

Is Canada Fighting an Imperialist War in Afghanistan?

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Recently a small group of professors at the University of Regina suggested that Canada's involvement in Afghanistan was an act of imperialism and should not be glorified. The professors were vigorously attacked by Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall, a number of Conservative Members of Parliament, and a long list of editorial writers, columnists and directors of news in the mainstream Canadian media.

On this subject, a new group of scholars argues that the United States is a major imperial power, dominating the world, and this is a good thing. These would include Antonia Negri, Michael Hardt, Deepak Lal and Naill Ferguson. Canadian Liberal leader, Michael Ignatieff, is often seen as part of this group. Samuel P. Huntington, the eminent U.S. scholar, writes that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are part of the "war of civilizations" between Christianity and Islam, and there is no question who we should support.

The American empire

Chalmers Johnson reminds us that the United States is much more than just a major military power. It has 735 known bases in 38 countries, five Central Commands which cover the world, 12 aircraft carrier strike groups, a fleet of strategic bombers which strike anywhere in the world, an arsenal of nuclear missiles and 1.5 million active military personnel. The official U.S. policy of Full Spectrum Dominance includes military devices in space, the ability to carry out surveillance of entire populations, monitoring everyone's telephone calls, faxes, emails, internet communications, telegrams, cell phones and the books you take out at the local library. There are also a good number of secret bases around the world used for holding "suspects" indefinitely and subjecting them to "aggressive interrogation." The most important one is at Bagram Air Force Base near Kabul.

The world is the U.S. sphere of influence. President Barrack Obama has intervened in Pakistan, Honduras, Haiti, Columbia, Yemen and Somalia, greatly increased the number of U.S. military personnel in Afghanistan, and has produced the largest military budget in history.

The U.S. Petroleum Institute and the Anglo and American oil corporations strongly supported the war on Iraq as Saddam Hussein was cutting them out of the second largest oil resource in the world. They also supported the war in Afghanistan, a necessary part of gaining control over the oil and gas resources around the Caspian Sea. This has been the official U.S. geopolitical strategy in Central Asia since the declaration of the Carter Doctrine in January 1980.

What is imperialism? Imperialism has been around at least since 2500 B.C. It has always been the imposition of the rule or authority of a more powerful country or state over a weaker one. It takes the form of the domination of another country's political, economic, religious and cultural systems. It is the denial of a weaker country's right to democracy and self determination.

Regime change and creating a puppet government

On October 7, 2001 the U.S. government launched a massive air and missile attack on Afghanistan. The U.S. allies on the ground were the Northern Alliance warlords, the remnants of the horrendous Islamist government (1992 to 1996) that had been driven out of Kabul by the Taliban. With the U.S. bombing, it was not long before the Taliban fled and the Northern Alliance forces captured Kabul. U.S. and NATO forces arrived on the ground and they are still occupying the country after nine years. Michael Ignatieff has referred to the U.S. invasion as "necessary imperialism."

How did the U.S. government and its NATO allies create the present puppet government? On November 27, 2001 the United States brought together a group of Afghans at Bonn, Germany to create an interim government. Five new broad-based Afghan democratic political parties and alliances asked to be represented at this conference, but the U.S. government said no. The representatives chosen were mainly from the Islamist Northern Alliance.

When it came time to select an interim leader, the "representatives" voted for Abdul Satar Sirat of the Rome group which wanted the restoration of the constitutional monarchy established in 1964. Hamid Karzai received no votes. But the U.S. government made it clear that Karzai had to be their choice. The interim government established by this process was mainly composed of Islamist war lords.

An Emergency Loya Jirga (or Grand Council) was held in June 2002. Around 1500 delegates were selected, although the new democratic parties were almost completely excluded. Nevertheless, 900 delegates signed a petition calling for the restoration of the constitutional monarchy. The U.S. government, Hamid Karzai and the Northern Alliance warlords rejected this demand.

The U.S. government made it clear that they were not going to allow the Afghans to reinstate their liberal democratic Constitution of 1964. They insisted on a new constitution with a very strong, centralized presidential system. They rejected the creation of a federal state. Canadian officials supported and assisted the U.S. government in this process. The Afghan people had no role in drafting the new constitution. There was no public debate on the draft, which was kept secret.

A Constitutional Loya Jirga was convened in December 2003. The 500 delegates were carefully selected by the political allies of the U.S. government. Nevertheless, there was strong opposition to the proposed constitution. At one point 48% of the delegates walked out in protest. No vote was taken, yet interim president Hamid Karzai declared that the constitution was adopted "unanimously."

Backing the narco warlords

The new constitution allows for the formation of political parties. Around 80 have registered,

and 50 are considered to be strongly committed to democracy. Yet the U.S. government and President Karzai have refused to allow them to participate in any election. They prefer the present system, where warlords, drug lords and radical Islamists control the legislature and hold prominent positions in the Karzai government, beginning with the two Vice Presidents. It is no surprise that at least 65% of eligible voters refused to participate in the last presidential election.

Afghanistan is a very poor country and it has not yet developed a capitalist class. Therefore, past governments followed the model created by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in Turkey, which relied on the state for important and necessary developments. The U.S. government and its NATO allies, especially Canada, have rejected this Afghan model and imposed a free market free trade model of development, emphasizing foreign ownership and control, especial in the resource area.

Today US/NATO forces continue to expand the war, killing thousands of innocent Afghan men, women and children. Canadian troops specialize in the night raids in towns and villages, kicking in the doors of people's homes, assaulting and arresting "suspects." All recent polls indicate that the Afghans strongly want a negotiated end to the war. Who stands in their way?

The U.S. and Canadian governments, and their NATO allies, have imposed on the people of Afghanistan a corrupt and detested government. Many Canadians are fully behind this project, just as many Canadians strongly supported British imperialism and colonialism. But other Canadians are not at all proud of the role of their government and military in this poor country. The latest Ekos Research poll shows 34% of Canadians support the mission in Afghanistan and 49% oppose.

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