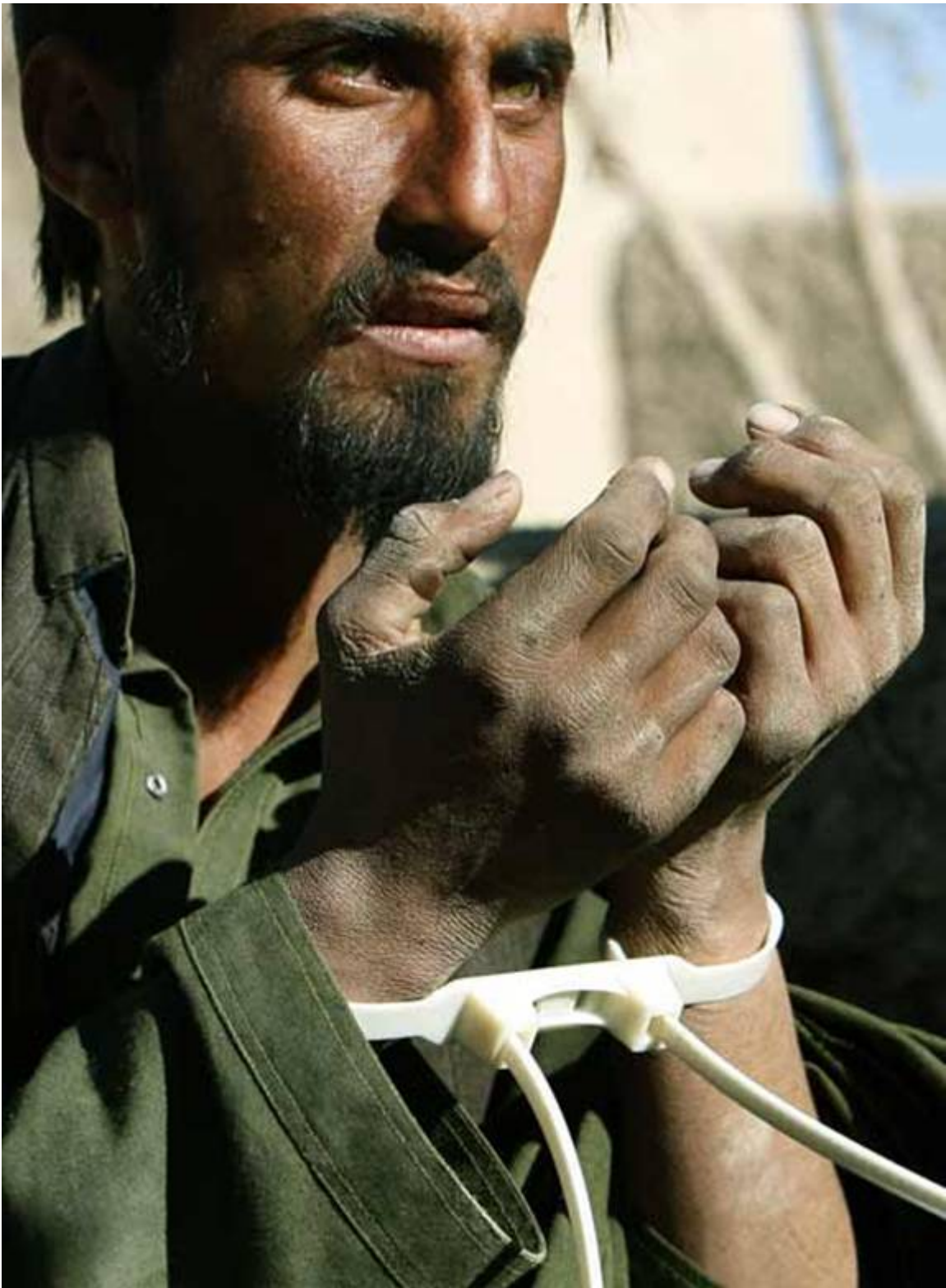
An optimistic vision of Afghanistan’s post-occupation future must involve a very loose federative structure with significant regional autonomy, allowing regions to implement their visions of socio-economic “development.” For example, one would hope that Afghanistan’s innovative National Solidarity Program of grassroots development would be greatly expanded.

As my dear friends from RAWA put it, first get rid of the foreign oppressors, then we’ll focus upon the remaining home-bred ones. Is that not better than continued.....maiming.....abductions.....and fear?



Burned victims of a U.S. “precision” bombing in the Kajaki region arrived in October 2006 at the Emergency (Italia) Surgical Hospital in Lashkar Gah, Helmand Province (source: Maso Notarianni, “Burnt Children after a NATO Bomb Attack,” RAWA News (October 31, 2006) at <http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews/2006/10/31/afghanistan-presumed-taliban.phtml> ). Maso Notarianni is the editor of [PeaceReporter](#), an online news magazine and news agency set up by the [Missionary International Service News Agency](#) and the humanitarian organisation [Emergency](#). Emergency is an independent and neutral Italian organization founded in order to provide free, high quality medical and surgical treatment to the civilian victims of war, landmines and poverty. Its work around the world is possible thanks to the help of thousands of volunteers and supporters. Maso is married to Cecilia Strada, daughter of Gino Strada and Teresa Sarti, the founders of Emergency.







Faces of Afghanistan under U.S. bombs and occupation. The first photo above depicts a detained Afghan

in November 2007 (photo by Reuters reproduced in Spain's *El Pais*). The second, award-winning picture (2001)

taken by Seamus Murphy shows a young "Girl in Ghulam Ali," a village in the Shomali Plains where the

U.S. bombed heavily during November 2001. The latter photo is taken from

[http://www.poyi.org/62/wua/murphy\\_01.php](http://www.poyi.org/62/wua/murphy_01.php).

#### Notes

[1] See Michael Stittle, "Warlords are no better than Taliban, says Afghan MP," RAWA News (November 8, 2007) at

<http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews/2007/11/08/warlords-no-better-than-taliban-says-afghan-mp.phtml>

[2] See for example Katherine Viner, "Feminism as Imperialism. George Bush is not the First Empire-BUILDER to Wage War in the Name of Women," *The Guardian* (September 21, 2002) at

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/sep/21/gender.usa/print>

[3] Feminist politics of clothing is discussed in Sarah Seltzer, "From Bikinis to Burqas, the Feminist Politics of Clothing," *RHRealityCheck.org* (July 10, 2010) at

<http://www.rhrealitycheck.org/print/10694>

[4] The conclusion is inescapable. When using delivery-adjusted cost data as a proxy for accuracy, U.S./NATO "precision" bombing slaughters many more innocent Afghan civilians than does a Taliban suicide car bomber (from my "Suicide Car Bombs vs 'Precision' Bombs," *Frontline. India's National Magazine* 23, 19 (Sep. 23-Oct 06, 2006) at

<http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl2319/stories/20061006001205600.htm> ).

[5] From his "National Liberation and Culture," Transition No. 45 (1974): 12-17

[6] See video at

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/player/nol/newsid\\_6560000/newsid\\_6565400/6565495.stm?bw=nb&mp=wm&news=1&ms3=6&ms\\_javascript=true&bbcws=2](http://news.bbc.co.uk/player/nol/newsid_6560000/newsid_6565400/6565495.stm?bw=nb&mp=wm&news=1&ms3=6&ms_javascript=true&bbcws=2)

[7] Omar fought as a guerilla with the Harakat-i Inqilab-i Islami faction of the anti-Soviet Mujahideen under the command of Nek Mohammad. After the experience in the Soviet conflict, Mohammed Omar shifted his attention to his religious studies. He reportedly taught at a madrasah (Islamic religious school) near the Pakistan border.

[8] Kathy Gannon, "Qadir Key Pashtun Leader for Karzai," Associated Press (July 6, 2002)

[9] See Marc W. Herold, "Tratando de comprender los veinte años de guerra en Afganistán (1989-2009) y el 'momento unipolar' de Estados Unidos" ,in Enric Prat Carvajal (ed.), Las raíces históricas de los conflictos armados actuales (Valencia: Publicacions de la Universitat de València, 2010): pp. 141-169

[10]1] Go to a 7-minute video of an attack by an AC-130U Specter gunship upon an Afghan village in October 2001. The video depicts U.S. gunners firing directly upon people leaving the mosque, view at:

[http://pubpages.unh.edu/~mwhero1d/AC130\\_Gunship.wmv](http://pubpages.unh.edu/~mwhero1d/AC130_Gunship.wmv).

[11] From her "Brutality Smeared in Peanut Butter. Why America Must Stop the War Now," The Guardian (October 23, 2001)

[12] Martin Bentham, "Omar Flees by Motorcycle to Escape Troops," Telegraph (January 6, 2002)

[13] Described by Philip Alston in 2008 in Joe Kay, "CIA Death Squads Killing with "Impunity" in Afghanistan,"

WSWS.org (May 19, 2008) at

<http://www.wsws.org/tools/index.php?page=print&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.wsws.org%2Farticles%2F2008%2Fmay2008%2Fafgh-m19.shtml>

and in Pratap Chatterjee, "The Secret Killers: Assassinations in Afghanistan and Task Force 373," The Huffington Post (August 19, 2010)

[14] H.D.S. Greenway, "In Mideast, Time is not on America's Side," Boston.com (February 27, 2004) at

[http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial\\_opinion/oped/articles/2004/02/27/in\\_mideast\\_time\\_is\\_not\\_on\\_americas\\_side?mode=PF](http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2004/02/27/in_mideast_time_is_not_on_americas_side?mode=PF) ).

[15] As beautifully expressed in "The American public is conditionally tolerant of [military] casualties and consistently indifferent to collateral damage," Dr. Karl P. Mueller, School of Advanced Airpower Studies, Maxwell Air Force Base.

[16] See my "Obama's Unspoken Trade-Off: Dead US/NATO Occupation Troops versus Dead Afghan Civilians?"

<http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews/2009/08/23/obamaand-8217-s-unspoken-trade-off-dead-u-nato-occupation-troops-versus-dead-afghan-civilianso.html>

[17] view 2 ½ minute video at <http://seminal.firedoglake.com/diary/63771>

[18] see my “Crashing the Wedding Party: Arrogance, Pentagon Speak and Spooky’s Carnage,” Cursor.org (July 8, 2002) at <http://cursor.org/stories/kakarak.htm>

[19] My original dossier was released on December 10, 2001 at the Cursor.org website. A slightly revised version can be found as “”A Dossier on Civilian Victims of United States’ Aerial Bombing of Afghanistan: A Comprehensive Accounting [revised],” Cursor.org (March 2002) at [http://cursor.org/stories/civilian\\_deaths.htm](http://cursor.org/stories/civilian_deaths.htm)

[20] Marc W. Herold, “More of the Same Packaged as Change. Barack Obama and Afghanistan,” Counterpunch (August 6, 2008) at <http://www.counterpunch.org/herold08062008.html>. I have added the “...” in Lieven’s quotes

[21] the concept is explored in amongst many others, Nigel Harris, National Liberation (London and New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 1990)

[22] see amongst many others the editorial comment by the legal scholar, W. Michael Reisman, “The Resistance in Afghanistan is Engaged in a War of National Liberation,” American Journal of International Law 81,4 (October 1987): 906-909 available at <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.unh.edu/stable/pdfplus/2203416.pdf>

[23] Reisman, op. cit.: 908

[24] As falsely argued by David Whitehouse, “Afghanistan Sinking Deeper,” International Socialist Review No. 69 (Jan-Feb 2010): 12 at <http://www.isreview.org/issues/69/feat-afghanistan.shtml>

[25] Details on Nigeria in Pade Badra, Imperialism and Ethnic Politics in Nigeria, 1960-1996 (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1998): 72

[26] Samir Amin, “The Battlefields Chosen by Contemporary Imperialism: Conditions for an Effective Response from the South,” MRZINE.Monthly Review.org (20101) at <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2010/amin070210p.html>

[27] “Interview: Taliban is Part of Will of Afghan People – WikiLeaks Chief,” The Voice of Russia (2010) at [http://english.ruvr.ru/rtvideo/2010/08/01/video\\_14087677.html](http://english.ruvr.ru/rtvideo/2010/08/01/video_14087677.html)

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