

THIS magazine is the product of mass line work carried out by the WPRM-Winnipeg over the past year. As part of our work, we have had many discussions with people about the current world situation, in particular Canada's current role in Afghanistan. Our position has always been to demand the immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan, including Canada's. In taking out this position, we have been asked many questions about how we have come to this conclusion. Questions like whether Canada's role is peacekeeping or not, what is the nature of the Taliban, and why Canada is in Afghanistan in the first place. We hope our contribution here will add to the ongoing discussion of questions like these among anti-war and anti-imperialist forces.

Resistance to the occupation in Afghanistan is growing in many segments of Afghan society: from youth, women, professionals, and students. Of course, you wouldn't know this from watching the news where only the insurgency involving the Taliban is reported on. Contrary to what some have argued, we do not believe that the Taliban is an 'anti-imperialist' group that should be supported. The Taliban are an

extremely reactionary force, and have shown themselves to represent a worldview and vision of a future society that is profoundly against the interests of the masses of people and their struggle for liberation. They are a brutal anti-people faction that in the past has been more than willing to 'play ball' with various imperialist powers. The fact that they have a temporary beef with some major world powers currently does not fundamentally alter their character. In many ways, what is going on in Afghanistan is a microcosm of what's going on in the world as a whole. The current situation is leading to a polarization among the masses: a divide between the 'McWorld' sweatshop hell of the big imperialist powers and the 'Jihad' of medieval Islamic fundamentalism.

This is a polarization that is dangerous, and not at all favorable. What Afghanistan needs, and what the world needs, is the emergence of a 'third pole' among the people that will genuinely stand for social progress and liberation, and fight to create the conditions where the masses of people can free themselves from the current crisis. This is what the WPRM stands for, in Winnipeg, and around the world.



Notes on Afghanistan

Spring/Summer 2007

Afghanistan: REASONS FOR WAR

SINCE early 2002, Canadian troops have been in Afghanistan both in support of the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom, as well as part of NATO operations. The motives that led to Canada's participation in military operations have gone under or unreported. Mainstream media, when

Anti-occupation
protestor shot and killed
in Kabul, capital city of
Afghanistan

not out-rightly cheering on the occupation, has refused to dig at all into the deeper reasons Canada has immersed itself in the bloody occupation of Afghanistan, glossing over the subject and narrowing the framework of debate to simply an issue of "helping out our friend to the south" or "taking on our responsibilities as peace keepers".

But there is more to the situation than that. Due to Canada's location, its economy is closely tied to that of the United States. Because of this, it is in the interests of Canada's ruling class, the group of people that control the bulk of Canada's wealth, to ensure that Canada maintains close and friendly ties with the United States.



Maintaining friendly ties often means supporting American foreign policy, which can come in the shape of adhering to American embargoes and sanctions imposed on other nations, or sending troops to support American military operations overseas. The latter is what we are currently witnessing with Canada's presence in Afghanistan.

Currently, the United States is the world's only superpower. Its foreign policy works to maintain and spread the current imperialist world order. This is a difficult and costly task. Because of

this, the United States expects other second-tier imperialist countries that benefit from this world situation (i.e. western industrialized countries like Canada, Great Britain, etc.) to help with its maintenance. If these countries do not foot their share of the costs of maintaining the imperialist system, they run the risk of being excluded from sharing in the spoils of plunder. Canada, being the world's fifth biggest foreign investor (New Socialist #54), cannot risk losing access to cheap labour, as well as oil, gas, and mineral deposits that form

> > Afghanistan's historical timeline > >

- 1921
Afghanistan wins its independence from Britain.
- 1973
Afghanistan becomes a republic.
- 1978
Members of the Communist Party of Afghanistan seize power in a coup d'etat. An Islamic-based rebel movement emerges in opposition to the pro-Soviet government.
- 1979
The Soviet Union invades Afghanistan to prop up the faltering government.
- 1980s
The US, Pakistan, China, Iran and Saudi Arabia begin contributing money and arms to a growing Islamist-based resistance, named Mujahadeen, against USSR's occupation of Afghanistan - one such resistance leader is Osama bin Laden.
- 1988
Afghanistan, the USSR, Pakistan and the US sign peace accords and Soviet troops begin to pull out.
- 1991
USSR and US both end military aid to Afghanistan.
- 1992
Muhajadeen government seizes power, though it quickly fractures into various factions grouped around powerful warlords.

the foundation of the Canadian economy.

According to the Mining Association of Canada, Mining, quarries, and oil and gas extraction inject nearly \$40 billion into the Canadian economy each year. Compare that to \$15.4 billion from agriculture, and \$7.2 billion from forestry and logging, and it becomes clear that mining, oil, and gas are of great importance to the Canadian economy, and thus the Canadian ruling class. What is more, other industries like electric/gas/water utilities (\$262 B/year), transportation (\$51.9 B/year), and manufacturing (\$184 B/year) could not function without base materials like oil, gas, and metals. It is in this context that we begin to see how strategic Afghanistan is to the particular needs of the Canadian ruling class.

Afghanistan has world-class mineral deposits. According to the government of Afghanistan, the Aynak Copper deposit alone holds approximately 240 million tons of material. On 14 November 2006, the Government of Afghanistan released a short-list of firms it is considering for the development of this particular copper deposit. Making the list of nine was Canadian mining firm Hunter-Dickinson, Inc.

Canada is a world leader in mining. The Toronto Stock Exchange (TSX), one of the world's largest stock exchanges, "is home to the largest peer group of mining companies in the world," with "trading activity of TSX stocks in

2005 [exceeding] \$167 Billion" (mining.ca, Mining Association of Canada). 88% of the global mining industry's 1,611 public financings in 2005 were conducted on the TSX. London, England ranked second with 9%. Overall, Canadian companies do 40% of world mining exploration.

But Afghanistan is not only important for the resources found within its borders. Geographically, Afghanistan is the gateway to a region of the world that is becoming increasingly important to the world's developed and developing industrial powers: The Caspian Sea region.

The Strategic Importance of the Caspian Sea

For the past 10-15 years, the world's economic powers have been eyeing the Caspian Sea region for its potential natural gas and oil wealth. The Energy Information Administration (US) estimates proven oil reserves in the Caspian Sea to be between 17 and 49 billion barrels. It also estimates proven natural gas reserves to be approximately 232 trillion cubic feet. These resources are of vital importance to any industrial power. As mentioned above, oil and gas are absolute necessities for the manufacturing and transportation sectors, and are of vital importance to a country's military as well. All of this

indicates that the Caspian Sea region is very much a strategically important area of the world, with oil and gas reserves easily outstripping that of the North Sea.

The Caspian Sea is the World's largest land-locked body of water. Five countries border on the Caspian: Azerbaijan, Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Iran (see map). Afghanistan shares borders with Turkmenistan to its north, and Iran to its west.

Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan have significant oil reserves, and Uzbekistan's natural gas reserves rank in the world's top ten. Canadian firms have been in the thick of things in this region for years. According to the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) website, a Canadian trade mission in May 2004 saw 10 Alberta firms travel to Kazakhstan to meet with the operating company responsible for North Caspian Sea deposits, as well as Canadian companies already active in Kazakhstan. "Almost all of world's largest oil and gas companies have a presence in Atyrau, the country's oil and gas capital (DFAIT)."

Canadian firms have been active elsewhere in the region. In 2004, former Canadian Prime Minister, and advisor to PetroKazakhstan (a Canadian firm based in Calgary), Jean Chretien,



> >
1996
The Taliban, an extreme Islamic group, seizes control of the country in 1996.
1998
The United States launches missiles against targets in Afghanistan in an effort to kill Osama bin Laden.

headed a Canadian delegation that met with Turkmen officials to negotiate a deal on behalf of Buried Hill Energy of Edmonton to develop the Serdar block of the Caspian Sea (18 January 2004, News Central Asia). On the same trip, the delegation met with officials from Oman and Turkmenistan to discuss the construction of the Trans-Afghan Pipeline (TAP) (4 September 2004, News Central Asia). The TAP is a network of pipes that would lead south transporting extracted oil and gas from Turkmenistan, through Afghanistan, Pakistan, and ending in India. This pipeline was finally agreed to on 21 November 2006. In 2004, another Canadian firm, ThermoDesign, was awarded a \$42 million contract to build an LPG and gas condensate plant in Turkmenistan (Oct. 20, 2004 News Central Asia).

The interests of the Canadian ruling class are deeply invested in the energy resources of the Caspian Sea region. It is in the Canadian bourgeoisie's direct interests to keep the region open to Canadian capital. Afghanistan is strategically important in achieving this in that, geographically, it lies exactly where pipelines need to run to export Caspian oil and gas.

Containing Iran and Turning Off the Tap to China

Iran adds an interesting twist to things in the region. First, it is already one of the most oil-rich countries in the world, and it stands to gain access to more oil and gas reserves from Caspian

Sea deposits. Currently, how much it will be given access to will depend on whether the Caspian Sea is legally declared a sea or a lake. If it is a lake, all bordering nations would have to equally share its resources, and Iran would have access to 20%. If it is a sea, each country will have access according to its coastline, reducing Iran's share to 13%.

Iran also has the second largest natural gas deposits in the world. The world's largest deposits lie in Russia and Central Asia. According to the EIA website eia.doe.gov, almost three quarters of the world's natural gas deposits are in the Middle East and Eurasia, with Russia, Iran, and Qatar accounting for 58% of the world's reserves. Geographically, Iran lies at the crossroads between Central Asia and Europe. Thus, pipelines heading from the east to Europe in the west would likely need to pass through Iran, effectively giving Iran influence over nearly half of the world's natural gas reserves. This would be unacceptable to the US, who aspires to control crucial energy resources and thus maintain leverage over any potential rivals.

According to the Washington Post, in 2004, China signed deals with Iran worth approximately \$90 Billion to purchase Iranian oil and gas, and help develop Iran's Yadavaran oil field. In exchange for oil, Iran receives many products produced by China, such as computers, appliances, and automobiles. With China rapidly developing, its voracious energy needs are running into limitations imposed on it by the current

global political situation. With access to these resources, China has the potential to emerge as a new world super-power. For this reason, it is important to the American ruling class that they control the world's energy deposits, so as to satisfy their own energy needs and prevent the emergence of any competing military and industrial powers. This necessarily means containing Iran and building alternative pipeline routes that are acceptable to the

'The interests of the Canadian ruling class are deeply invested in the energy resources of the Caspian Sea region.'

American ruling class. Any pipelines connecting the Middle East and the Caspian Sea region to rivals such as China or Germany would be wholly unacceptable.

Thus, we can see how Canada's role in Afghanistan is not by chance – some kind of foreign policy quirk or blunder. Canada is in Afghanistan with the aim of defending Canada's national interests, interests which are rooted in its desire to enrich itself through the natural resource industry as well as maintaining close amicable relations with the US, the country currently playing the leading role in defending the world economic order. And the 'national interests' of Canadian capital, it demands to be said, are in sharp contradiction with both the interests of the people of the world including the vast majority of people in Canada. <

A horizontal timeline with a black background and white text. It features a series of white arrows pointing right at the top. Below the arrows, dates are written in a light grey font, slanted upwards. Under each date, a white text box contains a description of an event.

- 2001**: The United Nations continues to increase sanctions against Afghanistan, while the Taliban step up their imposed fundamentalist laws.
- 9/11**: Attacks against World Trade Center and Pentagon in the US.
- 10/01**: The US blames bin Laden for the attacks, and demand the Taliban hand him over. The Taliban initially refuses, asking for evidence. The United States and Britain respond with massive air strikes and invade.
- 12/01**: The Taliban is routed from Afghanistan. The US files in Hamid Karzai, an Afghan exile, to form an interim government.
- 2004**: A new constitution is adopted declaring the 'Islamic Republic of Afghanistan'. Later this year presidential elections are held, which Karzai wins, despite clear evidence of fraud.

Myths of Canadian Peacekeeping

THE truth about Canadian peacekeeping has been distorted, lied about and covered-up for many reasons. Since the reality about these missions has been often so distorted, Canadians are led to believe that Canada is a peaceful country that has done no harm in the world. Canada's real role in peacekeeping has been that of securing strategic areas for its imperialist allies and securing its own economic or political interests.

The United Nations (UN) states that the purpose of peacekeeping is to create conditions for finding solutions rather than creating those solutions for the people or region at hand. It is widely thought of as an international effort involving an operational force to promote the ending of armed conflict or the resolution of long-standing disputes. But why then have certain areas of the world been concentrated on for peacekeeping, while others have been completely forgotten? Why has the Canadian Forces been subject to cover-ups over its operations during the 1990s? Why are places like Afghanistan (the subject of the articles in this document) no better off than they were before Canada's forces entered its borders?

This document will detail many different peacekeeping missions as well as Canada's Joint Task Force II. This is of course, not a complete history of Canadian peacekeeping but it is focused on the missions many will call the 'great milestones in Canadian history', as well as those missions many would like to forget.

UNEF & the Suez Canal

Although before 1956 there had been some peacekeeping observation missions, the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) in

Egypt is said to be the first true peacekeeping mission, and the mission that gave peacekeeping its name.

The Suez Canal separates Egypt's mainland from the Sinai peninsula and the Sinai separates the Canal from Israel. This canal is historically important for maintaining control of Africa and India. It is extremely important for transporting goods and oil through from Asia and Africa to the West. This is why when Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal Company, Britain and France objected.

By nationalizing the company, Egypt had complete control over what went through the canal, so the Europeans could no longer decide when and what they could transport through it. This pitted Egypt against Britain, France and Israel who used the Suez Canal for transport and trade. Shortly after the canal's nationalization, Israel, France, and the UK invaded Egypt. Soon after, the Anglo-French force's

'Canada's real role in peacekeeping has been that of securing strategic areas for its imperialist allies and securing its own economic or political interests.'

refusal to leave raised tensions with other NATO countries.

The US opposed the Anglo-French action, partly because they felt it could weaken their own influence in the Middle East – and this raised fears of a split within NATO. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union offered to help Egypt. Because of this, the then Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lester B. Pearson, feared that the West would lose its Cold War advantage. Pearson suggested a 'legitimate' UN force be placed in Egypt.

The fighting stopped in November 1956 when UNEF secured

the area. In April, the Canal was reopened. UNEF's goals had been met in Egypt. This mission cleared the English and French from the ensuing problems in the region and the Soviets withdrew their threats. UNEF solved the 'Soviet Union against NATO' crisis in that strategic area of the world and allowed the US, Britain, and France to stay allies. The mission also secured the area for one of the West's primary trade and transport routes.

The Congo

The Congo was an uncontrolled territory that held many valuable resources, including diamonds, copper, cobalt and uranium. It was colonized and occupied by Belgium over a century ago for these reasons. During the Cold War, intrigue into the Congo grew as the US thought the Soviets would steal the area for its uranium and as the Congolese people fought for their independence from Europe.

Canada itself was interested in the Congo for hydroelectric projects that could be used for uranium separation. Canada, by the end of the 1950s, was already supplying the US with at least 50% of its nuclear material for bombs, and the Congo was supplying it with another portion.

Following World War Two, a wave of national-liberation movements swept Africa. The Soviet Union tried to pull newly liberated countries into their sphere of influence in order to gain more strategic areas than the US during the Cold War. There was also a fear that Belgian bases in Africa could work against NATO if they got into the wrong (Soviet) hands.

The Congolese won their independence from Belgium in 1960. However, NATO needed to make sure that the Congo would eventually be a

neutral country that would respect the West's interests in the region. A UN peacekeeping force was called in. However, the UN force was not warmly welcomed; many peacekeepers were beaten and tortured.

This mission was formally a UN mission. However, it helped secure this area of Africa for NATO countries by denying the Soviet Union access. The

support a cease-fire but this effort was inadequate.

This conflict became a problem of NATO's because it put two NATO countries, Turkey and Greece, against each other. A UN force called UNIFCYP was initially to stay in Cyprus for only three months, yet a small force stayed all the way through the 1980s.

The 1990s

The armed conflict that erupted in the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s provided the pretext for varying interventions. Between 1992 and 2004 more than 40 000 Canadians served in Bosnia-Herzegovina (a region of the former Yugoslavia) alone, not counting deployment in Croatia or its air deployment in the Kosovo campaign.

In 1999 actions in the region took a new leap as NATO unleashed an air war against Serbia. This was ostensibly to protect civilians in the Serbian province of Kosovo who were being oppressed by Serbia – but had much more to do with NATO flexing its muscles against an uncooperative Serbia. For this campaign, Canada sent 125 air personnel to a base in Italy in support of NATO. NATO attacked all sorts of infrastructure in Serbia, including bridges, a hospital and a television station. Over 1000 civilians were killed by the NATO bombing.

European forces took over Balkan operations in 2004. All but a few of Canada's 650 troops stationed there were withdrawn. Only a couple months earlier in August Canada had sent 450 troops leading to support the coup against Jean-Bertrand Aristide in Haiti – reflecting a shift in the division of imperialist responsibilities in the post Cold War world.

One of the most controversial deployments of Canadian troops was to Somalia in 1992 - one billed as a humanitarian relief mission.

Locals did not welcome the deployment. It had become common for youth to sneak onto the Canadian base in Somalia to steal food. The Canadian Airborne Regiment, an elite unit, had been afflicted by several problems prior to Somalia. It had discipline problems – and known KKK sympathizers were not removed from the unit.

On March 4, 1993, Canadian troops from the Airborne Regiment, lured, captured, and tortured two Somali youth. One was killed and the other was injured. Only twelve days later another Somali youth, Shidane Arone, was caught and then killed, only after being tortured for hours in the camp. There



Nato Bombs over Serbia, 1999

mission, probably not coincidentally, was unable or unwilling to prevent the murder of the Congo's first Prime Minister and independence leader, Patrice Lumumba. It is one example of the lengths Canada went during the Cold War to secure a strategic area for its allies, while promoting its interests in the uranium industry.

Cyprus

Cyprus is an island strategically placed between Europe and the Middle East. It is just south of Turkey and west of Syria. 79% of the population of Cyprus is of Greek ancestry, while 18% is of Turkish origin. The island became a British colony in 1925.

In the mid 1950s some Greek Cypriots wanted to join as a country with Greece, a movement called *enosis*, while the Turkish Cypriots disagreed with this. There was an agreement on the island to create a republic in 1959, but more violence continued after that. The British, Turkish and Greeks tried to

Canadian interest in Cyprus is similar to that of the Suez Canal and of the Congo. The Soviet Union had 700 missiles pointed at NATO countries, so there were plans to use Cyprus as a missile base to counter this threat. In order to protect oil interests outside NATO, Canberra bombers were placed on the island. Cyprus was basically used as a base for NATO countries. When Iraq threatened to invade Kuwait in 1961, rapid deployment of troops from Cyprus quickly stopped a crisis that could have led to a threatened oil supply for the West.

If there were a crisis on the island of Cyprus it could have seriously disrupted NATO's communications and ability to defend itself – as 11 nuclear storage and communications facilities had been placed in both Greece and Turkey.

The 1990s were a busy time for the Canadian Forces, beginning with their participation in the attack on Iraq in 1991 during the First Gulf War.

are conflicting accounts of why the boy's murder was allowed, but the killers and those who had been involved in the torture claim the military brass had given them *carte blanche*. The murders shocked the Canadian public, and humiliated the government.

The Airborne Regiment was disbanded in early 1995 after months of public outrage and international shaming of Canadian Forces due to the murder, torture, and cover-up scandals, which seemed to continue unabated. However, this disbanded regiment was not totally destroyed, but was absorbed by a new up and coming combat unit of the Canadian Forces: Joint Task Force 2 (JTF2).

The JTF2

JTF2, created in April 1993, is a source of pride for the Canadian bourgeoisie, who can respond rapidly anywhere in the world to a diverse range of "crises", stamping out little fires before they become big.

JTF2 is the Canadian Forces' elite unit of commandos. Its members are picked for their aggressiveness and are trained for counter-"terrorism" and counter-insurgency.

JTF2 is the "secret" arm of the Canadian ruling classes. They have been found all over the world: Haiti, Afghanistan, Rwanda, Congo, and even in deployments against aboriginals in BC and Quebec. The Ottawa Citizen broke the story of JTF2 working clandestinely in the former Yugoslavia, something the UN did not even know about. The unit's secretive nature means that it can engage various crises often before Parliament, much less the public, can become aware of it or organize opposition.

But as the unit's purpose explains, its use is permitted to defend the "national interest." By bypassing some sections of the government, JTF2 is an added security for the Canadian bourgeoisie in times of crisis, where things must often be done outside of national and international legality.

In 1993, a quarter of the Canadian military was at "full readiness" surrounding the First Nations Reserves of Akwasasne, Kanesatake, and Kahnawake, near Montreal and Cornwall. With 800 police and thousands of troops, the government aimed to "restore law and order" and end what they called the "smuggling," of cigarettes by aboriginals across the St. Lawrence River, even though natives had for centuries traded this way.

The Canadian government wanted to set an example to the rest of First Nations who would dare resist the Reserve system which keeps them in poverty. The massive confrontation, however, was called off when the element of surprise had been lost when the massive build up of forces around the Reserves became known – as well as the fact that Native Warriors were prepared to fight the invasion, and that the result would have been a bloodbath politicians gauged the public to be in no mood for.

On September 11th, 1995, JTF2 was called to Gustafsen Lake where police were laying siege to a native

encampment. JTF2 "officially" never accepted the request. The 1990s were host to an increasing amount of countrywide native protests. But police who were there confirmed JTF2 was conducting reconnaissance in preparation for an invasion (Pugliese). Regardless, the police and army fired thousands of rounds at the natives, but could not invade the territory at that particular time.

JTF2 also carried out bombing practice near the city of Anjou, Quebec, as the referendum on Quebec sovereignty in 1995 neared. Quebec Premier Jacques Parizeau condemned the unannounced bombing and helicopter raids as creating a "climate of crisis" on the eve the referendum.

Elite Canadian troops were also used to train counter-insurgency forces in Peru and Nepal. Several Royal Nepalese Army officers were brought to Halifax in the mid-1990s for training to suppress the Maoist-led revolution in the countryside.

Canada's Counter Terrorism and Special Operations branch (CTSO), with former JTF2 officers, also went to Nepal to contribute intelligence and know-how to Nepalese armed units. These units (both Royal Army, police and Armed Police Force) have been responsible for wanton human rights violations in Nepal, including mass killings, disappearances, torture, and rape.

In Peru, JTF2 was used in a diversionary tactic in a daring hostage situation on Lima.

The situation unfolded when the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement had captured the residence of the Japanese Ambassador where 380 guests of Peru's ruling elite were dining. Peru's own commando force ended the standoff with a 140-member assault team, where all the hostage takers were reportedly killed, along with one captive who had a heart attack, and two commandos. JTF2, although not officially the executing force, "considered their mission a success" in Lima.

The world imperialist economic system under which we all live necessitates that the countries on the

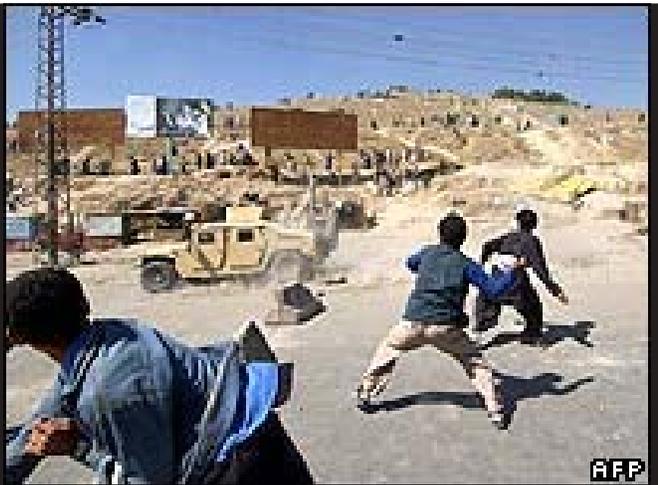


The torture and murder of Shidane Arone

receiving end of the benefits of this system (including countries like Canada) must act to maintain and extend their dominance. This means seizing markets, resource-rich areas, eliminating threats, punishing rivals, among other measures. Canadian foreign policy, including its peacekeeping roles, only makes sense when viewed in this context.

Every instance in which Canadian forces have been deployed overseas demonstrates this rule: the Canadian military acts to defend the dominant political and economic relations from which the Canadian ruling class benefits: namely, imperialist and capitalist relations – the same relations which dictate that life is a living hell for billions of people on the planet. Canada acts to further the dominance and expansion of international capitalism, both to benefit interests within Canada specifically, and to aid those of the US and other imperialists generally when these interests complement Canada's needs. An invasion or intervention doesn't necessarily mean direct profit for Canada's imperialists, but it does maintain their good standing in a fraternity of thieves. <

Afghan youth throwing stones at US troops. Even the CBC has now reported that this is a common response from people towards Canadian troops whenever they leave their base.



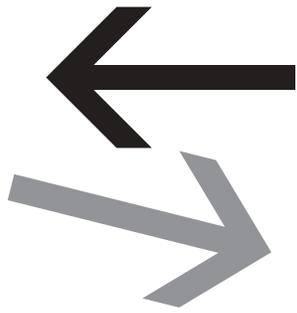
Homeless mother and children begging in Kabul.

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From Taliban to 'Islamic Republic'

THE Taliban, one of the main enemies faced by NATO today in Afghanistan, emerged as a political force in that country during the early 1990s. The word "Taliban" is derived from Arabic meaning "seeker" – a name which reflects the group's origins in the fundamentalist religious schools in neighboring Pakistan.

The Taliban rose to power between 1993 and 1994. Afghanistan at this time was in chaos, as no one force had been able to bring stable rule to the country following the withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1989. With the aid of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and with Saudi Arabian financial backing, the Taliban quickly emerged as a major force within the country. With Mohammed Omar as leader, the Taliban seized Kabul, Afghanistan's capital, in 1996.

As their grip on the country was extended, the Taliban began enacting a series of Islamic religious laws. As a result, women were not permitted to attend school with men, which marginalized the type of education they could receive.

The only jobs open to women were in the field of medicine. If they became nurses or doctors they were only allowed female patients. They were prohibited from leaving the house unless they were covered from head to toe. Men had to grow beards, and adhere to traditional Islamic dress. Theatres were shut down, music was no longer heard and television was unavailable. Crimes resulted in death-by-beheading, including the 'crime' of adultery (where a woman who was raped could be executed for having sex out of wedlock!).

With such measures, the Taliban quickly began to lose the

support of the people of Afghanistan, and eroded much of the goodwill they had with the people for bringing some elements of stability to the country. In Particular, Afghanistan's non-Pashtun peoples, its minority nationalities (which actually make up 60% of the population), came to despise the Taliban for the severe oppression and discrimination unleashed against them.

It was also during this time that the Taliban gave refuge to the then-obscure Islamic militant group *Al Qaeda*. This would prove to be consequential. Following the September 11th attacks, the US moved quickly to lash out at the suspected culprits and to unleash its still-raging 'war on terror.' First on their hit-list was Afghanistan, the hiding place of *Al Qaeda*, whom they blamed for September 11th. While the Taliban initially asked for the US to produce evidence of *Al Qaeda's* guilt before they handed them over to the US, it soon became clear that the US sought larger

objectives, namely taking over the whole country, and therefore refused to take 'yes' for an answer. Instead, the US launched a massive bombing campaign and invaded Afghanistan to oust the Taliban.

Allying itself with the fundamentalist warlords of the 'Northern Alliance', the US's overwhelming firepower quickly routed the Taliban, and the US and its local allies were able to seize Afghanistan's key cities and pave the way for the creation of a pro-US puppet government.

To further this end, the Bonn Conference was held 27 November 2001. Its aim was to create a presidency, create a new parliament, and form a national army. Hamid Karzai, a former Taliban supporter living in exile, was chosen as the interim president. It's worth remembering this when Karzai occasionally makes the rather absurd claim that foreign forces are in Afghanistan at his request, when in

Result of NATO bombing, Kapisa province, Northern Afghanistan.



reality, he was (literally!) brought to Afghanistan by the US. Further, Karzai has no real power in Afghanistan. NATO and the US decide Afghanistan's foreign and domestic policies, not Karzai or the Afghan parliament. He is best seen as a puppet reciting the odd pre-written speech and posing for a picture here and there. Such was his role when he visited Canada hailing the occupation.

A key question many people are asking is whether or not the new government is an improvement over the Taliban. Unfortunately for the people of Afghanistan, it is not. Keep in mind the new government, like the Taliban – aside from being staffed by war criminals from the country's decades-long civil wars – is made of Islamic fundamentalists. After all, the country was re-named 'The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan' to reflect this.

Security for Afghans is worse than under the Taliban's rule. For example, women face a higher risk of being raped. Citizens can only get around safely by means of convoys. The continual bombing and shootings by the occupation are targeting mainly civilians. In 2006 alone 1,500 civilians were killed by NATO bombings. Much of the rebuilding of the country is done to benefit the occupiers. A good example of this is the road Canadian troops are constructing near Kandahar, a road whose main purpose is to facilitate military action against the Taliban. Moreover, most 'aid' to Afghanistan is military aid, and whatever small amounts are being used for reconstruction have not even come close to repairing the damage done by the aforementioned US bombing campaign in late 2001. While there has been some economic growth, this has mainly benefited foreign businesses, like the pre-paid phone card companies, not the Afghan masses. Unemployment is rampant, as is homelessness. Economic problems have many consequences. Even in Kabul, beggars are a frequent sight. Peasants face incredible debt-loads to local landlords and moneylenders,

which, combined with feudal social relations left untouched by the new government – whose existence actually serves to protect feudal elements in the countryside – has led to such miseries as parents selling their children to pay off debts. Predictably, these hardships have forced many women into prostitution, and have driven peasants to cultivate profitable opium – with consequences for the masses of people outside Afghanistan

The situation of women has not improved. Women are now able to work outside of nursing but only if they are offered a job. Schooling is available at the cost of risking rape and murder. Islamic law is being enforced. An example was when, in April 2005, a woman was stoned to death in Badakhshan by order of a local court after being found guilty of adultery. It's so terrible and desperate that some women have resorted to burning themselves alive.

Considering the situation, it's no wonder that the occupation is deeply unpopular. Resistance to NATO and the US appears to be growing, and not just from the Taliban. Anti-occupation demonstrations have been reported in most major Afghan cities. Sometimes demonstrators have paid for their resistance with their lives after being shot by government or occupation troops.

To truly stand with the people of Afghanistan now means opposing all of their major enemies: the Taliban, the 'Islamic republic of Afghanistan' and of course, the foreign occupiers, Canada included, who keep the Afghan government in power. <



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