

The U.S. war in Afghanistan

QUESTION: Is the U.S. bombing campaign directed against "terrorists" or the people of Afghanistan?

ANSWER: A terrible crime was committed against innocent civilians on September 11. But this is a war against the people of Afghanistan. The U.S. and Britain are dropping thousands of bombs and firing missiles on homes, schools, mosques, hospitals and villages throughout the country.

Thousands of 5,000-pound and 1,000-pound bombs are deliberately targeting every major town and rural area. AC-130 planes filled with 70,000 pounds of ammunition are firing huge Gatling-guns on the population in a steady stream of bullets.

When Wazir Akbarhan hospital in Kabul was bombed on the first day of the U.S. bombing, 13 women were killed in the gynecology department. Some 200 people were killed in a hospital in Herat. Red Cross facilities have been bombed twice.

Cluster bombs—one of the most terrifying and deadly of the U.S. weapons—are now being used as bombing intensifies. Cluster bombs are prohibited by international law because of their highly destructive nature against humans and other living things. Hundreds of small bomblets packed with razor shrapnel are dispersed at high velocity over a wide area, ripping into people with devastating damage.

The Sydney Morning Herald quotes Dan Kelly, head of UN mine clearing in Afghanistan, as saying, "These bomblets can explode if the villagers so much as touch them. It is a very violent death. You don't get arms and legs blown off like you do with anti-personnel mines, you get killed." Another proof that civilians are targeted is the U.S. method of repeat bombing to kill rescuers as well. In Jalalabad, the Sultanpur mosque was bombed during prayer. As neighbors dug out the 17 victims who were trapped, the plane returned to bomb minutes later, killing 120 people.

Cluster bombs, depleted-uranium ammunition, 5,000-pound bombs, fuel-air explosives: this is the terror being unleashed by the biggest military power in the world against one of the poorest and most underdeveloped countries in existence.

QUESTION: What is the current state of the Afghan people?

ANSWER: The average life expectancy in Afghanistan is 43 years. Per capita income is \$180 per year. Only 13 percent of the population has access to drinking water. Barely 12 percent of the population has sanitation coverage. Literacy is about 20 percent. The infant-mortality rate is a shocking 247 deaths per 1,000 live births. On average, 16,000 mothers die in childbirth every year, one out of every 17 births, the second worst maternal mortality rate in the world.

It's not just the bombs that are killing people. The dislocation and chaos of the war itself means huge numbers of Afghan people will die from hunger, cold and disease. According to UNICEF officials, more than 100,000 Afghan children will likely die from war-related causes by the end of winter.

QUESTION: Isn't the war in Afghanistan a defensive reaction to the Sept. 11 attacks?

ANSWER: After Sept. 11, the U.S. immediately targeted all of Afghanistan and added to its "enemies" list any country or organization that didn't fully support the U.S. government on terrorism. Afghanistan agreed to negotiate but asked for proof of the culpability of Osama bin Laden in the September 11 attack. The Bush administration responded that they wouldn't negotiate and they refused to provide the evidence. Is it really because the U.S. wanted to combat terrorism? Or is it because the U.S. has made a calculated decision to use the terrible Sept. 11 attack as justification for a Pentagon move to expand its domination in the Middle East and South/Central Asia?

The real motive for the 1991 U.S. war on Iraq and continued sanctions against the Iraqi people is to maintain full control of the Persian/Arabian Gulf oil. Two-thirds of the world's known oil reserves lie in that region. The U.S. Gulf War allowed the Pentagon to establish numerous military bases in Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and elsewhere.

What is less known is the vast interests of U.S. oil, banking and military corporations in South and Central Asia as the next strategic region for oil and natural gas exploitation.

The Caspian Region—made up of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan—has a potential value in oil and natural gas of more than \$5 trillion. These former Soviet states share a border with Afghanistan, and are precisely the countries where the U.S. military has now established bases and troops. The U.S. militarization of the region began before September 11; now it is going full-scale ahead.

A Unocal Oil Corp. spokesperson, Vice President John J. Maresca, testified to the House of Representatives Committee on International Relations on February 12, 1998. He said, "the Caspian region contains tremendous untapped hydrocarbon reserves ... proven natural gas reserves ... equal more than 236 trillion cubic feet. ... [oil reserves] estimates are as high as 200 billion barrels."

The May 1998 issue of Time magazine reported that the CIA "set up a secret task force to monitor the region's politics and gauge its wealth. Covert CIA officers, some well-trained petroleum engineers, had traveled through southern Russia and the Caspian region to sniff out potential oil reserves. When the policy makers heard the CIA report, [then Secretary of State] Madeleine Albright concluded that 'working to mold the area's future is one of the most exciting things we can do.'" (Time magazine, May 1998).

The Pentagon has been seeking to pull the region's governments into a military alliance connected to NATO's so-called "Partnership for Peace." These former states of the Soviet Union have become open to unbridled exploitation for their oil and gas resources by firms whose directors are ex-U.S. military and political leaders. Former Reagan, Bush and Clinton advisers Gen. Brent Scowcroft and Zbigniew Brzezinski, former White House Chief of Staff John N. Sununu; former Defense Secretary Richard

Cheney, Secretary of State James Baker, former Clinton treasury secretary Lloyd Bentsen, all have become oil and gas company executives involved in the Caspian Region. (Washington Post, July 6, 1997)

QUESTION: Isn't the U.S. trying to stabilize the region by eliminating a "network of terrorists"?

ANSWER: This is the most dangerous myth of all. More war, bombing and assassinations will only create more violence, death and economic crisis. The only way to stop terrorism is to stop the oppression that the U.S. has been largely responsible for in the region.

Using the brush of "fighting terrorism," the U.S. government wants to brand all causes for justice as terrorist, and crush resistance to corporate and military globalization. The U.S. wants sweeping powers and rationalization to go after all the peoples of the world who have waged determined struggles against U.S., British and Israeli occupation of the Middle East and elsewhere.

No one denies the terrible crime against innocent civilians on September 11. But the death of thousands in New York must not be used to justify what the United States is doing in Afghanistan and to hide what it has done and continues to do to the Iraqi and Palestinian people.

There is enormous anger in the Middle East that some 8,000 to 12,000 people—5,000 of them children under five—die in Iraq every month as a direct result of U.S. sanctions. This has gone on for 11 years. This crime of genocide has been hidden from the U.S. people but it is well known among the people of the Middle East.

Over 800 Palestinians have been killed and 16,000 seriously wounded since the second Intifada began in September 2000. Their homes are bulldozed as they try to defend themselves against the brutal and long-standing Israeli occupation of their land. Every bullet, every helicopter, every F-15 and F-16 comes from the United States. Every year, the U.S. continues to fund Israel by \$4 billion. This is unabashed terrorism, and more and more people in the world are calling for an end to U.S.-Israeli oppression of the Palestinian people.

QUESTION: Why does the anti-war movement say that there is also a war at home?

ANSWER: Thousands of Arab people, South Asian people and Muslims have been violently attacked inside the United States. Homes, mosques and stores have been defaced. People of Arab and South Asian descent have been put off airplanes. Main media outlets, like the Wall Street Journal, have called for legitimizing racial profiling. This is racism pure and simple. After Timothy McVeigh blew up the Oklahoma City Federal building in 1995, killing 168 people, there was no campaign to take white males off of airplanes because people felt "uncomfortable" in their presence. White men were not rounded up and held without charges. Since September 11, however, more than 1,000 people, mostly of Middle East origin, have been detained, many since Sept. 11 and many without charges.

Under the rubric of anti-terrorism, ultra-racist Attorney General John Ashcroft has pushed through the so-called anti-terrorism USA Patriots Bill. Only Senator Russell D. Feingold, Democrat of Wisconsin, voted against this bill in the Senate, arguing that it allows unconstitutional searches and punishes individuals for

vaguely defined associations with "possible terrorists." This bill legalizes racial profiling, eliminates due process for arrested people, allows the government to vastly expand the definition of terrorist to potentially include millions of people who might want to protest U.S. government policy, and allows the government to detain immigrants without charges. In addition, it eliminates basic privacy rights, allowing the government to have nearly limitless authority to carry out electronic surveillance and wire taps of anyone it deems "suspicious."

QUESTION: Is it true that the U.S. is considering legalizing the torture of suspects in detention?

ANSWER: Shocking, but true. The FBI and the Justice Department under John Ashcroft are considering using torture as an approved policy of the United States against those in detention who assert their legal rights to remain silent. According to the Washington Post, the U.S. government is discussing using "pressure tactics, such as those employed occasionally by Israeli interrogators to extract information." (See www.justiceonline.org for more information.) Israeli-style pressure tactics is just a euphemism for torture.

According to a 1998 report by B'Tselem, an Israeli-based human rights organization, interrogation tactics include a combination of sleep deprivation, isolation, psychological torment and direct physical force, including beatings, violent shaking, painful shackling and use of objects designed or used to inflict extreme pain. Interrogations routinely span months, with constant intermittent periods of interrogation and force lasting for days without interruption.

QUESTION: Is the Pentagon censoring the news?

ANSWER: Almost all of the war coverage by the mass media contains only the information the Pentagon wants you to know. The Pentagon is well aware that during the Vietnam War when the people learned the truth about the war and that the government was lying (1970 Pentagon Papers, etc.), people turned against the war. The U.S. government's National Mapping and Imaging Agency has signed a contract giving it exclusive control over all satellite imaging of the war in Afghanistan. They bought the commercial rights to all satellites on October 7, the day the bombing of Afghanistan began.

QUESTION: If Bush's bombing war is not the answer, what is the answer?

ANSWER: The people of the region perceive the U.S. as an occupying, colonial-type force. The tens of thousands of U.S. troops that occupy Saudi Arabia and the Persian Arabian Gulf should be removed. The U.S. must immediately end the economic sanctions on Iraq. It must stop funding Israel \$4 billion a year to occupy Palestine. Instead of destroying pharmaceutical factories, like the Al Shifa factory in Sudan that it destroyed with 17 cruise missiles in 1998, the U.S. should lift its economic sanctions against Sudan and the other countries of the region. If there is to be peace, the people of Palestine and the people who suffer U.S. military occupation in the region must enjoy genuine self-determination and justice.

International Action Center

National Office: 39 W. 14 St. #206, NY, NY 10011 • 212 633-6646 • www.iacenter.org • iacenter@action-mail.org
Washington DC Office: 1247 E St. SE Washington DC 20003 • 202 543-2777 • iacenterdc@yahoo.com