

## America's War for Empire

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On November 3, 2008 as many in the US prepared to celebrate a possible Obama election victory, the small village of Wech Baghtu in southern Afghanistan prepared for a celebration of its own—a wedding celebration. But their celebration turned to horror when a US missile struck the wedding party—murdering at least 60 people, mainly civilians, including women and children.

"My wounded son was in my arms, right here, bleeding," the bride's father told the AFP news agency. "He died last night. I lost two sons, two grandsons, a nephew, my mother and a cousin." Three days later, at least 20 more people were killed by another US air strike in Badghis Province. "The Americans are hitting civilian houses all the time," said provincial council member Mohammad Tawakil Khan. His house was hit, killing two of his sons and one grandson.

The next day another 10 to 13 people were killed in a US air strike on a village in north Waziristan in Western Pakistan, along the Afghan border—the 15th such attack in the last two months.

These are the latest atrocities in the escalating US war in Afghanistan. A July 6 bombing killed 47 members of a wedding party near the village of Kacu and an August 22 attack massacred more than 90 civilians in Azizabad.

US aerial attacks on wedding parties have been a hallmark of the current occupation, since the US occupiers consider any large gathering of Afghans inherently hostile.

According to Human Rights Watch (September 8), US and NATO air strikes tripled in 2007 over the previous year, killing 321 Afghan civilians in 22 bombings, while hundreds more were injured.

The actual number killed by the US is probably much greater. In 2007 NATO reported it killed 6,000 "Taliban." Associated Press reports that more than 4,200 have been killed in 2008, most of them labeled "militants" (and therefore considered legitimate targets—not "civilians") by Afghan and Western officials. But these officials have consistently lied about and covered up US-NATO atrocities, so many of these thousands may have been civilians as well. For instance, for days following the August massacre of civilians in the village of Azizabad, US officials claimed the number killed was much lower than villagers and reporters had actually counted.

These atrocities flow from and epitomize the unjust, anti-people, imperialist character of the whole US war in Afghanistan—from day one. This is NOT—as the US rulers would have people believe—a "justified response" to 9/11 to "protect Americans".

In truth the US war and occupation of Afghanistan and then Iraq were conceived of by the Bush administration as the opening salvoes in an unbounded war for greater empire, waged under the rubric of a "war on terror". Its goal from the very beginning was to defeat reactionary Islamic fundamentalist trends and groups that posed a growing obstacle to US hegemony (and the attacks of 9/11 clarified the magnitude of that threat to the US rulers), overthrow states not fully under US control, and restructure the Middle East and Central Asian regions in order to deepen US domination. Bush regime spokespeople called this "draining the swamp,"—which implies the targeting of entire regions which are home to tens of millions of people.

All this is being done to ultimately seize deeper control of key sources and shipment routes of strategic energy supplies and establish new military bases and beachheads as part of a conscious plan to forge an unchallengeable global empire. And Afghanistan has been merely one front in this regional and global war. The war and occupation of Iraq was not a "diversion" from this, but, like the invasion of Afghanistan, part of an overall strategy of greater US empire.

Before the US invasion, life for the Afghan people was hell under the rule of the Islamic fundamentalist Taliban. Reactionary religious strictures and suffocating social relations were imposed on pain of death—a savagery scorched into the world's memory by the stadium stonings of women for "crimes" like adultery. The Taliban also enforced feudal economic relations that kept Afghan peasants shackled and destitute. And while their agenda sharply conflicted with the US agenda at times, the Taliban weren't fundamentally opposed to America's overall domination of

Afghanistan. In fact they'd been quite willing to deal with the US over oil pipelines and on other fronts.

These reactionary Islamic fundamentalist forces are opposed to some policies of the White House and represent a growing pole of opposition to US domination in the Middle East. But there is absolutely nothing good about these forces who represent outmoded reactionary economic and social relations and continue to bring down horror on the people.

Following September 11, 2001, Taliban rule in Afghanistan didn't become intolerable for the US because of its completely reactionary nature and all the horror it means for the Afghan people. In fact, one factor that contributed to the rise of the Taliban and other Islamic fundamentalist forces was the financial, organizational, and military support given to the Islamic Mujahadeen by the US and Saudi Arabia (often working through Pakistan's intelligence service) to fight the Soviet Union in Afghanistan during the 1980s, the US goal being defeating a rival imperial power and gaining greater control of the Middle East-Central Asian region. And the US directly supported Taliban rule for a time in the 1990s. The US decision to invade Afghanistan had nothing to do with the reactionary, theocratic nature of the Taliban, which mainly represented sections of the feudal classes and tribes of Afghanistan's largest nationality, the Pashtun. The purpose of the US October 2001 invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, and its overthrow of the Taliban regime, was not to bring democracy and liberation to the Afghan people. It was to defeat Islamic fundamentalism and to directly dominate and control Afghanistan to further the US imperial agenda. This was an unjust war of aggression-a war crime-and US and NATO forces continue to try to impose this agenda at gunpoint through a brutal and bloody occupation that targets the Taliban and the Afghan people.

The unjust brutality of the US occupation is illustrated by the Afghan forces the US has relied on, built up, and used to create a puppet regime after the invasion to carry out US objectives. They were the same hated landlords, militia heads, and feudal and tribal chieftains that have tormented the people of Afghanistan decade after decade, who represent and enforce the very oppressive, traditional feudal relations that have made life hell for the people.

In one notorious incident, the barbaric fighters of the so-called "Northern Alliance" locked hundreds of people suspected of being Taliban supporters (many of whom were targeted because they were ethnic Pashtuns) into trailers and suffocated them to death. These are the kind of forces the US has relied on to enforce its occupation. And today these same US allies are responsible for widespread war crimes, including operating their own prisons with "unprecedented abuse, torture, and death of Taliban prisoners" which have been documented by a 2005 report by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. This same report cited 800 cases of detainee abuse by US forces at some 30 firebases, and condemned the CIA for operating secret detention centers holding "ghost prisoners" (detainees who are not given any legal rights or access to counsel and who are likely not reported or seen by the International Red Cross).

The ongoing oppressive treatment of women is another example of the nature of the US occupation. The Bush regime seized on the horrific, barbaric treatment of women under the Taliban as part of the justification for the US invasion with its promise of freedom for women. Yet today, after 7 years of US occupation, Afghan women remain imprisoned in oppressive, violent traditional relations and Islamic strictures, despite a few cosmetic changes in women's formal legal rights.

In October 2007, the National Democratic Organization of Afghan Refugees in Europe stated, "The situation for women has deteriorated and hundreds of thousands of young girls and women are kept from school and work and are confined within the walls of their home."

Every 30 minutes, an Afghan woman dies during childbirth; 87 percent of Afghan women are illiterate; only 30 percent of girls have access to education in Afghanistan; 1 in every 3 Afghan women experience physical, psychological or sexual violence; 70 to 80 percent of women face forced marriages in Afghanistan. Instances of self-immolation are on the rise.

The US State Department claims that the US, together with the UN, the World Bank and other international agencies (which are dominated and controlled by US) "have assisted in a great variety of humanitarian and development projects all across Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban in 2001."

But in reality, the US's objectives, the unjust war it's waging, and the reactionaries it has allied with have ensured that Afghanistan remains an extremely backward, desperately poor country, where life is getting worse, not better.

Take the case of opium production. When the US invaded Afghanistan in 2001, opium poppy production had basically been ended by the reactionary Taliban. Today, after seven years of US occupation, Afghanistan accounts for 90 percent of the world supply and a third of Afghanistan's GDP. Why? A big reason is the US's reactionary warlord allies, who profit from drug money and rely on it to hold onto power. (Eric Margolis writes, "Washington called off efforts by the Drug Enforcement Agency to combat the Afghan drug trade for fear of endangering the power base of its former CIA 'asset,' president Hamid Karzai. Starting with Karzai's brother, Ahmed Wali, the US-installed regime's most important supporters are all involved in varying degrees with the heroin trade." *Huffington Post*, October 15, 2008.)

Conditions of life in Afghanistan under the US occupation are among the worst on the planet. The statistics mind-numbing, the reality they describe hard to imagine. Afghanistan is the 174th poorest country (of 178), according to the UN's Human Development Index. Since 2003, life expectancy has fallen to 43.1 years, and adult literacy has fallen to 23.5 percent.

According to the World Bank, Afghanistan's total 2007 GDP (gross domestic product) was a mere \$11.6 billion-less than what the US spends on three Nimitz class aircraft carriers. Hunger is widespread and growing. "Up to 70% of Afghanistan's estimated 26.6 million people are considered food-insecure by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)," the World Bank reports, "and millions have recently been pushed into 'high-risk' food-insecurity because of high food prices."

One of every three children under 5 is malnourished, and in 2005 (the last year for which estimates are available), the average Afghan earned roughly \$271 a year- less than \$1 a day, and 42% of the people exist on less than \$14 a month.

Two historically outmoded and reactionary forces are in contention in Afghanistan: Islamic fundamentalist forces which represent historically outmoded strata among colonized and oppressed humanity-up against historically outmoded ruling strata of the imperialist system. These two reactionary poles reinforce each other, even while opposing each other.

The brutal US occupation of Afghanistan has only added more fuel to widespread anti-US sentiment in the Middle East. Given the lack of a genuine revolutionary force that can lead the people to fight both US hegemonism and reactionary Islamic fundamentalism-many people in Afghanistan have turned in desperation to the Taliban. "The Taliban and other fundamenatalists are taking advantage of the chaos and misery created by the occupiers and the puppet regime. They are advancing their war and imposing their medieval theocratic dictates over more of the country and its people, although they do not have stable areas of political power."

In this way, the reactionary nature of the US war and occupation have ended up reinforcing and fuelling reactionary Islamic fundamentalism.

Right now, some 40 countries have over 60,000 troops in Afghanistan operating under US command, including 33,000 US troops. This is triple the number of US-NATO forces in Afghanistan after the Taliban government's fall in November 2001. And the American Administration scheduled to send another 8,000 US troops to Afghanistan in January, while a top US general has asked for another 15,000 on top of that-a "surge" Obama supports. (As of this month, 555 members of the US military had died in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Uzbekistan since 2001, and US military deaths in Afghanistan have risen this year to at least 113, the highest yet.)

Nothing good can or will come from escalating an unjust and vicious war of empire. Many, many more Afghans will die. Reactionary Islamic fundamentalism will be fuelled even more. □□□  
[Source : *Revolution, Chicago*]