

Executive Summary³

The current state of affairs in Afghanistan has its roots in a history that can be traced back to at least the end of the 19th century. Afghanistan has been the victim of numerous catastrophic interventions by the world's superpowers, from the British Empire, to the Soviet Union and the United States, which have left the country devastated and in ruins. Yet even a brief historical overview of these interventions makes it clear that the superpowers had no intention to improve the affairs of the people of Afghanistan. Rather, their involvement was motivated by their own interests, that were primarily strategic and economic in nature.

During the late 1970s, the USSR installed a puppet regime, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), that served its own interests and trampled upon those of the common people. A Communist party, the PDPA came to power through a coup d'état that was largely sponsored and supported by the Soviet Union, although it did implement a variety of modernisation programmes. However, there was a general discontent with this regime which, despite some beneficial reforms, consolidated its power through a variety of brutal policies.

Fearing that it would lose its influence in the region, the Soviet Union sent troops into the Afghan capital, Kabul, in a full-fledged invasion of the country. Contrary to conventional wisdom, which presupposes that American support for the Afghan resistance against Soviet occupation was triggered by the USSR's invasion, historical records prove otherwise. In reality, the U.S. had been sponsoring rebel movements within Afghanistan prior to the Soviet invasion. The result, anyhow, was a brutal civil war in the country effectively engineered by both superpowers to secure their influence and control. There was no regard for either human rights or democracy, despite the jingoistic lip service paid to these by top U.S. and Soviet officials.

The U.S. supported the Afghan rebels in their fight against the Soviet Union throughout the 1980s, until Soviet forces pulled out of Afghanistan. This support from Washington came in overt forms, such as allowing and encouraging client states, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, to sell arms to the Afghan mujahideen, and covertly, through direct CIA involvement, such as funds and training. After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1988, the country fell into a chaotic civil war between the various rebel factions previously supported by the U.S. Eventually, one of these factions, the Taliban, gained control over most of the country by the mid-1990s.

The Taliban, like their Northern Alliance predecessors, were no democrats, no agrarian reformers. Their policies of cruel oppression towards

women, their ethnic cleansing of minorities such as the Hazaras of the north, their indiscriminate use of torture against prisoners, and many other such atrocities, are well-documented by numerous human rights groups. But such issues were irrelevant in the eyes of the U.S. government, whose only interest in the region was that a “stable” regime emerge, which in official doublespeak means a regime that serves U.S. strategic and economic interests, even if that be at the expense of the Afghan population.

Also well documented is the crucial factor of the abundant oil and gas resources recently discovered in the Caspian Sea. Afghanistan is considered the prime trans-shipment route for pipelines to these energy deposits. From another perspective, Afghanistan has great strategic value to those powers who desire to expand their hegemony⁴ to global proportions. In fact, Afghanistan has long been recognised as the principal gateway to Central Asia, which was described in a 1997 Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) study as the instrument of control of Eurasia, and thus the world.

In other words, there could be no claim to ‘democracy’ or ‘human rights’ when the U.S. government was covertly supporting the Taliban. The cozy relationship between certain U.S. high-ranking officials and Taliban members in the later half of the 1990s is not a secret. Indeed, when strategic and economic interests were weighed in contrast to ideals such as human rights and freedom, the former took precedence. We see this played out perfectly in American policy towards Afghanistan.

Indeed, the anti-Taliban stance of the U.S. government grew, not out of any specific concern for the human rights of the Afghan people, but out of a more general and growing realisation that the Taliban regime would be incapable of serving as a vehicle of U.S. entry into Central Asia. In relation to this, extensive U.S. government and corporate planning for the establishment of pipelines to the vast oil and gas reserves of the Caspian basin were put on hold, because of the insufficient security in Afghanistan under Taliban rule. As confirmed in 1998 Congressional hearings on U.S. interests in Central Asia, a unified, stable and friendly regime in Afghanistan was needed to allow the pipelines to be built and remain safe.

A number of factors were critical in the growing U.S. recognition that the Taliban could not provide any such security. By the year 2001, while formulating specific plans to invade Afghanistan and topple the Taliban, George W. Bush Jr.’s administration began a series of negotiations with the Taliban to save its relationship with that regime. U.S. officials called for a government of national unity, in which all factions, including the Taliban, would participate—but the Taliban were unwilling to compromise their own power.

Accordingly, U.S. officials promised the Taliban that they would suffer the consequences by facing “a carpet of bombs,” and further noted privately that the military plans would be implemented by October 2001. Extensive evidence on record indicates that the Bush administration intended to invade Afghanistan and overthrow the Taliban regime quite independently of the events of 11th September. The war on Afghanistan was thus not a response to 11th September. On the contrary, there is a long record of in-depth strategic planning at the root of U.S. military plans to invade Afghanistan. Much of this evidence is available in a 1997 CFR study by former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, who discusses in detail U.S. plans to secure hegemony over Central Asia as a means to the control of Eurasia, and thereby the expansion and consolidation of global U.S. hegemony, unhindered by potential rivals, such as Russia and China.

Against this backdrop, there is considerable evidence that, from 1995 to 2001, the American intelligence community was in receipt of multiple credible warnings of a terrorist attack on U.S. soil orchestrated by Osama bin Laden. Contrary to the official line of the Bush administration, this information, which was taken seriously by the U.S. intelligence community, specified the hijacking of civilian airplanes to be flown into key U.S. buildings in Washington, DC and New York City, including the World Trade Centre. The nature of these urgent warnings converged in a manner specifying that the attacks would occur between early and mid-September, while other credible information pinpointed 11th September as a likely watch date. Yet despite this extensive forewarning of the attacks, the Bush administration failed to act.

The failure to act was even more apparent on 11th September itself. There are clear rules established by the Federal Aviation Administration and the Department of Defense for responding to emergency situations, including hijacking. Yet, although four planes were almost simultaneously hijacked on 11th September, the U.S. Air Force systematically failed to respond in accordance with these rules, which are normally adhered to with routine, since they constitute Standard Operating Procedures (SOP). Subsequently, various official government accounts and statements have been issued attempting to deflect public attention from, thus denying the reality of, the collapse of SOP on 11th September.

In this context, the systematic violation of Standard Operating Procedures by the U.S. Air Force is an event that appears to have occurred with the complicity of key government and military officials in the Bush administration. This notion is supported by evidence that both President George W. Bush Jr. and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Richard B. Myers displayed utter indifference to notification they received of the

commencement of an air attack on the World Trade Centre, despite their responsibility at that time to ensure the security of the American nation.

The ominous implications of these facts are exacerbated in light of various revelations about the long-standing financial, diplomatic, military and intelligence ties between the members of the Bush administration and figures linked to Osama bin Laden—not to mention Osama himself. Reports indicate that until just after 11th September, the Bush family had close financial ties to the bin Laden family, and both were set to reap substantial profits from the war on Afghanistan through their mutual involvement in the U.S. defence industry. This has been accompanied by credible reports that Osama bin Laden has not broken away from his family and maintains ties with them. Further reports show that the Bush administration has systematically blocked attempts to apprehend Osama bin Laden, along with intelligence investigations of the terrorist connections of the bin Laden family and Saudi royals implicated in supporting Osama.

This state of affairs has largely continued in the aftermath of 11th September, despite the fact noted by former Deputy Director and Director of Antiterrorism for the FBI, John O'Neill, that the key to Osama bin Laden lies in Saudi Arabia. Indeed, abundant evidence indicates that the U.S. government has simultaneously maintained ties with figures in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan who support Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda, while blocking all meaningful investigations of those figures.

A particularly damning example is the U.S. response to revelations first in India, and then in Pakistan, that the then Director-General of Pakistani military intelligence, Mahmoud Ahmad, had funneled \$100,000 to the lead hijacker, Mohamed Atta, shortly before 11th September. The Bush administration, on confirming this fact through the FBI, blocked any further inquiry into the role of Pakistani military intelligence in supporting Al-Qaeda by requesting that Ahmad, from behind-the-scenes, quietly pursue early retirement as a purported consequence of routine re-shuffling.

In the aftermath of 11th September, the Bush administration embarked on a devastating bombing campaign in Afghanistan, killing up to 5,000 Afghan civilians—almost double the number of civilians killed in the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks. This massive bombardment of the country resulted in the destruction of the Taliban regime, making way for the installation of a new, interim government.

The new regime effectively constituted a return to the pre-Taliban era, when Northern Alliance factions ruled most of Afghanistan, brutalising and repressing the civilian population in the same manner as the Taliban. Now, however, Northern Alliance warlords have been bound by U.S.-UN brokered agreements designed to ensure the minimisation of civil war breaking out

between rival warlords, the idea being to create the regional stability essential to lending an appropriate degree of security for proposed pipelines to Caspian oil and gas. The rights and wishes of the Afghan people, meanwhile, have been ignored.

Subsequently, on the pretext of entering into a new “war on terror,” the Bush administration successfully secured unlimited war powers, free from Congressional accountability. This has established an open-ended militarisation of foreign policy in which any country can be targeted at will on the pretext of harbouring terrorists.

In the U.S., this has been accompanied by unprecedented curbs on civil liberties and basic human rights, the crushing of domestic dissent, and the criminalisation of legitimate protest. Many authoritative commentators have described these domestic measures as moves toward the establishment of an American police state. The combination of militarisation abroad and repression at home has granted the Bush administration a free hand to pursue its strategic and economic interests, consolidating a permanent military presence in Afghanistan and Central Asia, and moving swiftly to establish lucrative pipeline deals to secure access to regional resources and energy deposits. It has allowed the Bush administration to challenge its principal rivals—Europe, China and Russia—in the pursuit of control of Central Asia, with the final objective of consolidating U.S. hegemony over the entirety of Eurasia, thus moving toward the establishment of unrivalled global hegemony.

Prior to 11th September, all of this was inconceivable. The tragic catastrophe of 11th September, which was apparently permitted to occur by the Bush administration—and further effectively pushed forward by the administration through its ongoing support of key allies in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan who support bin Laden and Al-Qaeda—allowed the U.S. to expand, consolidate and empower its hegemony, both at home and abroad, to an unprecedented level.

In the epilogue, John Leonard gives a historical perspective on the Federal executive’s repeated, clandestine use of staged provocations to get America into foreign wars, and presents published evidence pointing to the involvement of Mossad, Israeli military intelligence, in September 11.

Notes

³ Mohamed Ahmad, a Researcher for the Institute for Policy Research & Development, contributed to this Executive Summary.

⁴ Hegemony: The predominant influence or rule, as of a state, region, or group, over another or others.