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Counterpunch

Trigger-Happy in Afghanistan

The Flood of Kabul-Shit

By RICHARD NEVILLE

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The brain disease sweeping the West is virulent and vicious, like the golden Staph which haunts so many hospitals. Most at risk are Presidents, Prime Ministers, Generals and journalists. The ailment is not triggered by bacteria but by an ideology as old as history, which every so often resurfaces as a new strain, and this one hasn't been named. It's often fatal. Less so to the carriers than those caught in their sights. Let's call it Kabul-shit – the propensity to ignore the years of violence inflicted on Afghanistan and to paint the invaders as heroes.

It sometimes seems that the greater the slaughter of civilians, the louder the praise for the mission. This may be due to guilt. Britain's Gordon Brown: We are in Afghanistan to purge terrorism. Australia's Kevin Rudd: Our soldiers are building schools. America's Barack Obama: This is a war of necessity. The Sydney Morning Herald: The mission is to bolster Afghanistan against Al-Qaeda and to support regional stability in Pakistan.

Tosh, the lot of it. The war started as an act of revenge on the perpetrators of the 9/11 tragedy and was not authorized by the United Nations. It took two years and a thousand bloody air strikes before UN Resolution 1510 finally granted the invaders an after-the-fact "legitimacy". Many legal scholars still regard the invasion as illegal under international law.

Since the start of Operation Enduring Freedom in October 2001, how many Afghani civilians have been blown away? Take a guess. It's not widely publicized. Wikipedia puts civilian casualties at "roughly" between 9,000 and 27,000. This does not include the thousands of maimed children.

All for what? Why are we there? The Taliban were not responsible for 9/11. "Yes they are"

claims the Sydney Morning Herald, they “nurtured Al Qaeda”. Breast feeding Osama bin Laden, tucking in his little romper suit...? The Herald editorial ignores the role of the CIA in seeding the Taliban, and pouring in cash and weapons for the Mujahideen to kick out the Soviets.

In October 2001, shortly after the US started its own invasion, the Taliban offered to surrender Osama bin Laden to a third country for trial, so long as the bombing was halted and they were shown evidence of his involvement in 9/11. George Bush’s reply: "There's no need to discuss innocence or guilt. We know he's guilty."

A perfect example of Kabul-shit. If Bush possessed the evidence, why wasn’t it divulged? Three years later, in October 2004, a video was delivered to Al Jazeera in which bin Laden claimed responsibility for the 9/11 attacks.

And so, eight years after the invasion, despite what Western Generals keep promising, US and NATO bombs continue to pulverise this unhappy land. It’s like a never ending blood sport. Why can’t we pull out? Every politician has a different answer. Former Australian Prime Minister, John Howard pithily expressed the fear that lurks in the souls of warmongers: A premature withdrawal would be a blow to the prestige of the West. Remember Prince William a few years ago, calling in air strikes on “enemy positions”, the media thrilled. Hurrah for Western prestige. Never mind that our continued occupation involves aerial assassination on a massive scale, a kind of slow motion genocide – [look at the record](#).

And in February this year, it was plucky little Australia that kicked off the shooting season, with a special forces attack on a compound in Uruzgan, killing 5 Afghan children. In April, American forces killed four civilians - a man, a woman, and two children - as well as an unborn baby. At first the US military said these were "armed militants", but – as is often the case - it was later conceded the dead were civilians. In May, we had the Farah massacre.

The US military claimed that only militants were hit, but the Afghan Defense Ministry announced a death toll of 140 villagers, producing an official list with the names and ages of those killed: 93 were children, 22 were adult males.

This was a bit too much, even for the Pentagon. The previous commander was dumped. President Obama appointed General Stanley McChrystal, formerly head of Task Force 6-26, a death squad that ran a brutal interrogation unit at Camp Narnia, near Baghdad. "High-value" detainees were kept in the Black Room, formerly a Saddam dungeon. Its décor featured a darkened cell with butcher’s hooks hanging from the ceiling. Basically, McChrystal’s task force ran a secret prison and his unit was implicated in two prisoner deaths. A prosecution was initiated, but ran out of steam after a “computer glitch” had disappeared the unit’s records. An Esquire writer who visited Camp Narnia, John H. Richardson, reported it was so secret that its officers used false names and it was a place where “bad things happened”, a place where Stanley McChrystal had made a “personal promise that the Red Cross would never be allowed into the camp”, in violation of US treaty obligations.

Last week came the disastrous US fighter jet air strike in the northern province of Kunduz, which a prominent Afghan rights group claims to have killed up to 70 civilians, a figure based on interviews with local residents. A few days later, it was reported that Soldiers from the US Army’s 10th Mountain Division made an armed raid on a hospital in eastern

Afghanistan, searching for insurgents. The soldiers bound guards and relatives before turning patients out of beds and ransacking a women's ward, it is claimed. Nato is investigating.

"This war has nothing to do with defending the American people", commented a New York Times feedback contributor, "Obama's war is the war of the overgrown military industrial complex that needs a continuous flow of dollars in order to survive". Another writes: "The so-called 'new strategy' announced by general McChrystal is nothing but a propaganda ploy to appease the American public. The Afghan war is continued exactly as it was pursued by the defunct Bush policy. Carpet bomb everything and perhaps the enemy will disappear".

According to Russian analyst Andrei Konurov, Washington and Brussels have far broader geo-strategic objectives in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and "ultimately the world", to abandon current operations and occupations. He points out that "the US has deployed 19 military bases in Afghanistan and Central Asian countries" since 2001.

US Terrorism expert Bruce Hoffman today told the NY Times an Afghan pullout could deny the United States bases from which it carries out Predator bombing missions. From their dual perspectives, both experts seem to believe that the US gameplan is far more complex, entrenched and far reaching than dreamed of by media analysts.

Finally, a comment from Dr Abdullah, the leading opposition candidate: "We have insecurity in this country. We have bad government. We have corruption. We have narcotics. We have a war. We have an insurgency. On top of that, if a leadership is imposed on the people based on fraudulent elections, what will happen? What will happen to Afghanistan?"

There are no easy answers. Curbing air strikes is a start, as well as holding clean elections. Many westerners seek a bright future for Afghanistan and the voices of the well informed, and of the local people, must prevail over trigger happy soldiers, secret geo-political maneuverings and the endless flood of Kabul-shit.