

Behind the US War in Afghanistan

**Dave Holmes
& Norm Dixon**

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Socialists Condemn Terrorist Outrage

Statement by the Democratic Socialist Party

Socialists unequivocally condemn the September 11 terror bombings in the United States. The killing of thousands of ordinary working people is absolutely criminal and has nothing whatsoever to do with the struggle for a better world. Indeed, this atrocity will undoubtedly make this struggle more difficult and aid the forces of capitalist reaction.

Popular struggles throughout history have often involved the killing of oppressors, tyrants, police torturers and the like. Such actions may or may not be politically expedient. But the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon was of a fundamentally different kind. It was a deliberate act of mass murder. The perpetrators made no political demands, they had no goal except to kill indiscriminately and inflict pain, suffering and devastation. It showed an astonishing callousness and brutality. Our sympathy and solidarity are completely with the innocent victims of these terrorist acts, not with their perpetrators.

Hypocrisy

But our solidarity with the victims should not blind us to the absolutely breathtaking hypocrisy of George W. Bush, Tony Blair, Ariel Sharon and other imperialist spokespeople and their lackeys in the always-accommodating capitalist media. The outrage in the US may be described as the greatest act of terror of all time only with severe reservations. While it is certainly the greatest act of non-state terror, many acts of governmental terror have far surpassed it.

At the end of World War II, for example, the US leaders cold-bloodedly carried out the nuclear annihilation of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki solely to

demonstrate their power and intimidate the Soviet Union; several hundred thousand men, women and children were killed to make this point.

During the long Cold War with the USSR, Washington propped up scores of blood-soaked Third World dictatorships, helped them torture and murder their opponents with impunity and helped cover up their crimes. In 1965, for instance, the US helped aspiring Indonesian dictator Suharto organise a pogrom against the left and progressive forces which massacred at least one million people. The long US intervention in Vietnam against the liberation forces there killed and maimed millions of people and inflicted massive material devastation on the country.

Saddam Hussein's murderous regime was another US client, being particularly favoured during the Iran-Iraq war of the early 1980s. Then the wheel turned and, for various reasons, he became a liability. Since the Gulf War, US- and British-backed sanctions against Iraq have led to the deaths of more than a million Iraqis through starvation and disease and politically strengthened Saddam's hold on power.

Afghanistan's brutal Islamic fundamentalist Taliban regime is a product of the US-backed war of the reactionary *mujaheddin* "freedom fighters" against the Soviet-backed secular, leftist People's Democratic Party government. This was also the origin of the Saudi Islamic fundamentalist Osama bin Laden, Washington's current world "public enemy number one" and suspected organiser of the US attacks.

Ever since the 1959 Cuban Revolution removed Cuba from the US sphere of influence, Washington has organised numerous — terrorist — attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro. Furthermore, the US has imposed a ruinous economic blockade on the island for over 40 years. And right now, the US authorities are resisting Cuban calls for them to extradite the CIA-linked counter-revolutionary terrorist responsible for the 1976 midair bomb-destruction of a Cuban airliner off Barbados in which 73 people died.

And then there is the misery and slow death to which the mass of the world's people have been condemned by Western capitalism's ruthless drive for profit, regardless of the costs to the planet and its people. Each year, for instance, millions of children in the Third World die of absolutely preventable diseases, victims of an implacable and merciless economic regime imposed on their countries by imperialism and its agencies such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation.

Who are the major "enemies of civilisation"? If Osama bin Laden is a terrorist we would have to conclude that he is a relatively minor one. If there was any justice in this world, Western capitalist leaders like George Bush senior, Bill Clinton, Tony Blair and Bush junior would be on trial for crimes against humanity. The Saddam Husseins,

Suhartos and bin Ladens would feature simply as their junior accomplices.

Roots of terrorism

It is still not clear who organised the terrorist operation in the US. But where would any terror organisation recruit people who were so embittered and without hope of the future that they could contemplate such a pointless atrocity and be willing to sacrifice themselves to implement it? The answer is no great mystery.

The massive misery which Western capitalism — led by the United States, the world's only superpower — has imposed on the majority of the world's people has created the seedbed for the very terrorism which its leaders so piously condemn. Oppression breeds hatred, desperation and despair. In such a climate, when the enemy seems so powerful, carrying out suicide bombings against the population of the oppressor country can seem to some like the only option.

In occupied Palestine, for instance, there is apparently no shortage of young men willing to sacrifice themselves as human bombs against the Israeli population. However, apart from being morally repugnant, such indiscriminate acts are a complete political dead-end. Each suicide bomber who carries out his mission in an Israeli town is actually weakening the Palestinian struggle and helping strengthen the hand of the Israeli regime and its US backers. Each bomb blast against the civilian population drives the Israeli masses towards Sharon and inhibits the development of any internal oppositional forces.

Throughout the history of the modern socialist movement, Marxists have carried out a fierce polemic against the political strategy of “individual terrorism” — that is, the killing of hated figures of an oppressive regime. Our objection to this kind of terrorism is not based on morality but on the grounds that it simply does not work. The ruling class can always replace individuals.

Furthermore and most importantly, employed as a strategy, such terrorist acts actually demobilise the mass movement. Only the struggle of the masses can change society. The combat of a small band of terrorist-avengers relegates the masses to the sidelines and makes them mere spectators of a contest between the terrorists and the regime, rather than participants in their own liberation.

However, the US attacks represent a completely different kind of terrorism: the wanton and indiscriminate killing of civilians is part of the methodology of imperialism and its accomplices, not of the progressive forces fighting for liberation from this inhuman system.

Reactionary agenda

The terror bombings will be used by Bush and the US ruling class to create a more favourable political climate in which to implement their reactionary agenda. This tragedy is a heaven-sent opportunity for them and they will take it with both hands. They will push forward their arms buildup and sabre-rattling foreign policy.

Under the guise of “fighting terrorism”, civil liberties will come under increased pressure at home, there will be a campaign for more cops and increased police powers, and the previously growing movement against the death penalty will operate in a much less favourable environment. The scandal of Bush’s stolen election and the rotten US electoral system will fade away in the glare of the patriotic spotlight.

Xenophobia will be strengthened; anti-Arab racism will become stronger and it will be harder to build a movement of solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Socialists oppose any “war on terrorism”. Military attacks by the US and its imperialist allies on the alleged terrorists and/or states that allegedly harbour them will not end acts of terrorism. To the contrary, such a war will only result in more loss of innocent lives, and deepen the nationalist hatred of Americans that has provided a recruiting ground for the organisers of terrorist acts of the World Trade Center type.

Socialists are struggling for a world that is free of violence, oppression and exploitation. This means struggling against imperialism and capitalism which is raping our planet and condemning the mass of its people to an increasingly miserable and desperate existence and replacing it with a socialist society. The only force which can accomplish this tremendous historic task is the working class and oppressed masses of the world. Terrorism has no part in this struggle; we are fighting against the system which breeds terror and which freely uses it to defend itself. ■

Who Is the Main ‘Enemy of Civilisation’?

By Dave Holmes

It has become a familiar scenario. A former political tool of the United States has fallen from favour and become an obstacle. Washington decides to take drastic action to assert its interests. But first, the public must be ideologically conditioned. Through a strident campaign in the mass media, the recalcitrant regime is painted in the blackest colours. A decade ago, the Gulf War required Iraq’s Saddam Hussein to be portrayed as an Arab Hitler; today, the terrorist Osama bin Laden is an “enemy of civilisation”, likewise Afghanistan’s Taliban regime which shelters him.

Of course, none of these are very nice people, as Washington should well know since it helped all of them to become what they are. In fact, it was precisely their utter ruthlessness in repressing popular democratic movements which made them useful to the US rulers.

For instance, in the 1960s, as Saddam Hussein embarked on his rise to power, the US provided him with crucial intelligence information in his brutal campaign to crush the large Iraqi Communist Party. In 1979 Washington was dealt a heavy blow when its client, the bloodstained Shah of Iran, was toppled by a massive popular, pro-democracy uprising. Not surprisingly, when Iraq fought a bloody war against the new Iran in the early 1980s, it received strong US support. Only long after these events did US policy-makers and the Western mass media discover that Saddam was the biggest thug in the whole world and a menace to international security.

But who is really the main “enemy of civilisation” — sundry Third World dictatorships and right-wing terrorists or the superpower which created and nourished them and used them to defend its global empire?

Imperialism

For Marxists, the answer is clear: the number one enemy of the human race — responsible for all its misery and threatening its very survival — is imperialist capitalism, in particular, US imperialism, the world's only superpower.

Human beings live on planet Earth, we have a particular ecosphere, and our current system of social organisation is capitalism, now in its imperialist stage. Without grasping this basic reality of our society, it is simply impossible to understand modern world politics — it determines everything.

While capitalism developed over centuries, the 19th century saw it embark on a truly stupendous growth (evoked nowhere so dramatically as by Marx and Engels in the 1848 *Communist Manifesto*). And at the end of the 1800s, it metamorphosed into a new stage: *laissez faire* capitalism gave way to monopoly capitalism — imperialism.

Becoming part of the problem

Every demonisation campaign undertaken by US imperialism has taken its toll as various prominent left-wingers have been taken in — or caved in — and have swung over to support US policy.

It happened in the lead-up to World War II when the 1939 Hitler-Stalin pact suddenly made identification with the Soviet Union (even with anti-Stalinist qualifications) extremely unpopular and a whole layer of adherents and fellow-travellers of both Stalinism and Trotskyism moved right and became supporters of US imperialism. In the late 1940s and '50s, the Cold War produced another crop of penitent leftist converts to the superiority of US imperialism.

During the 1990-91 Gulf War there was a similar phenomenon as prominent left figures like the British writer Fred Halliday moved right and became supporters of Washington's war against Iraq.

Today, the expatriate British writer Christopher Hitchens has disappointed many readers of his books and articles in the US *Nation* magazine by coming out in support of Washington against "Islamic fascism". He berates those left intellectuals — such as Noam Chomsky, Edward Herman, Edward Said and John Pilger — who argue that the primary roots of the September 11 bombings of the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon are to be found in the unjust world order defended by US foreign policy.

In a widely-circulated September 24 article on the *Nation* website ("Of Sin, the Left and Islamic Fascism"), Hitchens argues that, notwithstanding its past positions, "the [previous US] sponsorship of the Taliban could be redeemed by the demolition of its regime and the liberation of its victims" — that is, by Washington.

This is an utter fantasy: Bush and his advisers intend no such thing. While it is by no means excluded that the Taliban regime will still be there after the US offensive, it's more likely that a slightly sanitised version of the same regime will be installed, composed of

Instead of a relatively large number of small- and medium-sized firms, each branch of production came to be dominated by a handful of giant corporations: typically, the great bulk of output in each industry would be accounted for by one, two or three companies. Bank capital merged with industrial capital to create finance capital. Giant associations of capitalists — corporations and cartels — completely dominated the politics of the developed capitalist countries.

The new imperialist capitalism was aggressive from the start. The home market was too small for its operations; it quickly spread over the globe in its search for new markets, sources of raw materials, fields of investments and capital export (loans).

Colonialism received a tremendous impetus. Between 1876 and 1914, six European states grabbed 25 million square kilometres — an area two and a half times that of Europe! — and enslaved 523 million people. Africa, for instance, was largely carved up among the European powers in the late 1890s and early 1900s. From the colonies,

sundry drug-dealing warlords and “moderate” Taliban figures. The victims, especially the brutally oppressed and excluded female half of the population, are likely to be little better off.

Washington’s foreign policy is not about liberating the oppressed masses from tyranny; it’s about US “national interests”, that is, the interests of the US capitalist ruling class.

As an aside, it’s worth mentioning that the only regime which attempted to bring women into the mainstream of society by providing them with access to education and work was the previous Soviet-backed government of the Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan. It was precisely to destroy this government and its reforms that Washington armed and bankrolled the reactionary, brutal, women-hating, drug-dealing, Islamic-fundamentalist *mujaheddin* “freedom fighters”. Osama bin Laden was a key figure in this counter-revolutionary crusade.

If it’s anything more than a comforting epithet, Hitchen’s notion of “Islamic fascism” is profoundly misleading. Fascism arose in two of the most developed capitalist countries in Europe — Italy and Germany. It was a mass movement of the desperate middle classes, set in motion by big capital to crush powerful workers’ movements.

The Taliban are brutal and anti-democratic but to suggest that their ramshackle regime in a devastated Third World country is comparable to Mussolini’s or Hitler’s highly developed police states is absurd. The only function of such characterisations is to give political cover to the major enemy of the world’s people today, the US capitalist ruling class, by making it appear that there is something even worse.

But both Marxist theory and historical experience show that any “socialist” who departs from the position that the fundamental enemy of the human race since the end of the 19th century is imperialist capitalism, especially US imperialism, is in serious danger of becoming part of the problem and of being enlisted in Washington’s drive to defend its global empire.

— *Dave Holmes*

fabulous wealth flowed back to the ruling classes in the West.

Britain and France had the largest colonial empires. Germany was a more powerful but late arrival and lagged badly in the race for colonies. The only way it could acquire a world empire was to seize colonies from Britain or France. This reality led to World War I — the old empires strove to hang on to their stolen goods, which Germany fought to grab for itself. It was a war between robbers for control of the loot.

US imperialism erupted onto the world stage with the 1898 Spanish-American war; its easy victory over Spain gave the United States a number of first-class strategic assets. In the Caribbean, it annexed Puerto Rico; and, pushing aside the indigenous liberation forces, it established a harsh protectorate over Cuba. In the Pacific, Washington grabbed the Philippines — again pushing aside and then brutally crushing the native independence movement — and annexed Guam. Some years before this, US adventurers had overthrown the Hawaiian monarchy; in 1898 the US formally annexed the islands, thus completing its strategic corridor to China and the Far East. In 1903, the US rulers engineered a revolt in Panama, separating the country from Colombia, and embarked on the construction of the strategically and economically vital Panama Canal (completed in 1914).

Rise of US superpower

The US was the real winner from the World War I carnage. Britain and France still had their colonial empires but they were seriously weakened, as was Germany. It was clear to astute observers that a fundamental new force had arrived on the world scene, more powerful than anything seen before. In 1934, assessing the forces driving for a new world war, the exiled Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky wrote that whereas German imperialism under Hitler wanted to reorganise Europe in its interests, the US sought to reorganise the whole world.

The grandiose ambitions of the US imperialist rulers were well expressed in 1941 by *Time-Life* publishing magnate Henry Luce who called for an “American Century” — the US equivalent of Hitler’s “thousand-year Reich”.

World War II had the same underlying causes as the 1914-18 war. Nothing had been resolved by the first global slaughter. Germany again tried for European domination. However, the involvement of the post-capitalist Soviet Union was a new factor; it was not fighting for plunder but merely to survive; eventually its heroic resistance proved Hitler’s undoing.

The US emerged from the war as the world superpower. Britain and France were now definitely second-rank imperialist powers. But the US was stronger than ever: its homeland had not been devastated as had Europe, the Soviet Union and Japan, its

economic base was immensely strong and it had a monopoly on the atomic bomb.

The US had a qualitative military and economic superiority over all its capitalist rivals. This reality, and the Cold War struggle with the Soviet Union, conditioned the forms of inter-imperialist rivalry for the rest of the 20th century. All economic competition between the imperialist powers was conditioned by the need to present a common front — the US-led “free world” — against the challenge represented by the Soviet Union, China and the Third World national liberation struggles.

This ruled out another inter-imperialist war for the redivision of the world. However, it did not rule out sharp economic competition, localised proxy wars and, especially, it didn't rule out wars against the liberation movements in the Third World. Quite the contrary.

For instance, the postwar period saw the US supplant Britain in important traditional markets and spheres of influence such as Argentina and the Middle East. And for 15 years until 1975, Washington fought a bloody and atrocious war against the Vietnamese liberation forces, killing and maiming millions and devastating the country before being compelled to withdraw.

Today, the Soviet Union has gone and the Cold War is over. But the qualitative US economic and military preponderance remains a decisive fact.

Competition between the huge First World monopoly firms — multinationals in respect of their field of operations but in their ownership they remain tied to particular nation-states — and between the various imperialist countries is sharply intensifying. The whole system is in a deep crisis.

Neo-liberal assault on working people

For the past two decades we have seen the continued demolition of the so-called welfare state (that is, limited concessions to the Western working classes in the context of the Cold War contest with the Soviet Union) and endless calls to cut government spending — actually to cut social spending, while boosting handouts to big business and increasing the military and police budgets. Every conceivable state instrumentality is being privatised as big business searches for new sources of profit — even water supply systems are not immune. Workers are under constant pressure as union rights, job security, wages and working conditions face continuing attacks.

The imperialist powers are pressing this neo-liberal economic program on the working people of the Third World through the imperialists' control of international financial and trade organisations like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation.

Trapped by their huge debts to Western banks and governments, Third World

countries are unable to resist this pressure. The effects are devastating. Every index of social misery — hunger, poverty, infant mortality and child death rates, the oppression of women, sex-slavery, unemployment, and so on — is sharply worsening.

The only country which has been able to resist this trend, however tenuously, is revolutionary Cuba, which does not belong to the imperialist financial and trade organisations. Despite great pressures, Cuba retains control over its own economy and its modest but impressive economic and social development stands in stark contrast to the social holocaust occurring in the rest of the Third World. Cuba's revolutionary, anti-imperialist, non-capitalist path of development shows the only way forward for the people of the Third World.

Today the old colonial empires are gone but the Third World remains a collection of neo-colonies of imperialism. Just as the old colonial empires of Britain, France and the Netherlands were retained only by naked military force, so the economic interests of US corporations in the Third World are ultimately dependent on stealth bombers, aircraft carrier battle groups, the Marine Corps, the Central Intelligence Agency and murderous US-trained puppet armies, torturers and paramilitary death squads.

And that is what the Washington's "war on terrorism" is all about — projecting US military power across the world; gaining new legitimacy for its role as imperialism's "world cop"; having the right to station its forces in scores of countries far from home; and finding a more plausible ideological framework for fighting Third World liberation movements.

The "war on terrorism" is Orwellian double-speak for a war on the people of the world — on behalf of First World corporations. The criminal September 11 attacks killed some 6000 people; they have also given the world's number one terrorist a new ideological screen for its activities. But we shouldn't be confused: the main "enemy of civilisation" isn't some right-wing religious fanatic — a former tool of the CIA — holed up in a mountain cave somewhere in Afghanistan, but the imperialist world economic system which puts capitalist profit ahead of every human need and value.

Fighting to get rid of this rotten system and replace it with a socialist society of peace, solidarity and plenty remains the most urgent task facing progressive humanity. ■

Revolution & Counter-Revolution in Afghanistan

By Norm Dixon

On July 3, 1979, US President Jimmy Carter signed a secret document that began a terrible train of events which may have culminated in the September 11 mass murders in New York and Washington.

Since that date — as a direct consequence of the US government’s spiteful decision to crush Afghanistan’s 1978 democratic revolution — Afghanistan has had to endure more than 22 years of continuous war, costing the lives of millions of Afghans and dislocation of millions of refugees.

On October 7, Washington unleashed its military might on the poverty-stricken people of Afghanistan. The sickening roll call of victims rose by the day as US warplanes pummelled Afghanistan.

Washington’s decision to nurture, fund and train a brutal gang of anti-democratic, woman-hating religious zealots as its counter-revolutionary stormtroopers — the *mujaheddin* — in time spawned the reactionary Taliban regime, as well as Osama bin Laden and the plethora of right-wing terrorist *jihadi* groups that today infest the Middle East, Asia and other parts of the world.

From the very beginning, the US government justified its interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan with the claim that it was fighting “Soviet expansionism”. When the 1978 Afghanistan revolution erupted, Washington claimed it was merely the result of a “Soviet-engineered coup”.

When Soviet troops entered Afghanistan in December 1979 in response to the danger that the Afghan government might fall to US-backed, anti-Soviet contra bandits, Washington declared the intervention part of a Soviet strategy to incorporate the country into the “Soviet empire”, supposedly as a step towards achieving Moscow’s long-term goal of a “warm water port” and control of strategic Middle Eastern oil reserves.

The opening of the archives of the former Soviet Union and the published reminiscences of former US power-brokers have proven these US claims to be outright lies.

What has been revealed is that, at every turn, the Afghan imbroglio was deepened as Washington set about achieving its goals of destroying the gains — and the example — of the 1978 Afghanistan revolution, overthrowing the secular, left-wing party that had attempted to reform and modernise Afghan society, and to ensnare the Soviet Union in a Vietnam War-like military quagmire for as long as possible so as to enfeeble it.

The Soviet Union was, to use the words of former US national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, drawn into the “Afghan trap” by Washington’s actions.

The 1978 events in Afghanistan were not a “Soviet-engineered” coup, as Washington and the capitalist press charge, but was the culmination of almost 15 years of rising political protest and organisation.

In fact, it is now widely accepted by establishment historians that the Soviet Union was caught by surprise by the uprising by members of the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) on April 27, 1978, which overthrew the undemocratic regime of President Mohammad Daud.

What was the PDPA?

The PDPA’s first congress was held in January 1965 during an upsurge of the urban democratic movement in Kabul, in opposition to the autocratic rule of King Zahir Shah. It was led by young activists of that upsurge, as well as students and academics who had participated in the 1947-52 democratic movement led by the Wikh-i Zalmiyan (Awakened Youth Movement), such as writer Nur Mohammad Taraki (who was founding PDPA secretary general) and former student leader Babrak Karmal.

The PDPA was an orthodox pro-Moscow communist party. Its program called for a popular front of workers, peasants, progressive intellectuals, artisans, urban and rural smallholders and the national bourgeoisie to lead a “national democratic revolution” to modernise Afghan society.

While the party’s early membership consisted mostly of a few hundred students, intellectuals, soldiers, teachers and government workers, mainly in Kabul, its influence was not small. Four PDPA members, including Karmal, were elected to the short-lived and powerless parliament, the Wolesi Jirgah, in 1965.

Hundreds of students invaded the parliament’s first session on October 24, in support of the PDPA MPs and to oppose the king’s prime minister. The following day, troops fired on anti-government demonstrators, killing three. (The deaths were

subsequently marked every year on the same day. The “three scorpions demonstrations”, as they became known, grew in size each year. They were often violently repressed.)

Six issues of the PDPA’s weekly newspaper, *Khalq* (People), were produced in 1966 before the government closed it down, accusing its of be “un-Islamic”. The first issue sold 20,000 copies, later issues 10,000.

The legacy of the suppression of 1964-66 democracy movement was a radicalised urban-based mass movement, strongly influenced by the PDPA. This radicalisation spread from Kabul University and the high schools to civil servants and the small urban working class.

In 1967, anti-US feeling — already running high over the Vietnam War — increased after it was revealed that the CIA was interfering in Afghan student affairs. In 1968, there was a wave of workers’ strikes; students demonstrated in support. In May-June 1969, 15,000 students clashed with riot police. In 1970, women took to the streets to protest Islamic restrictions on their rights.

Kabul University became a hotbed of Marxist and radical ideas.

The PDPA grew substantially from this politicised urban population. A majority of the *Khalq* faction’s members, for example, were teachers. By the late 1960s, PDPA membership was several thousand.

Khalq & Parcham

In June 1967, the PDPA split into two factions, the *Khalq* and the *Parcham* (the Flag). The initial dispute was over how to respond to the banning of the party newspaper, *Khalq*. Taraki was opposed to continuing to publish the paper underground; Karmal supported it. Karmal’s faction began producing the weekly *Parcham*. The central committee was evenly split between the two.

However, according to Fred Halliday, writing in the November-December 1978 *New Left Review*, the division also involved deeper differences over ideology and political strategy: “Whereas *Khalq* insisted on building a working-class party with strict ‘Leninist’ discipline, *Parcham* wanted a broad national-democratic front to carry through the first phase of the revolution.”

Parcham, which had established cells inside the 85,000-strong Afghan armed forces, linked up with overseas-educated officers opposed to the monarchy and who favoured a modernised, secular Afghanistan.

The army ranks were composed mainly of Afghan peasants, whose unhappiness at the appalling conditions of life in the countryside also made them receptive to radical ideas. Many officers had been trained in the Soviet Union and were impressed

with the social progress that had been made in the predominantly Muslim Soviet republics of Central Asia, just across the border.

Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s the mass movement continued to develop, as did discontent in the army and rural areas fuelled by a serious famine and the monarchical regime's corruption.

In 1972, US ambassador to Kabul Robert Neumann warned Washington that "barring progressive decisions or very good luck, the survival of the present government for more than another year is problematical".

A section of the ruling class moved to head off a social explosion. On July 17, 1973, military officers (including Parcham members) overthrew the king, ending the 40-year rule of Zahir Shah, and placed Mohammad Daud, King Zahir Shah's cousin and a former prime minister, in power.

It is now known that Washington had prior knowledge of the coup and signalled that it would accept the overthrow of the king. This makes a mockery of the US display of outrage at the PDPA taking power in 1978 in circumstances in which that party had little choice but act or be massacred. The PDPA also was pledged to address the same social ills that Daud promised, but had failed, to remedy. Clearly for Washington there are "good" coups and "bad" coups depending whose interests are served by them.

According to US documents declassified in mid-October this year, Neumann was approached 15 months before the coup by "intermediaries" representing Daud. They asked how would Washington react if Daud took power.

Neumann informed Washington that he had told Daud's agents that: "As a matter of general worldwide principle, [US] attitude toward any government is based on that government's policies and actions, in particular toward US interests and towards peace and stability in [its] region." The US State Department replied that it had "full confidence" in the ambassador's response to the plotters' request.

Daud promised radical land reform, the legalisation of political parties and other reforms in the hope that more radical change, outside the control of the landlords and capitalists, could be avoided.

Parcham was offered four ministers in Daud's government. A Parcham member, Major Abdul Qadir, was nominated vice-commander of the air force, while another Parcham supporter, Major Zia Mohammadzi Zia, was appointed head of the Republican Guard.

However, Daud's promises were not implemented. His regime rapidly shifted to the right. While a republic was proclaimed, the royal family remained prominent in Afghanistan's affairs.

In 1974, Daud posted the Parcham ministers and Major Zia to overseas diplomatic postings (as well, Qadir was demoted to head of Kabul's military abattoir!).

Afghanistan's traditional position as a "buffer state" between the Soviet Union and Washington's Cold War allies, Pakistan and Iran, began to alter. With the encouragement of Washington, the reactionary pro-US Shah of Iran offered a US\$2 billion economic aid package in the hope of replacing Moscow as Kabul's biggest donor.

Military cooperation was also offered. The number of Soviet military advisers in the Afghan armed forces dropped from 1000 in 1972 to 200 in 1976, being replaced by agents of the dreaded Iranian secret police agency, SAVAK.

At the same time, Daud pursued closer relations with the Pakistan dictatorship of General Zia ul-Haq, agreeing in 1977 to drop Afghanistan's longstanding support for the right to national self-determination for the Pashtun and Baluch peoples, who inhabit parts of both countries. Pashtun and Baluch political exiles in Afghanistan were expelled.

Parcham's illusions that Daud could be part of a popular front committed to a "national democratic revolution" were soon shattered and, by 1975, it had moved politically closer to the Khalqi faction. Many Parcham supporters, including Major Qadir, shifted allegiance to Khalq.

In the meantime, supervised by Hafizullah Amin, Khalq had greatly strengthened its support among rank and file soldiers and even officers. By 1976, Khalq had prepared plans for its military cadre to launch an insurrection should the need arise.

The Khalq and Parcham factions reunited as the PDPA in 1977, however sectarianism and factionalism — often violent and unprincipled — continuously resurfaced and would seriously weaken and undermine the party.

Suddenly in April 1978, Daud and his hardline interior minister General Abdul Nuristani launched a sharp government crackdown on the PDPA. It proved to be a miscalculation.

Crackdown triggers insurrection

The best accounts of the events that followed were produced by US socialist Ernest Harsch, published in the February 11, 1980 edition of *Intercontinental Press/Impreacor*, and by Fred Halliday in the November-December 1978 *New Left Review*. Unless otherwise stated, what follows is based on those accounts.

On April 17, PDPA leader Mir Akbar Khyber, a former editor of the Parcham newspaper, was murdered in Kabul on the orders of Nuristani (who had stated it was time to "finish off" the "communists" before they became too strong).

A huge crowd by Afghanistan's standards, 15,000 people, gathered for his funeral. They carried red flags and shouted anti-government slogans. Taraki led the march to the US embassy, where the demonstrators denounced the role of the CIA and SAVAK. Other demonstrations followed.

On April 26, Daud had Taraki, Babrak Karmal, Amin and other top PDPA leaders arrested. However, Amin was able to smuggle out the order for the insurrection to begin.

Major Qadir and Colonel Aslam Watanjar, another leading PDPA member in the military, narrowly escaped arrest and early on April 27, Watanjar took command of tank regiments and Qadir the air force. In Kabul's central park, large crowds organised by the PDPA had gathered to protest against the arrests.

At 5pm, insurgent tanks knocked down the walls of the central prison and released the detained PDPA leaders. As armoured cars transported the leaders to the headquarters of the insurrection, thousands of people lined the streets to cheer them on. In cities, towns and army garrisons around the country, PDPA members and supporters arrested their generals and took control.

By 7.30pm, Radio Afghanistan proclaimed the overthrow of the Daud regime. "For the first time in the history of Afghanistan", the radio declared, "the last remnants of monarchy, tyranny, despotism ... has ended, and all powers of the state are in the hands of the people of Afghanistan."

The government of the new Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) headed by Taraki, as president and prime minister, took power the next day. Karmal and Amin were named deputy prime ministers. All members of the 21-member cabinet and the 35-member Revolutionary Council were PDPA leaders. The Khalq faction was in the majority.

At the presidential palace, fighting raged most of the night. During the final assault by tanks and jet fighters, Daud and some of his ministers, including the hated Nuristani, were killed. Daud reportedly shot himself. The only concerted resistance was in Jalalabad, where government forces held out for two days.

Revolution unfolds

The overthrow of Daud was tremendously popular, something even the capitalist press was forced to admit. The *New York Times*' Kabul correspondent William Borders reported on May 6, 1978: "Soldiers who distributed the government newspaper from army buses were besieged at every corner by crowds of eager buyers. Even people who are illiterate — as nine out of 10 Afghans are — seemed eager to study the photographs ..."

According to Borders, most foreign journalists found that “nearly every Afghan they interviewed said [they were] delighted at the coup”.

Rallies, marches and meetings were held in many towns and villages to celebrate the overthrow of Daud. On May 1, 1978, May Day was celebrated for the first time as a legal holiday.

The doors of Daud’s palace were thrown open. Gerard Viratelle reported in the May 13, 1978, *Le Monde* that hundreds of thousands of Afghans, “often coming from the interior of the country”, came to see how lavishly Daud had lived — and where he had died.

The January 16, 1979, *Wall Street Journal* reported that in Kabul alone “more than 150,000 persons . . . marched to honour the new flag on the day it was unfurled [October 23]. Similar demonstrations of support occurred in other cities. The marches were organized, but witnesses say the participants appeared genuinely enthusiastic.”

The *Washington Post* on June 1, 1979, reported that, “From the looks of banners and slogans all over [Kabul], Afghan loyalty to the government can scarcely be questioned”. And even the US government’s *Problems of Communism* (July-August, 1979) admitted that there were “demonstrations staged daily in Kabul in support of the government”.

Taraki delivered the government’s first major policy speech on May 9. He said that the April 27 insurrection was the beginning of a “democratic and national revolution”. He outlined a 39-point program which included radical land reform, the abolition of feudal property relations in the countryside, freedom of religion, the granting of rights to Afghanistan’s various national minorities, universal primary education and equality between men and women.

Taraki announced that a 51% stake in all major enterprises not already in government hands would be nationalised; state control over foreign trade would be established.

Taraki declared repeatedly in speeches and statements: “The goal of our revolution is a total break with our feudal past. We aim for the elimination of poverty, adversity and class exploitation, and the uplifting of the Afghan people.”

In an interview with Cuban television, deputy prime minister Amin, who was also foreign minister, went further and stated that it was “a revolution that heralds a socialist revolution” (*Granma*, June 4, 1978).

Swift implementation

One of the first acts of the new regime was to wipe out the last vestiges of royal power. The overthrow of Daud broke the royal family’s monopoly on political power. A few

days after the insurrection, all land and property of the royal family was confiscated. Within months, about 300 to 400 big landowners, many of them part of the old aristocracy, had been stripped of their lands.

Daud's elite Republican Guard was dissolved. All but one of Afghanistan's 50 generals were dismissed from the armed forces. Around 13,000 prisoners were freed and police files were publicly burned.

Thousands of royalists were removed from the state apparatus, the ranks of senior civil service and the diplomatic corps and replaced by young supporters of the revolution.

Price controls were imposed on basic necessities in the market of Kabul. The cost of bread was cut in half. Free emergency medical care was introduced in some areas. At the time of the revolution, infant mortality was 269 per thousand and average life expectancy was just 35 years.

Working hours were reduced and low-paid workers were given higher wages. Within days of taking power, the PDPA legalised trade unions for the first time in Afghanistan's history. Unions were subsequently set up in Kabul and elsewhere, but they remained relatively weak, in part because of the small size of the working class. (About 330,000 workers were employed in manufacturing, construction, mining, transport, communications and other sectors, out of a total estimated labour force of 5.6 million.)

A mass literacy campaign was begun. At the time of the revolution, about 90% of the population could not read or write. The literacy drive was organised by the National Agency for the Campaign Against Illiteracy. More than 5000 unemployed university graduates were recruited as teachers.

A little more than a year after the revolution, 600 new schools had been built, many of them in rural areas, and in smaller towns and villages. By the end of 1979, up to 500,000 adult Afghans were attending basic literacy classes (another 500,000 had enrolled but dropped out).

Higher education was expanded. By November 1979, there were 22,000 students in universities and other higher education institutions, compared to just 8000 in 1975-76.

Gains for minorities and women

Historically, Afghanistan had been dominated by the Pashtun ethnic group, which accounted for nearly half the population. Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, Turkomans, Baluchs and other minorities were discriminated against under previous regimes.

Primary education, which was previously conducted in Pashtu or Dari (the Afghan

dialect of Persian), now included instruction in local languages. Within weeks of the insurrection, radio and television programs were being broadcast in minority languages. *Khalq*, a weekly organ of the PDPA, was published in five languages.

Because the leadership of the PDPA was drawn from most of the nationalities, the ethnic composition of the government was also radically altered.

Women, too, made important gains. Under the tribal and nomadic social relations that predominated in much of the country, young women were still being sold into marriage, barred from education and from most employment outside of the home and field.

The PDPA proclaimed the legal equality of the sexes, abolished arranged (usually child) marriages, and drastically reduced the traditional bride price to a token amount.

Dr Anahita Ratebzad, the only woman member of the PDPA central committee, was named a minister and prominently encouraged women to become politically active and fight for their rights.

To organise and mobilise women, the Khalqi Organisation for Afghan Woman (KOAW) was formed and it played a visible role in the marches, demonstrations and rallies in support of the revolution.

The gains won by the revolution for women remained fresh in the minds of Afghan women 23 years later. Those memories highlight the hypocrisy of US and British governments' manipulation of the world's disgust at the Taliban's oppression of women to win support for its latest war on Afghanistan.

Saira Noorani, a woman surgeon who finally escaped the Taliban in mid-September 2001, told the September 30, 2001, *British Observer*: "Life was good under the Soviets. Every girl could go to high school and university. We could go wherever we wanted and wear what we liked ... We used to go to cafes and the cinema to see the latest Indian films on a Friday and listen to the latest Hindi music ... It all started to go wrong when the *mujaheddin* started winning ... They used to kill teachers and burn schools ... We were terrified. It was funny and sad to think these were the people the West had supported."

Land reform

Land reform was the single most important question facing the new government. In order to seriously develop Afghanistan and improve the social conditions of the impoverished population (75% of which lived at subsistence levels) the revolution could not avoid taking on the big landlords.

When the PDPA came to power, of 1.2 million peasant families, about 470,000 owned one acre of land or less; another 660,000 families owned no land at all. Just 4%

of the landholding population owned 41% of all cultivable land.

As a result, some 60% of all peasants had been forced to become tenant farmers on land rented from the big landowners, to whom they had to pay up to 80% of their crops and provide labour services. Many peasants were tied to the landlords as virtual serfs through unpayable debt.

The PDPA government cancelled all debts owed by poor and landless peasants to the landlords, a measure that benefited 3 million peasant families.

On November 28, 1978, a sweeping land reform was announced. It placed a ceiling of 15 acres (more for land of poorer quality) on all individual landholdings, a provision aimed at the big landlord class. All holdings above that ceiling were to be expropriated without compensation and distributed free to poor and landless peasants.

The purpose of the land reform, according to the decree, was to eliminate “the feudal and pre-feudal relations from the socioeconomic system of the country”, to raise agricultural production, and to popularise, consolidate and deepen “the unity of workers and peasants for the purpose of further strengthening of the unity of the people of Afghanistan for construction of a society void of hostile classes and free of exploitation of man by man”.

The land reform decree came into effect on January 1, 1979. Over the following six months, most of the big landlords who had not already fled the country had their estates expropriated and handed over to the peasants, under the slogan, “Land belongs to those who work on it”.

“The peasants also personally took part in this process”, Mir Ahmad, a leader of the PDPA’s youth group, told the November 23, 1979, *Workers’ World* newspaper. Several hundred thousand peasants joined cooperative associations. In late May 1979, mass meetings and marches of workers and peasants were held in support of the land reform program in Kunduz, Balkh, Ghour, Ghazni, Herat, Kandahar, Fariab, Jawzjan, Baghlan, Neemroze and other provinces, as well as in Kabul.

By June, the government had announced that the first phase of the agrarian reform was complete. Altogether, 1.4 million acres of land had been distributed to 248,000 peasant families.

Plans were being drafted for a second phase of the land reform program, in which greater emphasis was to be laid on increased agricultural production through the introduction of modern farming techniques, greater use of fertilizers, improved irrigation, stepped-up imports of tractors and other equipment, and the further organisation of peasant cooperatives.

In May 1979, Fred Halliday observed that “probably more has changed in the countryside over the last year than in the two centuries since the state was established”.

Even the US Pentagon could not pretend that the gains made by Afghanistan's workers and peasants were not impressive. In a publication *Afghanistan: A Country Study*, issued in 1986, it noted that "the government trained many more teachers, built additional schools and kindergartens and instituted nurseries for orphans", as well creating an 80% increase in hospitals beds. It recorded how the PDPA had reduced land inequality and improved women's rights.

Organisation

When the PDPA seized power in April 1978, its membership was probably under 10,000 and mostly concentrated in the major cities. To mobilise broader support for the revolution and to help initiate and carry through its radical reforms, the PDPA moved to organise the masses, particularly in the cities.

Party cells and committees were launched throughout the country, even in some of the remotest parts. In addition to the trade unions and KOAW, party members helped set up the Khalqi Organisation for Afghan Youth to mobilise support from students and other young people.

Shortly after April 1978, Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR) were established across Afghanistan. They were composed largely of workers and peasants. By late 1979, the government was claiming that 70,000 persons had joined them. The defence committees not only had a military function but helped mobilise support for the land reform program and other social measures.

Foreign minister Shah Wali, in an interview in the November 12, 1979, *Kabul Times*, explained that the CDRs "struggle against the anti-revolutionary elements and rally the toiling people behind the revolutionary programs. Further they are meant to encourage the working people to participate in the building of a new society and take part in the affairs of the khalqi government.

These committees will help and guide the people to construct roads and bridges and implement their health programs ... They will encourage the people to enrol in literacy courses."

Cuba's Fidel Castro welcomed Afghans to "the family of revolutions", an indication that, whatever the Afghan revolutionary process's weaknesses, it was more than simply a coup d'état.

PDPA's errors undermine the revolution

The PDPA and its supporters had been forced to suddenly take power in an act of self-defence, to avoid a massacre like those that followed the crushing of left-wing movements in the US-backed coups in Indonesia in 1965 and in Chile in 1973.

The PDPA's Stalinist politics meant that its cadre had not been prepared ideologically or organizationally to lead a revolution that required the political mobilisation and mass involvement of the broad masses for its survival. Instead, it had envisioned that it would be part of a coalition government with a section of the Afghan bourgeoisie committed to the peaceful modernisation of Afghan society and a relatively drawn-out development of Afghan capitalism.

At the time it was forced to take power, the PDPA was relatively small with membership that was predominantly made up of petty-bourgeois intellectuals. In a country where 80% of the people were peasants or nomads, illiterate and blinded by tribal and religious loyalties, the PDPA had virtually no implantation in the countryside.

These factors — intensified by the fact that from the very start the small vanguard forces felt their, and revolution's, very survival was threatened by a vicious imperialist-backed counter-revolution — led the Khalq-led PDPA government to rely on implementing the revolution's measures in an administrative and authoritarian manner, and at a pace faster than many people in the landlord- and mullah-dominated countryside were able to accept.

During the literacy campaign, reported Ernest Harsch, "PDPA activists who went out into the villages to organise classes immediately attempted to introduce coeducation, without regard to the problems of doing so in areas where women were still commonly segregated from men in public life. Rather than carefully and patiently trying to overcome conservative prejudices against women's emancipation, they sought to force the process."

The PDPA also made serious errors in implementing its land reform program. When the poor peasants' debts were cancelled, it failed to provide alternative sources of finance. And when after giving the peasants land, the government did not provide seed, fertiliser, implements or access to water — which were all previously provided by the landlords.

As Harsch explained: "An effective land reform requires careful organisation and political preparation. Its results must be immediately tangible, easing the burdens of the peasantry; otherwise, the dispossessed landlords can play on discontent."

In many cases, it was the armed forces rather than party cadre that arrived in the villages to implement progressive reforms.

"In dealing with the counter-revolution", noted Harsch, "[The government's] basic answer to all opposition was repressive force ... carried out by an army that had been formed under the monarchy". This tarnished the image of the revolution in the countryside and made it more difficult to politically defeat the contras. Such repression was not just directed at opponents of the revolution, but also at its supporters and

party members.

Harsch point out that, “The absence of democratic rights for the toilers, combined with the [PDPA’s] bureaucratic methods, gave the counter-revolution openings that could be exploited. The reactionaries were able to play on the uncertainty, confusion and doubts that existed among sectors of the Afghan population. The conservative tribal chiefs were able to retain a degree of influence in some rural areas.”

The PDPA’s factionalism also weakened and divided the revolution’s supporters. Just three months after the April insurrection, Khalq purged the government of Parcham ministers, exiling Karmal and others by posting them as ambassadors overseas.

In August, the government accused Parcham members of conspiring to overthrow the government in league with “a foreign power”. Hundreds of Parcham members were dismissed from their jobs or detained. Karmal and other Parcham leaders overseas, wisely chose not to heed an order to return to Kabul.

The departure of the more cautious Parcham followers reinforced the Khalq’s tendency towards authoritarian ultraleftism.

The PDPA was convulsed by further factional bloodletting in 1979, this time within the Khalq faction. In March, Hafizullah Amin took over from Taraki as prime minister (Taraki retained the presidency) and in July also became defence minister. Amin had his strong influence within the armed forces.

As Amin consolidated his control of the government, its authoritarianism and ultraleftism escalated, driving more Afghans into the arms of the counter-revolution.

On September 14, 1979, Taraki attempted to violently put an end to what he believed was Amin’s creeping coup. Apparently, Taraki invited Amin to the presidential palace with the intention of ambushing him. However, the operation backfired and Taraki was killed in the subsequent shootout. Radio Afghanistan announced that Taraki had been struck down by a “sudden illness”. Amin named himself president.

Amin launched new waves of purges in the government and the PDPA. The few remaining Parcham figures in the PDPA leadership were expelled. The Amin regime relied more and more on military might to retain power.

The mistakes and crimes of the Khalq leadership of the PDPA, and the massive backing to the counter-revolution provided by US imperialism, combined to put the future of the Afghan revolution in severe doubt.

Washington moves against the revolution

Afghanistan’s big landlords, capitalists and merchants rapidly moved to oppose the reforms unleashed by the 1978 “Saur (April) revolution”. Land reform, nationalisation and democratic rights for women and minorities directly undermined their economic,

political and social interests. The propertied classes feared that the revolution would continue to deepen, threatening their survival.

A report in the November 8, 1978, *Los Angeles Times* noted that there was “panic in the old bourgeois circles in Kabul ... Merchants are moving their stock out of the country, fearing the government will step into commerce.”

Many began to organise the counter-revolution. For example, Sayed Ahmad Gailani, the owner of the Peugeot car dealership in Kabul, fled to Pakistan where he launched the Afghanistan Islamic and Nationalist Revolutionary Council.

A number of the counter-revolutionaries had studied in Egypt, where they became adherents of the Muslim Brotherhood, an organisation that advocates the imposition of a strict Islamic state in every Muslim country.

These fanatics, such as Abdul Rasul Sayyaf and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar — figures who would become the main recipients of CIA funds — went into exile in Pakistan long before the PDPA came to power. There they offered to serve the interests of the rulers of Islamabad. In their eyes, even Daud was an “infidel” because of his mildly liberal attitudes towards the modernisation of Afghan society. Even at that time, these zealots launched terrorist attacks into Afghanistan.

The anti-PDPA contras were backed by the mullahs, who themselves were large landowners or were at the service of the rich. The mullahs and landlords had a common stake in maintaining backward social traditions, especially against women.

The counter-revolution found it convenient to dishonestly portray its hostility to the PDPA’s reforms as a defence of Islam rather than a defence of the wealth and power of the landed minority.

Even the *New York Times* in 1979 could not ignore that religion “is being used by some Afghans who actually object more to President Taraki’s plans for land reforms and other changes to feudal society”. And a BBC reporter who spent four months with the contras also noted that they were “fighting to retain their feudal system and stop the Kabul government’s left-wing reforms which are considered anti-Islamic”.

While attempts by the PDPA to administratively undermine the influence of religion — especially in regard to the position of women — undoubtedly gave the reactionaries ammunition, it is false to claim that the PDPA government was anti-Islam. After the April insurrection, the government declared a commitment to Islam within a secular state. A year and half later, the right-wing British *Economist* reported: “No restrictions had been placed imposed on religious practice.”

The mujaheddin launched terrorist raids against government offices, schools (especially co-ed schools) and clinics, particularly in areas where the land reform was underway or where peasants had rallied to the government. Teachers, literacy program

volunteers and government workers were murdered, often horribly tortured first.

As William Blum wrote in his book on US foreign policy, *Killing Hope*: “A favourite tactic of the Afghan freedom fighters was to torture victims by cutting off their noses, ears and genitals, then removing one slice of skin after another, producing a slow, very painful death.”

Contrary to the common myth that US support for the counter-revolutionary *mujaheddin* only began with the entry of Soviet troops into Afghanistan in December 1979, Washington immediately moved to overthrow the PDPA.

The US government immediately suspended all new economic aid and reduced its previously pledged aid for 1978 from US\$20 million to \$13 million. Later all aid was stopped and Washington used its influence in the international financial institutions to stop loans to Afghanistan.

A propaganda campaign to portray the April revolution as a “Soviet-backed coup” was launched in the Western capitalist press. As has already been explained, there is no evidence that the Soviet Union knew of, let alone ordered, preparations for the uprising. Cyrus Vance, Carter’s secretary of state admitted in his 1983 memoirs that, “We have no evidence of any Soviet complicity in the coup”.

The US imperialists were alarmed that the revolution might deepen and offer an example to oppressed peoples elsewhere —especially in the strategic oil-rich Middle East. Claims of Soviet “expansionism” was designed to convince the US people of legitimacy of US support for the Afghan contras.

The PDPA-led popular uprising triggered a debate within the Carter administration about how it should respond. Soon after the Saur revolution, Harold Saunders sent a secret memo to Vance recommending that Washington “seek to avoid driving the [PDPA] regime into a closer embrace with the Soviet Union than it might wish”. Vance apparently agreed.

On the other wing, Carter’s National Security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski urged an aggressive response to the Afghan revolution. He argued that, in the light of the growing opposition to the Shah of Iran, the US had to send a message to its puppets in the region that they would not be expendable and central to US interests. Brzezinski prevailed.

US imperialism was smarting from its defeat in Vietnam in 1975, the victories of independence struggles in Angola and Mozambique in 1975, a revolution in Ethiopia in 1977, the intensification of anti-apartheid movement in South Africa and the national liberation struggles in Namibia and Zimbabwe. All were major setbacks for US imperialism. The US ruling class was determined to stem the tide.

All these gains by the world’s oppressed were being falsely painted by Washington

as “Soviet-engineered” and examples of Soviet “expansionism”.

While it was completely untrue to claim that the Third World movements for national liberation were being directed from Moscow, the Soviet Union had provided invaluable assistance, both before and after their victories.

The March 2, 1979, *Wall Street Journal* summed up the thinking of the US ruling class: “The large-scale opposition in Afghanistan provides the anti-Soviet forces in the region and the world with an opportunity to increase significantly the price of expansionism for the Soviets and reduce the likelihood of the consolidation of a Cuban-style regime in a crucial part of the world.”

Immediately after the 1978 insurrection, the pro-US Iranian and Pakistani regimes closed their borders with Afghanistan and placed their armies on alert. Pakistan provided sanctuary to counter-revolutionary bands as they prepared to launch attacks on the Afghan revolution.

In late June, 1979, in the United States, more than 270 top generals, admirals, diplomats, officials and others hastily gathered at the NATO Atlantic Command in Annapolis, Maryland. They concluded that imperialist interests in the region were seriously threatened by the Afghan revolution and that it must be strangled.

In his 1996 autobiography, *From the Shadows*, former CIA director Robert Gates revealed that Washington agreed to channel \$500 million to the *mujaheddin* at least *six months* before the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. US President Jimmy Carter on July 3, 1979, signed the “finding” that authorised the covert program.

Brzezinski confirmed in an interview published in the January 15-21, 1998, edition of the French magazine *Le Nouvel Observateur* that Washington had lied about its support to the Afghan counter-revolution: “According to the official version of history, CIA aid to the *mujaheddin* began during 1980, that is after the Soviet army invaded Afghanistan ... But the reality, secretly guarded until now, is completely otherwise.” Brzezinski also confirmed the date on which Carter signed “the first directive for secret aid to the opponents of the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul”.

However, covert aid to the contras had been initiated even earlier. Brzezinski states in his 1983 memoirs, *Power and Principle*, that in April 1979, he pushed through the Special Coordination Committee of the US National Security Council a decision to be “more sympathetic to those Afghans who were determined to preserve their country’s independence”.

According to a former Pakistan military official, interviewed by the Digital National Security Archive newsletter in 1988, the US embassy in Islamabad asked Pakistan military officials in April 1979 to recommend Afghan rebel organisations to receive US funds. A month later, Hekmatyar was personally introduced to a CIA official by

Pakistani military officials. Thus began the illicit love affair between Washington and one of the most brutal and extreme fanatics in the *mujaheddin*'s ranks. US officials also met with other factions.

Washington was already putting together the what would today be called its "international coalition" to overthrow the PDPA. In May 1979, the State Department reported that China, Saudi Arabia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates has been lined up to provide millions of dollars to the *mujaheddin*. CIA funds were flowing to the bank accounts of Afghan contras by August. In October, after a series of meetings with General Zia ul-Haq and Chinese government officials, the CIA had finalised Pakistan's role as the contras' quartermaster and main sanctuary; arms would be bought from Beijing.

Washington was well aware what the consequences of its actions would be. It knew that the defeat of the PDPA and destruction of gains of the revolution would impact harshly of the Afghan people. In August 1979, the US embassy in Kabul reported that "the United States' larger interests ... would be served by the demise of the Taraki-Amin regime, despite whatever setbacks this might mean for future social and economic reforms in Afghanistan."

Washington also knew from the beginning that the *mujaheddin* could not form a viable alternative government to the PDPA and that its fall would be followed by chaos and civil war. The State Department in August 1979 reported that mujaheddin officials themselves had described any government composed of the fundamentalist factions as like "putting five different animals in the same cage".

There is also evidence that Washington sought to entice the Soviet Union into making an unsustainable military commitment. Gates recounts a meeting that took place on March 30, 1979, at which US undersecretary of defence Walter Slocumbe asked whether there was value in keeping the Afghan insurgency to "[suck] the Soviets into a Vietnamese quagmire".

Brzezinski told *Le Nouvel Observateur*: "On that very day [that Carter approved covert aid to the *mujaheddin*], I wrote a note to the president in which I explained to him in my opinion this aid was going to induce a Soviet military intervention ... We didn't push the Russians to intervene, but we knowingly increased the probability that they would ... That secret operation was an excellent idea. It had the effect of drawing the Russians into the Afghan trap ... The day that the Soviets officially crossed the border, I wrote to President Carter: 'Now we have the opportunity of giving to the USSR its Vietnam War.'"

Washington knew that the Soviet leaders were attempting to rein in the ultraleftism of the Khalq, the dominant PDPA faction. In July 1979, a Department of State cable

reported that “the Soviets [were moving] ... to engineer replacement of the ... Khalqi leadership”. Soon after, the East German ambassador told the US embassy in Kabul that Moscow was attempting encourage the PDPA to institute a broader-based government.

Washington’s hostility to the Afghan revolution can also be explained by the fact that PDPA-led overthrow of the Daud regime had stymied a promising US operation to shift the Cold War geopolitical balance in south and central Asia.

As mentioned earlier, Daud was being lured into the orbit of the dictatorial Shah of Iran, who owed his rule to a CIA-engineered coup in 1953. With Washington’s approval and cooperation, Iran had become a regional power and imperialism’s chief ally in that part of the world.

Iran had invited Daud’s Afghanistan to join the Regional Cooperation for Development, which embraced US allies Iran, Pakistan and Turkey. It was a body that the Soviet Union considered “a branch of CENTO” [the Central Treaty Organisation], Washington’s Cold War regional military alliance against the Soviet Union.

When the Shah was overthrown in a massive popular revolution in January 1979, the stakes in the struggle for Afghanistan increased appreciably. No longer was Washington seeking to add a useful but minor ally to its regional stable. Washington now desperately needed a replacement for its key outpost on the Soviet border, where it could station its lost military installations and electronic spy bases.

Why Soviet troops entered Afghanistan

Soviet troops entered Afghanistan in December 1979. Washington and the capitalist press have long claimed that this decision was an example of “Soviet expansionism”. Nothing can be further from the truth. It was an act of self-defence in response to US imperialism’s provocations.

Declassified transcripts of discussions between Soviet and Afghan leaders reveal that Moscow vigorously resisted the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan’s requests for Soviet troops. Moscow only relented when it became clear that it was the last resort to prevent a hostile regime allied to US imperialism being installed in Kabul.

It is now clear that had Washington ceased its attempts to overthrow the legitimate, secular government of Afghanistan, Soviet troops would never have entered Afghanistan.

Long before the PDPA overthrew the pro-imperialist regime of Mohammad Daud on April 27, 1978, the Soviet Union had been Afghanistan’s main trading partner and biggest aid donor. The Afghan armed forces were armed and supplied with Soviet equipment; many officers were trained in the Soviet Union.

Moscow's ties were based on strategic rather than ideological grounds. The two countries shared a 1000-mile border; a number of ethnic groups, such as the Tajiks, Uzbeks and Turkomans, lived on the Afghan-Soviet border.

For decades, the Soviet Union was content for Afghanistan to act as a military "buffer" state between its southern border and US-aligned CENTO allies, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey. Washington accepted Afghanistan's relationship with the Soviet Union.

The conservative Stalinist Soviet bureaucracy did little to encourage the development of an Afghan communist movement that could threaten its cosy diplomatic relationship with the monarchy. Had Moscow known that the PDPA was prepared to launch an insurrection, it is likely that it would have discouraged it.

However, Moscow could not ignore the April 1978 uprising once it had been successful. Coming soon after US imperialism's attempts— through the Shah of Iran — to tempt Daud to join the ring of hostile states surrounding the Soviet Union, Moscow moved to secure its southern flank once more, quickly agreeing to the PDPA's requests for economic and military assistance.

Within six months, 40 or so new economic aid agreements between the two countries were signed. In December 1978, a friendship treaty was signed, providing for extensive collaboration in industrial development, transport, communications, agriculture, energy, exploitation of natural resources, defence and in other fields. The PDPA's first five-year economic development plan, released in 1979, factored in the receipt of substantial Soviet assistance.

Even as the US-backed counter-revolution became an increasingly serious threat to the PDPA government, Moscow refused to directly intervene. The Soviet leaders certainly did not want the PDPA overthrown by the *mujaheddin*, which would result in an openly pro-imperialist regime on the Soviet Union's southern border.

With Washington's "loss" of the Shah in the January 1979 Iranian revolution, Moscow had good reason to fear that the US was attempting to find an alternative territory on which to base its anti-Soviet military and spying operations.

The Soviet leaders were already worried by the NATO decision that year to deploy new classes of medium- and short-range nuclear missiles in Europe. It would not be beyond the realm of possibility for the US to seek to deploy such weapons in a *mujaheddin*-ruled Afghanistan.

Request denied

But despite the growing threat posed by the US-backed *mujaheddin* terrorists, throughout most of 1979 Moscow remained convinced that the PDPA government could survive, as long as the Khalq faction, which controlled the party, corrected its

ultraleft tendencies and broadened its support.

On March 20, 1979, Taraki rushed to Moscow soon after a bloody army rebellion in Herat, in which hundreds of DRA officials and Soviet advisers, who were assisting the women's literacy program there, were massacred. Taraki urgently appealed for Soviet ground troops to be sent help the Afghan army defeat the counter-revolution.

Declassified Communist Party of the Soviet Union Politburo minutes reveal that Soviet foreign minister Andrei Gromyko and Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin had already repeatedly rejected phone requests for Soviet troops, made by Taraki and his deputy Amin at the height of the Herat mutiny.

In his meeting with Taraki, Kosygin agreed to increased military supplies and additional Soviet advisers but again ruled out troops, telling the Afghan leader: "We must not allow the situation to seem as if you were not able to deal with your own problems and invited foreign troops to assist you ... We believe that there are enough forces in your country to stand up to counter-revolutionary raids."

Kosygin warned that the deployment of Soviet troops "would immediately alarm the international community and would invite sharply unfavourable multi-pronged consequences. This, in effect, would be a conflict not only with the imperialist countries, but also a conflict with one's own people. Our mutual enemies are waiting for the moment when Soviet forces appear on Afghan territory. This would give them an excuse to deploy on Afghan territory military groups hostile to you ...

"The question of deploying our forces has been examined by us from every direction; we carefully studied all aspects of this action and came to the conclusion that if our troops were introduced, the situation in your country would not only not improve, but would worsen."

Kosygin offered the following advice: "We think it important that within your country you should work to widen the social support of your regime, draw people over to your side, insure that nothing will alienate the people from the government."

This reflected Moscow's fear that the Khalq leadership's bureaucratic ultraleftism was playing into the hands of imperialist-backed counter-revolution. While in Moscow, Taraki reportedly met with the exiled leader of the Parcham faction, Babrak Karmal, to discuss a reconciliation.

Moscow was appalled when Amin killed Taraki and took control of the Afghan government in September, 1979. This reaction had nothing to do with the Stalinist Soviet leaders' moral qualms about how Amin seized power. In fact, it is believed that Moscow had prior knowledge, and approved of, Taraki's failed attempt to physically eliminate Amin.

Amin certainly thought so. Upon becoming president he dismissed three ministers

— including Colonel Watanjar, the hero of the April insurrection — who had sought refuge in the Soviet embassy and demanded the resignation of the Soviet ambassador.

Amin's foreign minister Shah Wali accused Moscow of interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs.

In the aftermath of this debacle, Amin launched a new wave of purges of the government and party. The last remaining Parcham members on the central committee were sacked. Amin also relied more and more on military and police repression to counter opposition. He placed his brother, Assadullah Amin, in charge of a new secret police agency. The head of the trade union federation was replaced with an Amin-appointee.

By November, Amin's regime had lost control of 23 of the country's 28 provinces.

The Soviet leaders not only believed that Amin's policies would fuel the counter-revolution, paving the way for the creation of an anti-Soviet, pro-imperialist Islamic state, but were now convinced that Amin was preparing to, in the words of one Soviet official, "do a Sadat on us" (referring to the defection of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to become a US ally earlier in the 1970s) and realign Afghanistan with US imperialism. Head of the KGB Yuri Andropov had earlier reported to Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev that Amin was conducting "behind-the-scenes activities which may mean his political reorientation to the West".

Whatever the truth, it was the very real likelihood that Amin would facilitate the overthrow of the PDPA government that led the Soviet leadership on December 12, 1979, to decide to send a large number of Soviet troops to Afghanistan. Andropov had told the Soviet leaders that exiled PDPA leaders, including Parcham leader Babrak Karmal, "had, without changing their plans for an uprising [against Amin], appealed to us for assistance, including military assistance if needed".

On the December 24, the main body of the 50,000-strong Soviet force began to enter northern Afghanistan. Just before night fell on December 27, a force of around 1000 elite Soviet troops, who had arrived in Kabul in November for the special operation, stormed the presidential palace and gunned down Amin. Karmal returned from exile in Prague and was named president of Afghanistan.

Even though the Stalinist CPSU leaders' decision to militarily intervene was motivated by to protect the Soviet Union's southern border from imperialist encroachment, its by-product was to stall the victory of the reactionary *mujaheddin* terrorists and to preserve the social gains of Afghan revolution.

Had the *mujaheddin*, massively backed by Washington, the gains of the revolution would have been drowned in blood on a scale comparable to that of Indonesia in 1965 and Chile in 1973. The Soviet intervention meant that it was possible that, in time, that

the counter-revolution could have been defeated and the lives of Afghanistan's workers and peasants improved immensely.

(It was for these reasons that the Democratic Socialist Party at the time defended the Soviet intervention — without excusing or glossing over Moscow's bureaucratic methods and conservative motivations. The barbarity and chaos that descended on Afghanistan following the eventual fall of the PDPA government, 12 years later in 1992, and the takeover of Kabul by Washington's *mujaheddin* allies, followed by vicious four-year civil war and the rise of the Taliban, only underline the correctness of the stand the DSP took to oppose the US-backed counter-revolution.)

'National reconciliation'

Karmal's government attempted to undo the damage done by the Amin regime. It pledged to defend the program of the April revolution and instituted a policy of "national reconciliation". It defined its goals as the "liquidation of the vestiges of feudalism, the expansion of the state sector of the economy, the provision of assistance to artisans, medium-sized and small landholders and the continuation of the democratic land reform". Karmal announced that "our direct objective in the present conditions is not the introduction of socialism".

Half the posts in Karmal's government were held by ministers purged by Amin and represented both Khalq and Parcham factions. Three non-PDPA ministers were also in the cabinet, including the commerce minister in the Daud regime. Assadulo Sarvari, a Khalq member, was Karmal's deputy.

Amin's secret police were abolished and thousands of political prisoners were released, many were PDPA members. Karmal announced that new constitution would be drafted that included the right to form political parties and reaffirmed freedom of religion. Money was set aside for the reconstruction of mosques, shrines and Muslim educational institutions.

Some reforms, such as the introduction of co-education were slowed and accompanied by patient explanation. It was no longer made mandatory in literacy classes.

Karmal, interviewed for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine's March-April 1980 *PFLP Bulletin*, stated: "Already we have achieved a kind of reconciliation; negotiations have started with representatives of the national and democratic forces and of the different classes and social groups in the country ... There is also a very remarkable section of the patriotic religious leadership working in the government."

Meanwhile, in contrast to the enlightened political approach it urged upon the PDPA government, Moscow's brutal military tactics seemed devoid of political

sensibility. In tactics reminiscent of Washington's tactics in Vietnam, Soviet forces bombed and burned villages in areas controlled by the *mujaheddin* and littered the countryside with deadly landmines.

The aim was to force Afghan peasants from the rural areas into the government-controlled cities or across the Pakistan or Iranian borders.

As the *mujaheddin* were supplied with increasingly sophisticated anti-aircraft missiles — culminating in the CIA's decision to deliver US stingers in 1986 — Soviet bombs had to be dropped from greater heights, resulting in raids that were more and more inaccurate and caused many more civilian deaths. Understandably, vast numbers of Afghans, even those who did not support the *mujaheddin*, grew to hate the “communists” because of such indiscriminate military tactics.

Washington's hysteria about the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan being part of a move to expand the “Soviet empire” and serve as a stepping stone to the seize the oil-rich Middle East and “warm water” ports was proven false.

As Selig Harrison, a senior associate of the US establishment's Carnegie Endowment and longtime commentator on South Asia, pointed out in 1983 in the US ruling class magazine of debate and discussion, *Foreign Policy*: “Informed American and other Western intelligence sources agree that Moscow has not used the occupation to improve its logistical capabilities ... for offensive action against neighbouring Persian Gulf states ... They have not substantially lengthened runways, expanded their petroleum storage facilities or built [facilities] for parking reserve [air force] squadrons.”

Washington blocks Soviet withdrawal

Until 1988, Washington at every turn blocked attempts to secure a negotiated settlement between the ruling PDPA and sections of the *mujaheddin*, which delayed the withdrawal of Soviet troops for years and prolonged the misery of the Afghan people. Had Washington permitted an early settlement, the dreadful 1992-96 intra-*mujaheddin* civil war and its devastating consequences — including the rise of the Taliban and possibly the appalling mass murders in New York and Washington on September 11 — may have been avoided.

As early as May 1980, the PDPA government proposed that discussions on ending the war be held with Pakistan and Iran, followed by an international conference that would agree to end interference in Afghanistan and the withdrawal of Soviet troops.

In 1982, UN secretary-general Javier Perez de Cueller appointed Diego Cordovez to mediate a settlement in Afghanistan. For the next six years, the progress of indirect talks in Geneva between representatives of Pakistan and Afghanistan — Cordovez was forced to shuttle between the Pakistan and Afghan foreign ministers — was

repeatedly blocked by Washington.

According to the May 4, 1983, *New York Times*, Soviet leader Yuri Andropov told General Zia in December 1982 that Soviet troops would leave Afghanistan “quickly” if Pakistan ended its backing for the *mujaheddin*.

These offers simply required the US and its allies to recognise the PDPA government as the legitimate government of Afghanistan and a legitimate negotiating partner — a fact accepted by the United Nations and scores of other governments.

However, under pressure from Washington, Pakistan and the *mujaheddin* leaders rejected any “peace process” that recognised the Afghan government. Washington, Pakistan and the *mujaheddin* insisted that the PDPA must step down and be replaced by an interim government before any settlement.

The drive to achieve US imperialism’s overriding goals in Afghanistan intensified following the 1980 defeat of the Carter administration by Republican Ronald Reagan.

Washington’s goals remained: to completely obliterate the gains of the 1978 Afghan revolution using the most fanatical, anti-democratic, anti-women Islamic movements; eliminate all traces of the PDPA, politically and physically; and use the Afghanistan war to “bleed” the Soviet Union.

This meshed with Reagan’s broader global agenda to reverse the gains made by anti-imperialist movements and governments — dishonestly dubbed “Soviet expansionism” — during the 1970s by funding and arming counter-revolutionary forces and increasing the “cost” of Soviet support to these movements.

(These “freedom fighters” were little more than cutthroats, bandits and terrorists, such as Renamo in Mozambique, UNITA in Angola, the Nicaraguan contras — and the *mujaheddin* in Afghanistan. Reagan boosted support for the apartheid regime in South Africa and continued prop up dictatorial regimes, like Zia’s in Pakistan, throughout the world.)

On paper, the Reagan administration’s Afghanistan policy was to “seek the earliest possible negotiated political settlement ... to effect the withdrawal of Soviet forces” (Department of State Special Report #112, December 1, 1983).

However, Washington’s true policy was expressed by Charles Cogan, who headed the CIA’s covert operations in Afghanistan in March 1983 when he told a journalist that Pakistan would not sign an accord at the next round of Geneva talks “or ever” because Pakistan dictator Zia had accepted the US view that “Pakistan’s security is best assured by keeping the Russians tied down” in Afghanistan (quoted in Selig Harrison’s “Inside the Afghan Talks”, *Foreign Policy*, Fall 1988. Harrison also reported that US under-secretary of state Lawrence Eagleburger expressed “alarm” that same month at the prospect of a settlement being reached at the next round of Geneva talks.)

In a similar vein, a “high US official” warned of “the political and psychological threat of a pacified Afghanistan”, Selig Harrison reported in the Summer 1983 edition of *Foreign Policy*. The official urged a further increase in aid to the contras as a means of gaining increased leverage in dealing with “Soviet activities” in Central America and eventually bringing about a more “favourable” Afghan settlement.

Reagan increased US weapons shipments to the contras significantly, in both quality and quantity. No longer were weapons supplies restricted to unsophisticated Soviet-models which allowed the US “deniability”. In January 1985, the CIA supplied the Swiss-made Oerlikon anti-aircraft missile; months later the more sophisticated British-made Blowpipe missile was provided; and in 1986, Reagan approved the supply of US-made Stinger shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles, the most sophisticated weapon of its kind at that time, to the *mujaheddin*.

A National Security Decision Directive was signed by Reagan in April 1985 which called for “all means available” to be employed to defeat Soviet troops in Afghanistan. (This ultimately included Congress-approved funding of more than US\$3 billion — more than all other CIA covert operations in the 1980s combined, according to the Digital National Security Archive. Billions more was sent covertly; the Saudi Arabian monarchy also provided financial support equal to that provided by Washington.)

Each boost in US covert aid to the *mujaheddin* sabotaged progress at the UN-mediated talks. Cordovez announced in May 1983 that “95% of the text ... of a comprehensive settlement was ready” which committed the Soviet Union to a phased troop withdrawal within a finite time period, in return for Pakistan agreeing to end its support for the contras and barring weapon shipments passing through its territory. In response, Washington leaked news that \$50 million worth of weapons was being shipped to the *mujaheddin*. The talks broke down.

Weeks later, Pakistan foreign minister Yaqub Khan visited Washington. The detrimental impact of hosting millions of Afghan refugees had made Pakistan more interested in a settlement at this time. Khan told US secretary of State George Shultz and vice-president George Bush senior that thought Moscow was serious about withdrawing its troops. However, Shultz and Bush told Khan that Washington was not interested in a “graceful” Soviet withdrawal.

In March 1986, Cordovez announced after visits to Kabul, Islamabad and Moscow that he had “all the elements of a comprehensive settlement”. A few weeks later the decision to supply the Stingers was announced by the US.

In March 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev became leader of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev was determined to reach a settlement that would allow Soviet troops to leave Afghanistan. This would end a military commitment that was damaging the Soviet

Union economically, socially and politically.

For Gorbachev, improving relations with the West was paramount; the fate of the PDPA and the Afghan revolution came a poor second. While he was also keen to secure a withdrawal that would not be seen as breaching his government's legal obligations to the legitimate government of Afghanistan, he was determined to cut a deal, come what may.

Soviet representatives at the fifth round of the UN-mediated Geneva talks in June 1985 proposed that: Afghanistan and Pakistan agree to mutual non-interference in each other's domestic affairs (meaning all aid and sanctuary for rebel groups would cease); Washington and Moscow agree to act as "guarantors" on behalf of their allies; the Soviet Union agree to a timetable for withdrawal; and the aid cutoff to the *mujaheddin* begin on "day one" of the Soviet withdrawal. Cordovez won formal Pakistani-Afghan agreement on the draft deal. Moscow quickly endorsed it.

Washington was put on the spot. It stalled answering whether it would be willing to go guarantor for Pakistan until the seventh round of talks in December 1985.

Washington was also opposed to Pakistan's acceptance of the "day one" formula. Washington remained implacably opposed to the survival of the PDPA government after a Soviet withdrawal and was scrambling for a way to maintain the flow of support to the *mujaheddin*.

On April 29, 1987, the US demanded that only the seven-party *mujaheddin* alliance based in Pakistan be allowed to determine which groups participate in an interim government. It was a crude attempt to exclude the PDPA.

In July, Cordovez proposed that the UN convene a meeting of Afghan leaders to set up "broadly based transitional arrangements" that would include the seven *mujaheddin* parties, the PDPA government and "selected personalities" in exile. Moscow informally endorsed the proposal.

In something of a breakthrough, Washington accepted Cordovez's "interim arrangement", but insisted that Soviet troops withdraw first. Washington argued for this by claiming that haggling between the factions around who should be in an interim regime would delay the Soviet withdrawal.

But behind that rationale, according to Selig Harrison, "lay the privately expressed belief that resistance forces would quickly displace [the PDPA] militarily after a withdrawal and would not have to make political compromises ... Zia wanted to install a Kabul regime headed by Islamic fundamentalist proteges, notably Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-i Islami. Islamabad was also anxious to prevent the return of [king] Zahir Shah, who personified Afghan nationalist opposition to Pakistani hegemony."

On October 30, 1987, the Soviet Union called Washington's bluff, dropping its

earlier position that the interim regime be in place prior to a Soviet withdrawal. In September, the CPSU's *Pravda* newspaper had announced that the Soviet Union was prepared to accept a 12-month timetable for the withdrawal of its troops.

On February 8, 1988, Gorbachev surprised the UN and Washington when he unilaterally announced that Soviet troops would begin their withdrawal on May 15, to be completed by February 1989. However, even this was not enough to secure Washington's agreement.

Months before, according to the Digital National Security Archive, right-wing US legislators had secured a promise from Reagan that the US would continue to fund the *mujaheddin* even after Soviet troops had withdrawn. Pakistan too was insisting that it would not sign a final agreement that did not provide for a *mujaheddin*-dominated interim government to be installed.

US secretary of state George Shultz met with Soviet officials and proposed "negative symmetry", meaning that Washington would stop its funding and arming the *mujaheddin* on if Moscow would also cut all military aid to the government in Kabul. The Soviet Union and the Afghan government rejected this because it would mean giving illegal foreign-backed guerillas the same legitimacy as the UN-recognised government.

On March 5, the US stated that it would not act as guarantor for the final agreement unless "positive symmetry" was accepted by the Soviet government, meaning that as long as the Soviet Union continued to provide economic and military assistance to the Afghan government after the withdrawal of Soviet troops, Washington would continue to aid the anti-government contras.

The "Geneva Accords" were formally signed by the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan on April 14, 1988. Kabul and Islamabad agreed to refrain from any interference in each others' affairs and allow Afghan refugees to return home. Soviet troops would be out of Afghanistan by February 1989. The governments of the USSR and the USA agreed to act as guarantors of the deal.

However, a separate statement was signed by Shultz and Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze that acknowledged the US demand for "positive symmetry". This blatantly contradicted the main content of the accords, which stated each party agrees to "prevent within its territory the training, equipping, financing and recruitment of mercenaries from whatever origin for the purpose of hostile activities against the other" party.

Yet, according to the April 15, 1988, *New York Times*, Shultz said straight after the signing of the accords that there was "nothing in the agreement that restricts" continued US aid to the contras. Incredibly, Pakistan's foreign minister also claimed the accords

did not prevent Pakistan from aiding the *mujaheddin*.

Shevardnadze protested that he had “honestly and openly said to ... Shultz that the US had no legal right to deliver arms to forces engaged in the struggle against the legitimate government”. However, it was clear that the PDPA after February 15, 1989 would have to sink or swim.

The US had urged Pakistan to sign, even though its demand that a *mujaheddin* government be in place first was not met. Washington told Zia that Moscow was going to pull its troops out, with or without an agreement. And anyway, Washington assured, without Soviet troops, the PDPA government would fall soon after.

For its part, the Soviet leadership resisted the demand that the PDPA government be replaced. Gorbachev stated at the accords’ signing that the composition of the Afghan government “is purely an internal Afghan issue. It can only be resolved by the Afghans themselves ... When it is hinted to us that the Soviet Union should take part in talks on the issue of a coalition government, or even talk to third countries, our answer is firm and clear: ‘Don’t expect us to do it. It is none of our business. Or yours for that matter.’”

PDPA government defies predictions

The last Soviet soldier departed Afghanistan on schedule on May 15, 1989. Gorbachev had kept his bargain, even though Washington had pulled a swifty and refused to stop funding the counter-revolutionary cutthroats of the *mujaheddin*.

The consensus held by the US, its local and Western allies and the capitalist press commentators was that the PDPA government, then led by President Najibullah, would fall within months, if not weeks, of the withdrawal of Soviet troops. Most of the smart-arse Western journalists and diplomats who gathered at the American Club in Peshawar to take bets on how long the PDPA government would last lost their money.

Washington and its loyal scribes had come to believe their own propaganda. The PDPA government was not the “Soviet puppet” that came had to power in a “Soviet-engineered coup” that they convinced themselves it was. It had far greater support and deeper social roots in Afghan society than it was given credit for, especially in the cities.

At the time of the signing of the Geneva Accords, the PDPA claimed a membership of 250,000. The mass youth, women’s and other people’s organisations had a combined membership of 750,000. Tens of thousands turned out in Jalalabad and Kabul to farewell Soviet “soldier-internationalists”, as they were described on banners waved by onlookers.

During the civil war, more than 3 million Afghans voted with their feet and decided take their chances in government-controlled cities rather than in the *mujaheddin*-

dominated refugee camps in Pakistan, or in Iran.

As well, tens of thousands of people were committed to the PDPA because of government employment and/or sympathy with its objectives. They considered their fates to be bound with that of the government. Faced with a backward counter-revolution that had shown it would give no quarter should it seize power, the populations of the cities — especially women — fought with determination to prevent a *mujaheddin* victory.

Najibullah had become Afghan president in 1986. His government continued Babrak Karmal's policy of national reconciliation and stepped up efforts to achieve a political settlement to the Afghan civil war. The Najibullah government proposed a unilateral ceasefire with the *mujaheddin* and offered posts to rebel leaders in a coalition government.

In March, Afghan foreign minister Abdul Wakil invited *mujaheddin* leaders, the former king Zahir Shah and ex-ministers from previous governments to join a government of national unity "to rebuild the war-torn country". Parliamentary elections in April 1988 resulted in a non-PDPA member, Mohammad Hassan Sharq, becoming prime minister; 62 parliamentary seats were left vacant for the "opposition".

Najibullah addressed the UN General Assembly and stated that the "flexibility of the present leadership of Afghanistan also includes its decision to give up monopoly on power, the introduction of parliament on the basis of party competition and granting of all political, social and economic rights and privileges to those who are returning."

The PDPA government had also achieved considerable success in reaching peace agreements with individual *mujaheddin* warlords.

In 1988, 160 guerilla commanders (there were an estimated 2000 such commanders inside Afghanistan in 1988) had reached agreements and more than 750 were negotiating. The most important of these was an agreement with General Abdul Rashid Dostum, who controlled a powerful rebel army in northern Afghanistan around Mazar-i-Sharif.

Militarily, the PDPA held its own without Soviet assistance. On February 1, 1989, as the last of the Soviet troops were crossing the Amu Darya River, Washington began what it believed would be the final offensive against the PDPA. In what the Afghan government called "psychological war", the US withdrew its embassy from Kabul. Other Western countries followed suit.

The following day, Washington's favoured *mujaheddin* leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar declared that "Kabul will fall in weeks, not months, without any major onslaught on the city". The contras and Washington expected wholesale defections of the Afghan armed forces to the *mujaheddin*. It was not to be. As with Jalalabad and

Khandahar, two cities which had been being successfully defended solely by Afghan troops for several months without Soviet troops, Kabul too would hold out.

Jalalabad

According to the February 11, 1989, *New York Times*, the US National Security Council held a secret meeting on February 9 at which, predicting the fall of Najibullah within three-six months, recommended that US President George Bush senior's arm the *mujaheddin* for "one more fighting season".

In Islamabad, US and Pakistani officials constructed a plan in which the *mujaheddin* parties would form an "Afghan Interim Government". The AIG would set itself up in the first Afghan city the *mujaheddin* was able to capture. Washington would then recognise the AIG as the legitimate government of Afghanistan and begin to massively funnel arms and funds to it.

The CIA and Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence Directorate chose Jalalabad as the AIG's new capital. Jalalabad was strategically located between the *mujaheddin*'s base in Peshawar and Kabul. The April 23, 1989, *New York Times* revealed that the attack had been planned by the Pakistan military at a meeting attended by US ambassador to Pakistan Robert Oakley — with no *mujaheddin* representatives present!

All eyes were on the first post-Soviet withdrawal test of strength between the PDPA government and the US-backed *mujaheddin*. The two-month siege of Jalalabad — in which more than 1000 *mujaheddin* were killed, the largest number killed in any battle in the Afghan civil war — resulted in a decisive *mujaheddin* failure.

This was despite the fact that the battle, which began on March 5, involved thousands of heavily armed guerillas, backed by hundreds of religious fanatic mercenaries from Arab states. An estimated 3000 Pakistani troops also participated. *Mujaheddin* rockets, which were indiscriminately fired into the city, killed hundreds of civilians.

Displaying great confidence in its support, the PDPA government distributed weapons to teachers, students and workers. In July, an Afghan army counteroffensive drove the *mujaheddin* from villages surrounding Jalalabad and recaptured the military garrison town of Samarkhel, the fall of which was the only significant *mujaheddin* gain since the withdrawal of Soviet troops.

The *mujaheddin*'s failure at Jalalabad strengthened the position of the Najibullah government. The realisation that the PDPA government was not about to fall, despite the billions of dollars that had been poured into the rebel coffers by the US and others, increased pressure on the more realistic elements within the *mujaheddin* to seek a political settlement with the Afghan government.

Najibullah repeated an invitation to rebel commanders based inside the country

to attend talks to end the war and participate in the government. He also proposed that all arms shipments to both sides be halted. "If it is said that we get help from the Soviet Union, then let the arms supplies from both superpowers be cut to put an end to the war", Najibullah told the March 2, 1989 *Far Eastern Economic Review*.

The secretary of the government's defence council Abdul Haq Olumi reported in July 1989 that peace agreements with 54,000 rebels had been concluded, while negotiations with 50,000 more continued. The government offered local rebel leaders autonomy and government funding. In the last half of 1989, the war in the countryside was relatively quiet. Rocket attacks on Kabul tapered off and truck convoys rolled in from the Soviet border relatively unhindered.

In mid-June, Najibullah appeared on live television for three nights running before a large audience which fired critical questions at him. Najibullah's government also reinstated the *Loya Jirga*, the great tribal council that has traditionally been the governing body in Afghanistan. The *Loya Jirga* appointed a new National Reconciliation Committee to oversee hoped-for negotiations. Its seven members included a former minister under Zahir Shah's pre-1973 rule, a royal family member, a former police commandant, a law professor and a former attorney-general.

Kabul again proposed a ceasefire, to be followed by a national peace conference, the formation of either a neutral or a coalition interim government, the drafting of a constitution for submission to the *Loya Jirga* and elections. Najibullah even offered to step down if it would bring peace.

Speaking of the elections, an Afghan government spokesperson told the July 10, 1989, *Time* magazine, "I think we would win. We are the lesser of two evils. We have an established record of running the government, and we have plans for the future."

Without a foreign enemy, the *mujaheddin* appeared increasingly to be stooges of Pakistan and the CIA. The prominence of the extreme Islamic party, Hizb-i-Islami, led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, also helped to discredit the rebels. The PDPA government relentlessly exposed his subservience to the Pakistani secret service, dating back to an unsuccessful uprising in Kabul he led in 1975, as well as his involvement in acid attacks on unveiled women in Kabul at the same time.

"Between the two of them, Najibullah is more acceptable, for people in the cities and those who are used to any kind of civilised life. If Hekmatyar comes to power, I will leave Afghanistan", a city dweller not friendly to the PDPA was quoted as saying in the July 13, 1989 *Far Eastern Economic Review*.

The failure of the rebels' drive to take Jalalabad and the growing frictions among the various guerilla factions forced the Pakistan government, led by Benazir Bhutto, to begin to consider a political settlement. In May, Bhutto sacked the head of Pakistani

military intelligence Lieutenant-General Hamid Gul, who was the key official in the channelling of the massive US military aid to the most extreme of the Afghan contras.

In Washington, doubts about Hekmatyar, the extremist whose faction had received the lion's share of the US\$6 billion in US and Saudi largess sent to the *mujaheddin*, began to be raised. (Hekmatyar would be abandoned after he voiced support for Iraq during the 1991 Gulf War.)

In June 1989, Edmund McWilliams, the special US envoy to the *mujaheddin*, estimated that a political settlement favourable to the *mujaheddin* was impossible if the Pakistan-based leaders continued to call the shots.

The ISI-engineered *shura* that elected the AIG was far from representative of the PDPA's opponents. It excluded representatives of the traditional tribal Pashtun leaderships, supporters of the former king and Afghanistan's northern ethnic and religious minorities. The eight or so Iran-based Shiite parties did not take part.

The ISI's favourites, Abdul Rasul Sayyaf and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, were imposed as prime minister and foreign minister respectively. The least important AIG ministries went to Jamiat-i-Islami, the party of Burhanuddin Rabbani and Ahmad Shah Massoud. Massoud was arguably the rebels' most formidable military leader.

This marginalisation was due to Rabbani and Massoud's base being among the Tajik and Uzbek populations of northern Afghanistan.

Massoud refused to allow the ISI to dictate to him and subsequently received very little aid. "This year, we have not received even a single map", he told the October 6, 1989, *L'Express*.

It was also common knowledge in Washington that Hekmatyar hoarded much of the US weaponry he received via the ISI or sold it on the black market.

McWilliams recommended that the US put less emphasis on a military solution and pressure Pakistan to stop favouring Hekmatyar. US ambassador Robert Oakley had McWilliams "reassigned".

Washington was not yet willing to allow peace to come to Afghanistan. A "senior US official" told Ahmed Rashid of the *Far Eastern Economic Review*: "We are determined to stay the course with the *mujaheddin* and hang tough with the Soviets. The *mujaheddin* deserve one more fighting season which will decide the outcome of the war in their favour." Soviet ambassador to Afghanistan Yuli Vorontsov described this US policy as: "Give war a chance. This is an artificial prolongation of the war."

That sentiment was beginning to be shared even in Washington. Three US senators asked for a major review of what they described as the "folly of present US policy". The chairperson of the House Committee on Intelligence, Anthony Beilenson, also called for a "mutual cutoff of all military aid to Afghanistan, to be negotiated with

Moscow.”

In July, 1989, Hekmatyar’s forces ambushed and slaughtered 30 commanders of Massoud’s army as they were returning from a strategy meeting. Hekmatyar left the AIG in August after AIG president Sibghatullah Mojadedi denounced the massacre and accused Hekmatyar of killing hundreds of his political opponents. Yet, even after this, Hekmatyar’s faction continued to get most of the available arms and funds.

Throughout the rest of 1989 and early 1990, the Afghan policies of the US and Pakistan were at an impasse. Despite the hundred of millions of dollars being injected into the Afghan contra’s warchests annually, fighting within Afghanistan was at an all-time low, and many internal *mujaheddin* commanders had agreed to ceasefires and non-aggression pacts in exchange for autonomy.

The internal *mujaheddin* groups were now being dismissed by the Pakistan-based “interim government” with derision. The AIG, established under the auspices of the ISI, was dominated by pro-Pakistan parties dominated by the majority Pashtun ethnic group, to the exclusion of the internal groups and those *mujaheddin* groups from the north which were composed mainly of ethnic and Shiite minorities.

The Najibullah government’s growing domestic and international acceptance led to an important breakthrough. In February, 1990, US Secretary of State James Baker told his Soviet counterpart, Eduard Shevardnadze, that the US no longer demanded that Najibullah resign before a settlement.

The US also began to pressure the discredited AIG to hold a *shura* or assembly to dissolve itself and elect a more representative group in preparation for the negotiations with Najibullah that now seemed inevitable — even to Washington. In the AIG’s place was proposed a body consisting of 10 representatives from each of Afghanistan’s 217 districts, as well as a small number from the Pakistan and Iran-based parties.

This plan failed miserably when the Pakistan-based parties refused to agree. A press conference scheduled for February 9 to announce the *shura* was cancelled, and the AIG announced that the meeting had been postponed indefinitely. The US special envoy to the *mujaheddin*, Peter Tomsen, also cancelled a press briefing.

Tomsen had spent almost a month at the Peshawar *mujaheddin* headquarters trying to convince the AIG to accept the US plan.

His failure left the US without a credible alternative to the PDPA government.

Why the PDPA fell

The Najibullah government survived two more “fighting seasons” by mid-1991. In 1991, the Bush senior administration again signalled that it was prepared to consider a role for the PDPA in an interim arrangement to end the war (without however

ending military support for the *mujaheddin*). Several *mujaheddin* representatives negotiated with Najibullah's government in talks in Geneva.

Peace prevailed in several parts of Afghanistan after agreements had been entered into. The military situation was a stalemate.

What led to defeat of the PDPA government was outside its control— the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union. Contrary to the US mantra that the PDPA government was a puppet of the Soviet Union, the PDPA government outlived its supposed “puppeteer”, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, by seven months.

A by-product of the failed Stalinist coup of August 1991 in the Soviet Union, which resulted in the banning of the CPSU by President Boris Yeltsin and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991, was cutoff in Soviet military supplies to the Afghan government on January 1, 1992. Meanwhile, US arms and funds continued to flow to the *mujaheddin*.

It is the supreme irony that when the Najibullah government finally fell, it was not to the main recipients of the billions funnelled through the ISI by the CIA.

The decisive event that sealed the PDPA's fate was General Abdul Rashid Dostum army's breaking of its peace agreement with Kabul to join forces with Ahmad Shah Massoud in early 1992. The Hazara faction Hizb-i-Wahdat also joined the coalition that they named the Northern Alliance.

On April 15, non-Pashtun forces that had been allied to the government mutinied and took control of Kabul airport. Najibullah took refuge in the UN compound in Kabul, where he remained until he was murdered by the Taliban in 1996. Massoud took Kabul on April 25, 1992. The Northern Alliance factions reached an agreement that excluded Hekmatyar. In June, Rabbani became the president of the Islamic State of Afghanistan. Hekmatyar's forces began to bombard Kabul with rockets. The rest of the country was carved up between various *mujaheddin* factions and warlords.

Washington had finally achieved its goals of destroying the Afghan revolution, crushing the PDPA and “bleeding” the Soviet Union. The *mujaheddin* had taken power. The stage was set for the beginning of a new and terrible civil war that was to see more Afghans killed in the next five years than were killed in the entire 1978-1992 period. It would culminate in the rise to power of a new Pakistan-backed, US-approved force — the Taliban. ■

How the CIA Created Osama bin Laden

By Norm Dixon

“Throughout the world ... its agents, client states and satellites are on the defensive — on the moral defensive, the intellectual defensive, and the political and economic defensive. Freedom movements arise and assert themselves. They’re doing so on almost every continent populated by man — in the hills of Afghanistan, in Angola, in Kampuchea, in Central America ... [They are] freedom fighters.”

Is this a call to *jihad* (holy war) taken from one of Islamic fundamentalist Osama bin Laden’s notorious *fatwas*? Or perhaps a communique issued by the repressive Taliban regime in Kabul?

In fact, this glowing praise of the murderous exploits of today’s supporters of arch-terrorist bin Laden and his Taliban collaborators, and their holy war against the “evil empire”, was issued by US President Ronald Reagan on March 8, 1985. The “evil empire” was the Soviet Union, as well as Third World movements fighting US-backed colonialism, apartheid and dictatorship.

How things change. In the aftermath of a series of terrorist atrocities — the most despicable being the mass murder of more than 6000 working people in New York and Washington on September 11 — bin Laden the “freedom fighter” is now lambasted by US leaders and the Western mass media as a “terrorist mastermind” and an “evildoer”.

Yet the US government refuses to admit its central role in creating the vicious movement that spawned bin Laden, the Taliban and Islamic fundamentalist terrorists that plague Algeria and Egypt — and perhaps the disaster that befell New York.

The mass media has also downplayed the origins of bin Laden and his toxic brand of Islamic fundamentalism.

Mujaheddin

In April 1978, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) seized power in Afghanistan in reaction to a crackdown against the party by that country's repressive government.

The PDPA was committed to a radical land reform that favoured the peasants, trade union rights, an expansion of education and social services, equality for women and the separation of church and state. The PDPA also supported strengthening Afghanistan's relationship with the Soviet Union.

Such policies enraged the wealthy semi-feudal landlords, the Muslim religious establishment (many mullahs were also big landlords) and the tribal chiefs. They immediately began organising resistance to the government's progressive policies, under the guise of defending Islam.

Washington, fearing the spread of Soviet influence (and worse the new government's radical example) to its allies in Pakistan, Iran and the Gulf states, immediately offered support to the Afghan *mujaheddin*, as the "contra" force was known.

Following an internal PDPA power struggle in December 1979 which toppled Afghanistan's leader, thousands of Soviet troops entered the country to prevent the new government's fall. This only galvanised the disparate fundamentalist factions. Their reactionary *jihad* now gained legitimacy as a "national liberation" struggle in the eyes of many Afghans.

The Soviet Union was eventually to withdraw from Afghanistan in 1989 and the *mujaheddin* captured the capital, Kabul, in 1992.

Between 1978 and 1992, the US government poured at least US\$6 billion (some estimates range as high as \$20 billion) worth of arms, training and funds to prop up the *mujaheddin* factions. Other Western governments, as well as oil-rich Saudi Arabia, kicked in as much again. Wealthy Arab fanatics, like Osama bin Laden, provided millions more.

Washington's policy in Afghanistan was shaped by US President Jimmy Carter's national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and was continued by his successors. His plan went far beyond simply forcing Soviet troops to withdraw; rather it aimed to foster an international movement to spread Islamic fanaticism into the Muslim Central Asian Soviet republics to destabilise the Soviet Union.

Brzezinski's grand plan coincided with Pakistan military dictator General Zia ul-Haq's own ambitions to dominate the region. US-run Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe beamed Islamic fundamentalist tirades across Central Asia (while paradoxically denouncing the "Islamic revolution" that toppled the pro-US Shah of Iran in 1979).

Washington's favoured *mujaheddin* faction was one of the most extreme, led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. The West's distaste for terrorism did not apply to this unsavoury "freedom fighter". Hekmatyar was notorious in the 1970s for throwing acid in the faces of women who refused to wear the veil.

After the *mujaheddin* took Kabul in 1992, Hekmatyar's forces rained US-supplied missiles and rockets on that city — killing at least 2000 civilians — until the new government agreed to give him the post of prime minister. Osama bin Laden was a close associate of Hekmatyar and his faction.

Hekmatyar was also infamous for his side trade in the cultivation and trafficking in opium. Backing of the *mujaheddin* from the CIA coincided with a boom in the drug business. Within two years, the Afghanistan-Pakistan border was the world's single largest source of heroin, supplying 60% of US drug users.

In 1995, the former director of the CIA's operation in Afghanistan was unrepentant about the explosion in the flow of drugs: "Our main mission was to do as much damage as possible to the Soviets ... There was a fallout in terms of drugs, yes. But the main objective was accomplished. The Soviets left Afghanistan."

Made in the USA

According to Ahmed Rashid, a correspondent for the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, in 1986 CIA chief William Casey committed CIA support to a longstanding ISI proposal to recruit people from around the world to join the Afghan *jihād*. At least 100,000 Islamic militants flocked to Pakistan between 1982 and 1992 (some 60,000 attended fundamentalist schools in Pakistan without necessarily taking part in the fighting).

John Cooley, a former journalist with the US ABC television network and author of *Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America and International Terrorism*, has revealed that Muslims recruited in the US for the *mujaheddin* were sent to Camp Peary, the CIA's spy training camp in Virginia, where young Afghans, Arabs from Egypt and Jordan, and even some African-American "black Muslims" were taught "sabotage skills".

The November 1, 1998, British *Independent* reported that one of those charged with the 1998 bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, Ali Mohammed, had trained "bin Laden's operatives" in 1989.

These "operatives" were recruited at the al Kifah Refugee Centre in Brooklyn, New York, given paramilitary training in the New York area and then sent to Afghanistan with US assistance to join Hekmatyar's forces. Mohammed was a member of the US army's elite Green Berets.

The program, reported the *Independent*, was part of a Washington-approved plan called "Operation Cyclone".

In Pakistan, recruits, money and equipment were distributed to the *mujaheddin* factions by an organisation known as Maktab al Khidamar (Office of Services — MAK).

MAK was a front for Pakistan's CIA, the Inter-Service Intelligence Directorate. The ISI was the first recipient of the vast bulk of CIA and Saudi Arabian covert assistance for the Afghan contras. Bin Laden was one of three people who ran MAK. In 1989, he took overall charge of MAK.

Among those trained by Mohammed were El Sayyid Nosair, who was jailed in 1995 for killing Israeli rightist Rabbi Meir Kahane and plotting with others to bomb New York landmarks, including the World Trade Center in 1993.

The *Independent* also suggested that Shiekh Omar Abdel-Rahman, an Egyptian religious leader also jailed for the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, was also part of Operation Cyclone. He entered the US in 1990 with the CIA's approval. A confidential CIA report concluded that the agency was "partly culpable" for the 1993 World Trade Center blast, the *Independent* reported.

Bin Laden

Osama bin Laden, one of 20 sons of a billionaire construction magnate, arrived in Afghanistan to join the *jihad* in 1980. An austere religious fanatic and business tycoon, bin Laden specialised in recruiting, financing and training the estimated 35,000 non-Afghan mercenaries who joined the *mujaheddin*.

The bin Laden family is a prominent pillar of the Saudi Arabian ruling class, with close personal, financial and political ties to that country's pro-US royal family.

Bin Laden senior was appointed Saudi Arabia's minister of public works as a favour by King Faisal. The new minister awarded his own construction companies lucrative contracts to rebuild Islam's holiest mosques in Mecca and Medina. In the process, the bin Laden family company in 1966 became the world's largest private construction company.

Osama bin Laden's father died in 1968. Until 1994, he had access to the dividends from this ill-gotten business empire.

(Bin Laden junior's oft-quoted personal fortune of US\$200-300 million has been arrived at by the US State Department by dividing today's value of the bin Laden family net worth — estimated to be US\$5 billion — by the number of bin Laden senior's sons. A fact rarely mentioned is that in 1994 the bin Laden family disowned Osama and took control of his share.)

Osama's military and business adventures in Afghanistan had the blessing of the bin Laden dynasty and the reactionary Saudi Arabian regime. His close working

relationship with MAK also meant that the CIA was fully aware of his activities.

Milt Bearden, the CIA's station chief in Pakistan from 1986 to 1989, admitted to the January 24, 2000, *New Yorker* that while he never personally met bin Laden: "Did I know that he was out there? Yes, I did ... [Guys like] bin Laden were bringing \$20-\$25 million a month from other Saudis and Gulf Arabs to underwrite the war. And that is a lot of money. It's an extra \$200-\$300 million a year. And this is what bin Laden did."

In 1986, bin Laden brought heavy construction equipment from Saudi Arabia to Afghanistan. Using his extensive knowledge of construction techniques (he has a degree in civil engineering), he built "training camps", some dug deep into the sides of mountains, and built roads to reach them.

These camps, now dubbed "terrorist universities" by Washington, were built in collaboration with the ISI and the CIA. The Afghan contra fighters, including the tens of thousands of mercenaries recruited and paid for by bin Laden, were armed by the CIA. Pakistan, the US and Britain provided military trainers.

Tom Carew, a former British SAS soldier who secretly fought for the *mujaheddin* told the August 13, 2000, *British Observer*, "The Americans were keen to teach the Afghans the techniques of urban terrorism — car bombing and so on — so that they could strike at the Russians in major towns ... Many of them are now using their knowledge and expertise to wage war on everything they hate."

Al Qaeda (the Base), bin Laden's organisation, was established in 1987-88 to run the camps and other business enterprises. It is a tightly-run capitalist holding company — albeit one that integrates the operations of a mercenary force and related logistical services with "legitimate" business operations.

Bin Laden has simply continued to do the job he was asked to do in Afghanistan during the 1980s — fund, feed and train mercenaries. All that has changed is his primary customer. Then it was the ISI and, behind the scenes, the CIA. Today, his services are utilised primarily by the reactionary Taliban regime.

Bin Laden only became a "terrorist" in US eyes when he fell out with the Saudi royal family over its decision to allow more than 540,000 US troops to be stationed on Saudi soil following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

When thousands of US troops remained in Saudi Arabia after the end of the Gulf War, bin Laden's anger turned to outright opposition. He declared that Saudi Arabia and other regimes — such as Egypt — in the Middle East were puppets of the US, just as the PDPA government of Afghanistan had been a puppet of the Soviet Union.

He called for the overthrow of these client regimes and declared it the duty of all Muslims to drive the US out of the Gulf states. In 1994, he was stripped of his Saudi citizenship and forced to leave the country. His assets there were frozen.

After a period in Sudan, he returned to Afghanistan in May 1996. He refurbished the camps he had helped build during the Afghan war and offered the facilities and services — and thousands of his mercenaries — to the Taliban, which took power that September.

Today, bin Laden's private army of non-Afghan religious fanatics is a key prop of the Taliban regime.

Prior to the devastating September 11 attack on the twin towers of World Trade Center, US ruling-class figures remained unrepentant about the consequences of their dirty deals with the likes of bin Laden, Hekmatyar and the Taliban. Since the awful attack, they have been downright hypocritical.

In an August 28, 1998, report posted on MSNBC, Michael Moran quotes Senator Orrin Hatch, who was a senior member of the Senate Intelligence Committee which approved US dealings with the *mujaheddin*, as saying he would make “the same call again”, even knowing what bin Laden would become.

“It was worth it. Those were very important, pivotal matters that played an important role in the downfall of the Soviet Union.”

Hatch today is one of the most gung-ho voices demanding military retaliation.

Another face that has appeared repeatedly on television screens since the attack has been Vincent Cannistrano, described as a former CIA chief of “counter-terrorism operations”.

Cannistrano is certainly an expert on terrorists like bin Laden, because he directed their “work”. He was in charge of the CIA-backed Nicaraguan contras during the early 1980s. In 1984, he became the supervisor of covert aid to the Afghan *mujaheddin* for the US National Security Council.

The last word goes to Zbigniew Brzezinski: “What was more important in the world view of history? The Taliban or the fall of the Soviet Empire? A few stirred up Muslims or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the Cold War?” ■

Taliban: Made By the USA

By Norm Dixon

Since the appalling acts of mass murder in New York and Washington on September 11, US President George Bush has at times sounded like a fire-and-brimstone preacher.

With homespun, Bible-inspired homilies, Bush has warned that the “evildoers” — Osama bin Laden and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan that shelters him — will pay for their sins. However, Bush has avoided the most pertinent and illuminating Biblical phrase to explain those terrible events: “You reap what you sow”.

The seeds of what became the Taliban were sown by Washington itself in the rugged mountains and deep valleys of Afghanistan and the badlands of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border region.

In 1978, the left-wing, secular Peoples Democratic Party (PDPA) took power in Afghanistan. Fearing the radical reforms being implemented there would inspire similar demands from the peoples of the region, Washington immediately moved to arm and train counter-revolutionaries — the *mujaheddin* — organised by Afghanistan’s wealthy landlords and its Muslim religious establishment.

When thousands of Soviet troops entered Afghanistan in December 1979 to defend the besieged PDPA government, Washington stepped up its support for the “freedom fighters” (in the Orwellian words of US President Ronald Reagan in 1985).

Fundamentalism

Between 1978 and 1992, the US government poured at least US\$6 billion into the *mujaheddin* factions. Other governments — including Britain, France, China and Iran — also provided arms and funding. Israel even sent rifles, tanks and artillery guns captured during its frequent wars against Arab states.

By 1987, 65,000 tons of weaponry had been being supplied by the US each year. The oil-rich Saudi Arabian monarchy — which was also committed to spreading an

extremely anti-democratic form of Islam known as Wahhabism — matched US contributions to the *mujaheddin* dollar for dollar.

The US plan was enthusiastically embraced by Pakistan military dictator General Zia ul Haq. Zia also promoted state-sponsored Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan. Washington knowingly ignored Pakistan's progress towards the development of nuclear weapons in this period.

Washington and Saudi Arabia funnelled the vast bulk of the assistance through the Zia dictatorship's secret police, the Inter-Service Intelligence Directorate (ISI). The most fundamentalist *mujaheddin* factions received the lion's share of arms and funds — with Washington's full knowledge and support.

In 1986, the CIA agreed to cooperate with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to expand an international network for the recruitment of foreign Muslim fanatics to join the *mujaheddin*. These recruits were primarily drawn from the Arab countries and Pakistan, but some travelled from central and south-east Asia, Africa and North Africa.

In Pakistan, the ISI — through the Maktab al Khidamat (Office of Services) operated by bin Laden — allocated the recruits and distributed CIA and Saudi money and US-supplied arms to the *mujaheddin* factions.

With CIA funds, the ISI built camps for the “trainees” inside Afghanistan. The Pakistan and Saudi state-sponsored religious sects provided “ideological” instruction. The CIA and the British SAS provided training in urban terrorism and guerilla warfare.

The ISI provided training inside Afghanistan. (The ISI trainers had learnt their craft from US army and navy elite forces in US training facilities).

Mass training of *mujaheddin* fighters was also conducted by the Pakistan army's elite Special Services Group. Pakistan's current military ruler, General Pervez Musharraf, spent seven years with the SSG and was involved in training the anti-PDPA contras.

According to the July 19, 1992, *Washington Post*, a “ceaseless stream” of CIA and Pentagon specialists had travelled to the ISI's head office in Pakistan to coordinate the training and operations of the *mujaheddin*.

An estimated 100,000 foreign Islamic militants flocked to the border region in Pakistan between 1982 and 1992. They joined another 120,000 or so Pakistani anti-communist religious fanatics and desperate Afghan refugees who were enrolled in 2500 Saudi-funded fundamentalist *madrassahs* (mosque schools) controlled by Pakistan's state-sponsored Islamic parties. There they were indoctrinated with a brand of Islam inspired by the Wahhabi sect of the Saudi rulers.

Some 35,000 foreigners and tens of thousands of Pakistanis and Afghans were selected from these schools for training by the CIA and ISI to fight for the *mujaheddin*.

All this shaped the most extreme *mujaheddin* factions, including that of Mullah

Mohammed Omar, who later emerged as the Taliban's supreme leader.

On February 15, 1989, the last Soviet troops left Afghanistan. However, the *mujaheddin* was unable to dislodge the PDPA government for another three years. The PDPA government finally fell in April 1992 because Moscow had stopped providing it with military aid as part of a compromise with Washington.

Thieves fall out

With the demise of the Soviet Union and the fall of the PDPA government, Washington's interest in developments in Afghanistan waned. The brutal *mujaheddin* bandits had served their purpose as far as the US was concerned.

The CIA left the job of managing the *mujaheddin* to the ISI. While covert US funding for the *mujaheddin* officially ended in 1992, the contra factions retained huge stockpiles of US-supplied arms — including hundreds of US- and British-supplied surface-to-air missiles.

Nor were they short of funds. Since 1979, the US had turned a blind eye to the *mujaheddin*'s massive opium trafficking and smuggling rackets, which the contras had developed in collaboration with senior officers of the Pakistan military, the ISI and Pakistan-based mafia.

The *mujaheddin* training camps established by the CIA and ISI continued to operate; the ISI continued to provide military and ideological training to Islamic fundamentalists from around the world (five ISI officers were killed in the 1998 US missile attacks on training camps in Afghanistan).

Foreign Afghan war veterans, and recruits who continued to arrive, were now being sent by the ISI to fight in the Kashmir civil war. Thousands of others fanned across the world and put their CIA-perfected skills to use in a range of conflicts and terrorist acts.

Inside Afghanistan, after the *mujaheddin* took Kabul in 1992, the warlords had soon turned on one another. The country was carved up into warring fiefdoms. Kabul was ruled by a succession of *mujaheddin* factions. Their opponents rained mortar bombs and rockets on the city, killing thousands. Rival armies routinely robbed, raped and murdered civilians.

Frustrated at the internecine squabbling, the Pakistani military withdrew support from the existing *mujaheddin* factions and sponsored its own, the Taliban movement, founded in 1994. At first, many Afghans welcomed the new fighters in the hope that they would reject the brutality and corruption of their predecessors. They were to be tragically disappointed.

With Islamabad's assistance, the Taliban rapidly acquired an army of 25,000 troops,

equipped with sophisticated weaponry. Most of these fighters were drawn from the thousands of foreign militants, the tens of thousands of poor Pakistanis and Afghan refugees enrolled in Pakistan's *madrassahs*, hence the name Taliban (meaning "students").

Jane's Defence Weekly in November 1996 estimated that "half of [the] Taliban's manpower and equipment originates in Pakistan under the ISI". Significant numbers of Pakistan army "volunteers" bolstered the Taliban forces.

According to Ahmed Rashid, the respected correspondent for the *Far Eastern Economic Review* and author of *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia* (Yale University Press), between 1994 and 1997 Washington "quietly allowed Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to back the Taliban" and welcomed its victory in September 1996.

(According to Robert Fisk, writing in the September 26 British *Independent*, Saudi Arabia's patronage of the Taliban was overseen by Prince Turki bin Feisel al Saud, head of the Saudi Arabian secret service until he was sacked less than a month before the Saudi government officially severed its diplomatic links with the Taliban on September 25. Turki was known to be an unrepentant supporter of bin Laden.)

In what Rashid describes as "romancing the Taliban", US economic interests took precedence over human rights concerns.

The US kept mum about the Taliban's institutionalised brutality — especially against women — and its massacres of ethnic and Shiite minorities. The Taliban's massive drug running operations were barely mentioned.

The US government had hopes that gas and oil pipelines, worth US\$4.5 billion, from the former Soviet Central Asian republic of Turkmenia to the Arabian Sea via Afghanistan and Pakistan would be constructed if the Taliban's control of Afghanistan could end the civil war.

The US oil company Unocal and Saudi-based Delta Oil had already sewn up a US\$2 billion deal with the Taliban for one of the projects to proceed. (Unocal pulled out of the consortium in December 1998, citing "turmoil" in Afghanistan.)

Washington believed the Taliban promised the best chance of "stability" for the strategically important region. Rashid added that Washington also considered the Taliban "as a convenient foil for Iranian influence in Central Asia".

The US rulers were also keen to enlist the Taliban's influence to rein in the Islamic militants who had been given sanctuary in Afghanistan by it and the ISI, especially those dedicated to overthrowing strategic oil-rich Arab and Central Asian states and US allies.

Only in 1998 did Washington turn against the Taliban regime — with a barrage of

70 or so cruise missiles — because the Taliban refused to control the Islamic fundamentalists it was sheltering within Afghanistan’s borders, the most notorious being bin Laden.

The sudden demotion of Osama bin Laden from “freedom fighter” in the 1980s to “terrorist mastermind” in late 1990s had little to do with the rash of terrorist deeds he began to be accused of at that time. Washington needed to demonise its Islamic fundamentalist Frankenstein monster, which had become a serious threat to its interests in the Middle East and Central Asia.

Oil

The US — as it did 11 years ago before the Gulf War — is mobilising a massive military force to attack a Third World country. The US rulers are not primarily responding to the September 11 mass murders — although that provides a useful justification — just as the 1990-91 US response to Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait had little to do with defending the rights of small states.

Behind all the US rulers’ pious condemnations of terrorism and crocodile tears for the 6000 victims of the September 11 attacks, the real goal of a US attack on Afghanistan will be the same as that of the Gulf War: the US rulers’ need to maintain their military and political domination over the oil-rich states of the Middle East and Persian Gulf.

Control over the oil of the former Soviet Central Asian states is also a new and increasingly important factor in US policy.

Addressing a conference in December 1996, then deputy director for intelligence at the CIA, John C. Gannon, was candid: “The area of the world where energy supplies are most abundant and at the same time most vulnerable is the Persian Gulf ... As a consequence, the US will need to ... remain engaged in the Persian Gulf to safeguard the flow of vital oil supplies ... There’s no room to be complacent. It was six years ago that the United States and its allies were building up the forces and collectively spending more than \$60 billion to ensure the security of oil supplies in the Gulf.”

“Energy security”, as ruling-class pundits refer to US control of the world’s oil supply, is becoming a greater problem. The developed capitalist countries are becoming more dependent on Middle Eastern oil, not less. An economic recession makes the US capitalist rulers’ desire to keep and extend their control of the world’s main oil reserves even more essential.

Central to US political domination of the Middle East is the existence of the imperialist colonial-settler state of Israel — Washington’s key ally in the region — and the pro-US regimes in Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, Egypt and Jordan.

Bin Laden only became a “terrorist” in US propaganda when he fell out with the

Saudi royal family and called for the overthrow of Washington's Middle Eastern client states.

The Taliban's Afghanistan only became a "rogue state" when it did not follow Washington's orders to put a brake on the movement of religious fanatics, that the CIA helped create, which is bent on driving the US out of the Muslim world. ■

Washington's 'Anti-terrorist' Terrorists

By Norm Dixon

Both the Taliban and the factions of the Northern Alliance are veterans of US imperialism's last great "crusade", against the Soviet Union and "communism".

Then, as now, Washington dishonestly justified its war against the Afghan people in the name of fighting for "freedom", "democracy" and against "oppression". Yet it knowingly created and fostered some of the most anti-democratic political forces that have ever existed.

US support for the *mujaheddin* "contras" began soon after the 1978 uprising that brought the left-wing Peoples Democratic Party (PDPA) to power in Afghanistan, and accelerated when Soviet troops entered in December 1979.

Between 1978 and 1992, the US government poured at least US\$6 billion into the seven or so *mujaheddin* factions. The Saudi government matched US contributions dollar for dollar. The Pakistan military regime controlled the distribution of arms and money to the *mujaheddin*.

The US Central Intelligence Agency, the British Special Air Service and Pakistan's ISI intelligence agency trained thousands of religious zealots in the arts of bomb-making, booby-trap construction and urban and rural guerilla warfare.

'Peace & freedom'

US President George Bush concluded his October 7 address announcing that military action against Afghanistan had commenced with the vow that "peace and freedom will prevail" in Afghanistan.

Washington and London want the world to believe that a coalition of the anti-Taliban warlords and dissident Taliban factions will bring this about.

It is pure fantasy to believe that the Taliban defectors who the US hopes to frighten or bribe into joining the ranks of Bush's Afghan "liberators" will suddenly become champions of peace, freedom and women's rights.

The only condition that Washington is putting on these fanatics is that they reject the policy of harbouring bin Laden and other anti-Western "terrorists". Terrorism directed against rival warlords and the people of Afghanistan will be just fine with Washington and London — just as it was after 1978.

The vicious and intolerant rule of the Taliban, and its role in the growing of poppy and trafficking of heroin, has been widely publicised by the capitalist mass media. But the Northern Alliance's equally appalling human rights record, its terrorism and its drug-running are rarely mentioned.

'Crimes against humanity'

The US-based Human Rights Watch on October 6 warned that "a number of commanders associated with the emerging coalition of opposition forces in Afghanistan have a record of serious human rights abuse" and that "the various parties that comprise the [Northern Alliance] also amassed a deplorable record of attacks on civilians between the fall of the Najibullah [PDPA] regime in 1992 and the Taliban's capture of Kabul in 1996".

"In the years before the Taliban took control ... these parties had divided much of the country among themselves ... In 1994 alone, an estimated 25,000 people were killed in Kabul, most them civilians, in rocket and artillery attacks. One-third of the city was reduced to rubble", *Human Rights Watch* reported.

The monitoring agency also said that while most of the abuses by the Northern Alliance "date from 1996-1998 when they controlled most of the north and were within artillery range of Kabul", abuses have been reported up until late 1999 and early 2000.

"Throughout the civil war ... the major factions on all sides have repeatedly committed serious human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law, including killings, indiscriminate aerial bombardment and shelling, direct attacks on civilians, summary executions, rape, persecution on the basis of religion or ethnicity, the recruitment and use of children as soldiers and the use of antipersonnel landmines. These violations can be shown to have been 'widespread or systematic', a criterion of crimes against humanity."

Human Rights Watch was particularly concerned that Washington seemed ready to offer military support to Northern Alliance commander General Abdul Rashid Dostum, whose forces are poised to capture the northern town of Mazar-i-Sharif.

Dostum is the leader of the National Islamic Movement (Junbish-i-Islami), a militia of mostly ethnic Uzbeks that mutinied against the PDPA in early 1992, and took control of Mazar-i-Sharif.

In 1997, the Junbush militia withdrew from an alliance it had made with the Taliban to rule Mazar. More than 3000 Taliban prisoners of war were executed. Some were shot, while others were thrown down wells and blown up with grenades.

When the Taliban retook Mazar in August 1998, they massacred an almost equal number of Hazara civilians in retribution.

Jamiat-i-Islami

Another key Northern Alliance faction is Jamiat-i-Islami, led by Burhanuddin Rabbani. Rabbani was the president of the Islamic State of Afghanistan that was overthrown by the Taliban in 1996.

Until he was assassinated on September 9, the then minister for defence and the Northern Alliance's top military leader Ahmad Shah Massoud was the Jamiat-i-Islami's most powerful leader.

Since Massoud's death, he has been lauded by the Western press as a great leader of the anti-Taliban "resistance". His vicious military tactics and the atrocious record of Jamiat-i-Islami have been ignored.

These include:

- In September 1998, Massoud's forces fired rockets into a crowded market in Kabul, killing up to 180 shoppers.
- In March 1995, Massoud's forces captured a mainly Shi'ite Hazara neighbourhood in Kabul. According to the US State Department's 1996 report on human rights, "Massoud's troops went on a rampage, systematically looting whole streets and raping women".
- On February 11, 1993, Jamiat-i-Islami forces raided West Kabul, killing more than 100 Hazara civilians.

Other factions that are in, or aligned to the Northern Alliance, include the predominantly Shi'ite Islamic Unity Party of Afghanistan (Hizb-i-Wahdat) led by Muhammad Karim Khalili and the Saudi-backed Islamic Union for the Liberation of Afghanistan (Ittihad-i-Islami), headed by Abdul Rasul Sayyaf.

In February 1993, Amnesty International has reported, armed Wahdat and Ittihad terrorists raped and killed 60 women in the Institute of Social Sciences in Kabul.

Highlighting the fact that there are few genuine political differences between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance warlords, the Taliban was able to capture the city of Hazarajat in September 1998 when a Wahdat commander joined forces with them.

Perhaps the most notorious of US President Ronald Reagan's 1980s Afghan "freedom fighters" was Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, leader of Hizb-i-Islami. Today, he is in exile in Iran and is not allied to the Northern Alliance.

But in during the 1992-96 civil war things were different. Hekmatyar was Washington and Pakistan's favourite *mujaheddin* warlord. In 1993, after Rabbani's *mujaheddin* alliance took Kabul in 1992, Hekmatyar's forces rained US-supplied missiles and rockets on the city — killing at least 2000 civilians — until Rabbani agreed to give him the post of prime minister.

The Rabbani-Hekmatyar regime ruled through mass terror. Rape and forced "marriage" of young women by *mujaheddin* commanders was systematic.

Another former "freedom fighter" now being painted by the Western mass media as a "resistance" leader is one of Hekmatyar's followers, Abdul Haq.

Haq is proud of the fact that he ordered the planting of a bomb at Kabul airport in September 1984 that killed 28 people. Many of them were relatives of students preparing to fly to the Soviet Union, while about 15 were reportedly military officers. Haq said the purpose of the bomb was "to warn people not to send their children to the Soviet Union".

Haq also defended the firing of long-range rockets at Kabul that killed thousands of civilians during its fight to overthrow the PDPA.

"I have to free my country. My advice to people is not to stay close to the government. If you do, it's your fault. We use poor rockets; we cannot control them. They sometimes miss. I don't care about people who live close to the Soviet Embassy, I feel sorry for them, but what can [I] do?" he said.

Fully aware of his record, PM Margaret Thatcher welcomed Haq to Britain in 1986. At the time, Thatcher was denouncing the Palestine Liberation Organisation and the African National Congress as "terrorists".

The British *Guardian* reported on March 5, 1986 a Downing Street spokesperson saying: "The Afghans don't see themselves as revolutionaries. They're only trying to resist an invader and win back their freedom. The prime minister has a degree of sympathy with the Afghan cause inasmuch as they're trying to rid their country of invaders, which you cannot say of the ANC and PLO."

Drugs

On October 5, the UN office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention (UNODC) reported that most of Afghanistan's opium, the raw product from which heroin is produced, is grown in areas controlled by the Northern Alliance.

While the UNODC says that the Taliban has maintained a ban on opium-

growing it imposed last year, which resulted in the harvest from the areas it controls dropping from 3000 tonnes to virtually zero, growers in the Northern Alliance's areas harvested about 140 tonnes.

It should not be forgotten that the poppy fields of Afghanistan were well-established before the Taliban took power. CIA and ISI backing of the *mujaheddin* coincided with a boom in the drug business. By 1991, the Afghanistan-Pakistan border was the world's single largest source of heroin, supplying 60% of US drug users.

The factions that are now the Northern Alliance were up to their necks in the drug trade.

The tiny area of Afghanistan near the Tajikistan border controlled by the Northern Alliance is, according to UNDDCCP director Pino Arlacchi, a major corridor for heroin being smuggled to Europe. Around 90% of heroin sold on Britain's streets originates in Afghanistan.

"There are no white hats over there", a US official told the October 5 *New York Times* in a moment of candour. "If the US tries to find someone whose hands are completely free [of involvement in narcotics trafficking] they are going to have to go thousands of miles." ■

Washington's war on Afghanistan did not begin in 2001, following the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

It started in early 1978, when a radical leftist government came to power in Kabul. The new regime proclaimed land reform, women's rights and other popular democratic measures.

The US rulers set about to overthrow it and to suck the Soviet Union into a debilitating and costly conflict.

The bloody struggle begun by Washington has lasted for over 23 years and has devastated this already poor and backward country.

The US created the brutal mujaheddin "freedom fighters"; the anti-communist fanatic Osama bin Laden was on their payroll; it helped Pakistan create the vicious Taliban.

When the terrorists they had created bit their master's hand, Washington once more intervened in Afghanistan, not to liberate the suffering people, but to create a more amenable regime and assert its role as the world's only superpower.

This pamphlet presents the views of the Democratic Socialist Party. It explains the truth about Washington's "war on terrorism" — in reality, a war on the people of the world to defend the global empire of the US corporate rich.

Resistance books