

# Liberation Ecology: Women and War

by Dana Visalli



“When I was young I had not courage, but now I have courage.”  
Asra, a 12 year-old Afghan girl who lived in a refugee camp in Pakistan until she was 9

Afghanistan has been called ‘the worst place in the world to be a woman,’<sup>1</sup> because not only is the poverty pervasive and the lifespan short, but while they are alive many women live like indentured servants. Afghan students at the private school for girls where I work in Kabul recently produced a series of essays in which they describe the social norms for women in their country. One wrote, ‘A girl in my culture marries at eleven or twelve years of age. Some parents make their daughters marry when they are very young so they can get money for their daughter and the family can be rich. When a girl is married, she accepts her husband's orders; she must never tell people if she is being treated badly.’ Another of the girls was more blunt: *‘When sisters sit together, they always praise their brothers; when brothers sit together, they sell their sisters to others.’*<sup>2</sup>

Human Rights Watch said in a recent report that the situation for women in Afghanistan is ‘dismal in every area,’ with violence against them

‘endemic’ and a government that fails to protect them from crimes such as rape and murder.<sup>3</sup> The report cites cases where rapists have been pardoned by the government, girls and women have been imprisoned for running away from home, rape victims have been charged with adultery and where women in public life have been murdered. Afghan women’s rights activist Malalai Joya writes that, ‘The U. S. presence in Afghanistan is doing nothing to protect Afghan women. The level of self-immolation among women was never as high as it is now. There is no justice for women.’<sup>4</sup> She contends that the overall situation for women has in some ways gotten worse during the 13 year U.S. occupation because the U.S. financed the Islamic fundamentalist mujahideen during the war with the Russians and allowed them to control the Afghan government after the fall of the Taliban. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the executive director of UN Women, says attacks against women and girls have increased at a frightening pace. In 2012,



Afghan women in burkas show their identity cards, but not their faces.

female casualties increased by 20 percent over the previous year, and then by 61 percent in 2013.<sup>5</sup>

As disturbing as this news is, the oppression of and violence towards women in Afghanistan is in no way unique. While researching their book *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*, Nicholas Kristoff and Sheryl WuDunn discovered what they called a 'pandemic' of abuse of females by men around the world. To begin with, in China, India and elsewhere female fetuses are regularly aborted in favor of male babies; demographers say that more than 100 million females are 'missing' from the world due to what they call 'gendercide.' Once born, the British medical journal *The Lancet* estimates that among the very poor of the world 1 million children are forced into prostitution every year, and the total number of prostituted children could be as high as 10 million. 130 million women alive today have endured genital mutilation, the cutting out of portions of their reproductive system, in order to destroy any sexuality.<sup>6</sup>

The United States is certainly not immune to gender abuse; one study found that over 22 million women in the United States have been raped in their lifetime. Every two minutes someone is sexually assaulted in the United States, and somewhere in America a woman is battered, usually by her intimate partner, every 15 seconds. An estimated 17,500 women and children are trafficked into the United States annually for sexual exploitation or forced labor.<sup>7</sup>

The most relevant question that can be asked is, 'Why is this happening?' From a historical perspective this perverse dynamic between the sexes has distant roots. In Ancient Greece, Athenian women were given no education and were married at puberty to grown men. They

remained forever the property of their fathers, who could divorce them and make them marry another. They lived in segregation and could not leave the house without a chaperone. They could not buy or sell land. If one were raped her husband had either to divorce her or lose his citizenship.<sup>8</sup>

The Bible and the Koran both reflect the mores at the time of their writing, and perpetuate male dominance into the present through their social paradigms. In the Old Testament, Genesis 3:16 instructs women that, 'Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee,' and Ephesians 5:22 commands, 'Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord.' Such teachings prompted 19th-century feminist Elizabeth Cady Stanton to write: 'The Bible and the Church have been the greatest stumbling blocks in the way of woman's emancipation.'<sup>9</sup>

Similar passages are found in the Koran, such as 4:34: 'Men have authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other. Good women are obedient. As for those from whom you fear disobedience, admonish them and forsake them in beds apart, and beat them.'<sup>10</sup>

The Catholic Pope Innocent issued a Papal Bull in 1484 on the problem of demons in which he initiated the systematic accusation, torture and execution of countless 'witches' all over Europe, all of the females. Innocent commissioned a document called *Hammer of Witches*, which basically said that if you were accused of witchcraft, you were a witch. Torture was an unfailing means to demonstrate the validity of the accusation. The most fantastic testimony was readily accepted — that tens of thousands of witches had gathered for



Eve corrupted Adam by having him eat the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. Moral: women are the source of man's problems.

THE THIRD PART  
RELATING TO THE  
JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS IN  
BOTH THE ECCLESIASTICAL  
AND CIVIL COURTS  
AGAINST WITCHES AND  
INDEED ALL HERETICS

CONTAINING XXXV QUESTIONS IN  
WHICH IS MOST CLEARLY SET OUT THE  
FORMAL RULES FOR INITIATING A  
PROCESS OF JUSTICE, HOW IT SHOULD  
BE CONDUCTED, AND THE METHOD OF  
PRONOUNCING SENTENCE

A passage from Pope Innocent's *Hammer of Witches*

a Sabbath in public squares in France, or that 12,000 of them darkened the skies as they flew to Newfoundland. The Bible had counseled, 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live'; so legions of women were burned to death.<sup>11</sup>

There were strong erotic and misogynistic elements, as might be expected in a sexually repressed, male-dominated society with inquisitors drawn from the class of nominally celibate priests. The trials paid close attention to the quality and quantity of orgasm in the supposed copulations of defendants with demons or the Devil. No one knows how many women were killed altogether – perhaps hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions.<sup>12</sup>

A best-selling book titled *Advice to a Daughter* published in London in the early 1700s, and widely read in the American colonies, gives the flavor of a woman's station in that time. 'There is Inequality in Sexes, and that for the better Economy of the World; the Men, who were to be the Law-givers, had the larger share of Reason bestow'd upon them; by which means your Sex is the better prepar'd for the Compliance that is necessary for the performance of those Dudes which seem'd to be most properly assign'd to it.'<sup>13</sup>

On one level we can attribute the abuse of women to a long tradition of males viewing females as weaker and inferior members of the human family. There are deeper psychological currents as well. Since the advent of large urban and agricultural civilizations, humans have demonstrated an extreme antipathy for the natural cycles of life on earth. Not only do rivers flood and rains fail, threatening society, but death itself menaces each individual. The rich and powerful could

attempt to escape death by building religious monuments that rose away from the earth to reach the sky – ziggurats and pyramids – but their efficacy against the inevitability of death was minimal.

Women on the other hand are wedded to the earth's cycles, and are therefore problematic because they are evidently more earth-bound by nature. Not only can they create new life inside their bodies, which no male is capable of, but they also exude body fluids back to the earth monthly (menstruate) and they produce milk to nurture life. Male discomfort with this arrangement is illustrated in the Bible, where it is written, 'If a woman has born a man child, then she shall be unclean seven days. But if she bear a maid child, then she shall be unclean two weeks.' (Leviticus 12:5). The Koran offers supporting arguments: 'Keep aloof from women during their menstrual periods and do not approach them until they are clean again.' (2:222) The message is that when women menstruate they are earthy, dirty, untouchable. Many of those burned at the stake in the Middle Ages as witches were midwives and herbalists – women who were knowledgeable about nature. And some of them had orgasms; a sure sign of devil-worship.

In our time males are still engaged in a war against both the Earth and against the painful reality of death. While we do not think of it as such, modern warfare has in fact become a war against the Earth itself. Ecologist Wendell Barry writes, 'We're living, it seems, in the culmination of a long warfare – warfare against human beings, other creatures and the Earth itself.' In steadfast pur-



Witches lived in close relationship to nature; they made herbal remedies out of wild plants, they sometimes took their clothes off, and they had orgasms.



The United States sprayed 20 million gallons of herbicides on the rich forest ecosystems of Vietnam during the Vietnam war.



The Vietnamese government estimates that 4.8 million people were exposed to Agent Orange, resulting in 400,000 deaths and 500,000 birth defects.

suit of this war, the United States has dropped 20 million tons of high explosives on the Earth in the last 70 years along with a million tons of napalm and 22 million gallons of toxic herbicides in an effort to eradicate imaginary evil (usually in the form of impoverished rice farmers in Asia) and thus gain a sense of heroic purpose. And, killing others offers a brief feeling of immortality. The profound sham and transience of the experience of war and killing others is a major reason that currently 22 war veterans commit suicide every day; they can no longer live the lie that they were enticed into.<sup>14</sup>

A 2002 report titled 'War on the Earth' details how nearly thirty years after the end of the U.S. war in Southeast Asia, many of the affected ecosystems have still not recovered from the chemicals used in the war. Ten percent of southern Vietnam's forests (including one third of the coastal mangroves, which play a vital role in the coastal ecosystem and fish habitats) were destroyed by the 20 million gallons of herbicide the U.S. military dropped during the Vietnam War era. Arsenic and dioxin in the herbicides are expected to pose a health threat long into the future. Since 1975, 50,000 civilians have been killed by the landmines and other weapons the U.S. military left behind. The U.S.'s vast bombing campaign also left millions of large bomb craters. This war in Southeast Asia is just one of innumerable examples of the American the assault on the Earth.<sup>15</sup>

In addition, the United States maintains by far the most potent arsenal of nuclear weapons on the planet, which if used would destroy most of the biosphere and signal a final victory for man

over his apparent arch enemy, the Earth which gives him life.

In the insightful 1975 book *The Denial of Death* author Ernest Becker observes that the terror of death is so overwhelming we do everything in our power to remain unconscious of it. We are defended by a fortress of self-identity that feels immortal, even though it is not, and a social hero system that allows us to believe that we transcend death by participating in something larger than ourselves. The root of human evil according to Becker is our need to deny our mortality by gaining a sense of permanent selfhood.

Another facet of this assault on women and the biosphere is the human proclivity to seek an external authority to tell us who we are and how to act. Not only are we faced with the humiliation and horror of death, but we are confused as to our purpose while alive. 'We are,' wrote cosmologist Carl Sagan, 'like a newborn baby left on a doorstep, with no note explaining who it is, where it came from.' So we turn en masse to individuals who purport to have answers. 'Why in the world,' asked French philosopher Etienne De La Boetie, 'do people consent to their own enslavement? The mystery of *civil obedience*: why do people, in all times and places, obey the commands of government, which always constitutes a small minority of the society? If we led our lives according to the ways intended by nature and the lessons taught by her, we should be intuitively obedient to our parents; later we should adopt reason as our guide and become slaves to nobody.' De la Boetie penned these lines in the year 1552 in his treatise, *The Politics of Obedience*.

There is an alternative to the mass destruction of ecosystems and of half the human race, and that is for every adult human being to reject external authority and take responsibility for their own lives. After all, as John Lennon pointed out, 'Our society is run by insane people for insane objectives. We're being run by maniacs for maniacal ends.' People in the United States seem to fear their government as if it were some kind of god, even though the American government is 'the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today,' according to Martin Luther King, and it is clearly the greatest source of human suffering and death and of ecosystem destruction on the planet. If you as a unique, sovereign living being of the Earth do not want to see the biosphere destroyed by nuclear weapons, why have you spent your life paying for them? The answer can only be fear; your fear of your so-called government has to date overwhelmed your desire to live a sane and ethical life.

Ernest Becker writes in *The Denial of Death*, 'There are signs that some individuals are awaken-



An Afghan mother and daughter illustrate through their stature and beauty the potential for humans to build sane societies.

ing from the long, dark night of tribalism and nationalism and developing a moral conscience, an ethic that is universal rather than ethnic. Our task for the future is exploring what it means for each individual to be a member of Earth's household, a commonwealth of kindred beings. Whether we will use our freedom to encapsulate ourselves in narrow, tribal paranoid personalities and create more bloody Utopias or to form compassionate communities is still to be decided.'

It is a simple task to see in retrospect the journey that humanity has been on, with personal identity and consciousness transitioning from the family to the clan, and through tribe, village, and city-state to the nation-state. It is up to every individual who cares about the Earth and the creatures upon it to continue the journey and become a life-enhancing member of the Earth household.

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# Coming of Age in a Land of Broken Dreams

by Dana Visalli



Afghan mother & child; photo by Shane Dallas

Teaching at a private girl's school in Afghanistan, as I am doing at the moment, brings home to the heart and mind the harsh realities that Afghan women live with. In a series of essays that the fifteen and sixteen year old students at the school recently wrote, one encounters proverbs shared among Afghan women such as, 'When sisters sit together, they always praise their brothers; when brothers sit together, they sell their sisters to others.' Another is, 'The good girl is the one who goes to her husband's house with a white dress and comes out in a white shroud.' While the abusive treatment of fully half of the population of Afghanistan may seem like a pathology unique to this country or region, one only need to read Nicholas Kristoff and Cheryl Dunn's book *Half the Sky* to realize the perverse behavior of males in relation to females is commonplace around the world. When one fully grasps the vast extent of this dysfunctional behavior, it becomes clear that what all humans need to do is take their next step towards a sane existence.

The young women at this school intend to change their country; but it won't be an easy task. The impoverished population is growing rapidly and the land is degraded. Afghanistan has little in the way of energy resources and the global production of petroleum ap-

pears to be peaking. This is not a propitious coincidence of events. As one student writes, 'My father always tells me that to reach our dreams and goals we have to tolerate and endure so many challenges that are directed to us. That is true because we can't reach our big dreams easily.'

Passages in their essays illuminate the antediluvian social mindset they are confronted with. 'Some people in Afghanistan think that girls should not go to school, because girls are for working at home not working outside of the home. In many places in Afghanistan, if a girl talks to man or boy who is not her relative, people think that she is a bad girl. People say "good" girls should always be quiet and listen to their grandparents, parents and older brothers.' Another writes, 'For girls, growing up in Afghanistan is sometime like being in a jail. In provinces like Kandahar, where I am from, many parents believe that a girl should not get an education but only stay in the house learning to cook and clean.' Somehow these particular girls have managed to make it to school. 'Studying and learning are very important for me. Without that there can be no life. Education is like sunshine....' The light in these girls' eyes, minds and spirits is profound; youthful spirits somehow expect a livable world.



The beauty of youth is universal

Although the United States has occupied Afghanistan for twelve years now and spent \$750 billion dollars<sup>1</sup> on the war effort, many Afghans feel that life remains almost intolerable. 20 million of the country's 30 million people are impoverished, violence against women is endemic, and the Afghan government, supported by the U.S. military, is considered one of the most corrupt in the world.<sup>2</sup> Afghan activist Malalai Joya writes, 'Afghan women had more rights in the 1960s to 1980s than today. Rapes, abductions, murders, violence, forced marriages, and violence are increasing at an alarming rate never seen before in our history. Women commit self-immolation to escape their miseries. The production of opium and heroin has increased 4000% since the U.S. invasion, making Afghanistan the narcotic drug capital of the world. Every aspect of life in Afghanistan today is tragic, and I don't know what to mention first.'<sup>3</sup>

The American record for making the world safer for girls and for children in general through warfare is not good. One could begin the accounting anywhere, but taking the Korean War as a starting point, the United States completely destroyed the social infrastructure of North Korea during that war, dropping 32,500 tons of napalm and another 600,000 tons of bombs on the cities, towns, villages, farms, dams, bridges and roads in that country.<sup>4</sup> General Curtis LeMay pointed out in 1952, 'We have bombed every city twice, now we are going to pulverize them into stones.' That rain of destruction fell on the children of North Korea as well as the adults—children who had the same hopeful gleam in their eye as today's Afghan students. Two million

North Koreans were killed in the war, along with half a million Chinese.

The United States moved on to drop seven million tons of bombs on the agrarian, rice-farming country of Vietnam, along with 400,000 tons of napalm and twenty million gallons of chemical herbicide, which was sprayed on one of the richest tropical ecosystems on the planet.<sup>4</sup> The Air Force had a motto: 'Only you can prevent forests,' which they thought was quite funny, while in fact the spraying was an act of ecocide. At the same time a massive, nine-year, covert B-52 bombing campaign was waged against two more impoverished, rice-farming societies in Cambodia and Laos. This insane rain of destruction was dropped randomly on forests and fields and villages; there were no military targets in these countries, although there were a lot of children under the bombs. Cambodian society has never recovered. It was so shattered and traumatized by



10 children killed by a NATO air strike in Afghanistan on March 7, 2013

nine years of airborne brutality that the bombing was followed by the rise of Khmer Rouge, who hated all things Western. Social customs were obliterated, and today Cambodia is the largest sex-trafficking society in the world, selling children as young as five years old into sexual slavery.<sup>5</sup>

The United States attacked and invaded Iraq in 1990 and again in 2003, imposing crippling sanctions between those two wars which destroyed the economy of the Iraqi people and killed an estimated 750,000 children.<sup>6</sup> That society is now a mere disfigured and violent shadow of the relatively prosperous and liberal state that existed in the 1970s.<sup>7</sup> Serbia was bombed for three months in 1999, followed



The agony of war is universal

by Afghanistan in 2001, and Libya in 2012 (Libya is now a 'failed state,' destroyed by the bombing campaign<sup>8</sup>). Today we supply weapons to the Islamists fighting in Syria, where after three years of civil there are six million Syrian refugees.<sup>9</sup> It is this kind of psychotic behavior that moved Martin Luther King to say in 1967, 'The greatest purveyor of violence in the world today is my own government.'

Human beings are genetically programmed perceive the world from a self-centered perspective, and thus to interpret the unfolding events of life in their own favor.<sup>10</sup> For Americans this distortion caused by the power of the self-image results in the perception of the last 70 years of endless warfare against other human societies and against the biological integrity of the earth as 'freedom and democracy.' Observing this psychological distortion of reality, Vietnam veteran Mike Hastie says, 'America is in absolute psychiatric denial of its genocidal, maniacal nature. We kill and destroy for profit.' The United States spends one trillion dollars a year on its military colossus, while the problems of the world are environmental, ecological and psychological, against which bullets and bombs are useless at best.<sup>11</sup>

So just who is it that is coming of age in the land of broken dreams? It is the American people, who will soon be waking up the reality of the crimes against people and the planet committed by their government, in their name and with their resources. Whenever we are ready, each one of us can take 'one small step for man, one giant leap for humanity, by disowning and disarming the bombs, and thereafter doing our utmost to make the world safe for children and other living things.

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Lady Butler's famous painting of Dr. William Brydon, one of a very few survivors of a major British army defeat in the 1st Anglo-Afghan War in 1842

# Afghanistan: A Brief History Explains Everything

by Dana Visalli

A brief review of the recent history of Afghanistan explains why there are so many difficulties in the country today. To begin with, Afghanistan is a complex place; there are 20 major ethnic groups and more than 50 total, with over 30 languages spoken, although most also speak either Pashtun and/or Dari. This reflects its geographical position at a cultural crossroads, as well as its mountainous topography, which isolates different ethnic groups from one another. In the 1700s, when Afghanistan was just forming as a nation, two of the world's major powers of the time were advancing towards it from opposite directions. England was busy conquering India between 1757 and 1857, and Russia was spreading its control east and was on Afghanistan's border by 1828. This overview will focus on first England's and then America's part in shaping modern Afghanistan.

One of the most lucrative products that England exported from its new colony India was opium.<sup>1</sup> By 1770 Britain had a monopoly on opium production in India and saw to it that cultivation spread into Afghanistan as well (the boundary between the two was ill-defined until 1893). Anxious to protect their drug trade and concerned the Afghan king Dost Mohammad was too friendly with the Russians, the British sent an expeditionary force of 12,000 soldiers into Afghanistan in

1839 to dethrone him and set up their own hand-picked king, Shah Shoja. They built a garrison in Kabul to help prop him up. However the Afghan populace resisted this occupation, and in the winter of 1842 the British were forced into an attempted retreat back to the east. Within days of leaving Kabul 17,000 British soldiers and support staff lay slaughtered in the snow between Kabul and Jalalabad after a battle with Afghan forces.<sup>2</sup>

Dost Mohammad returned to power, but the Afghan government did not have the resources to protect its borders, and England soon took control of all Afghan territory between the Indus River and the Hindu Kush, including Baluchistan in 1859, denying Afghanistan access to the sea.<sup>3</sup> Still worried about the Russians, England invaded Afghanistan again in 1878; overthrew the standing king and forced the new government to become a British protectorate. England considered slicing up Afghanistan according to what London had determined was the "scientific frontier" of its Indian empire, but settled for an Afghan government over which it retained control of the economy and all foreign policy.<sup>4</sup> The British invasions embittered the Afghan people, creating a sense of xenophobia that created powerful resistance to Western-style reforms put forward by Afghan leaders in years to come.

In order to consolidate its gains, England created the Durand Line in 1893, an arbitrary 1500-mile border between “British” India and Afghanistan that consolidated its previous territorial gains and laid claim to the Northwest Frontier Provinces, long considered part of Afghanistan. The boundary was made “permanent” in a 1907 Anglo-Russian convention, without consulting the Afghan government.<sup>5</sup> Taking these provinces divided the Pashtun people, who since time immemorial had been considered part of the Afghan homeland, between two separate nations, Afghanistan and India. This created a deep animosity among the Pashtuns that survives in full force today, 120 years later. Neither Britain nor Pakistan afterward ever gained full control of the Northwest Provinces, and they later became the source of the Islamic radicalism that spawned both Al Qaeda and the Taliban; in fact all Taliban are Pashtuns. It is into the Northwest Provinces that majority of the American drone missiles are fired today. This antipathy has its genesis in the drawing of the Durand Line.

A strongly anti-colonial young King Amanullah ascended to the Afghan throne in 1919, and declared Afghanistan’s independence from Britain’s “protectorate” status in his inaugural speech. He attempted to regain the Pashtun lands east of the hated Durand line by organizing uprisings in the Northwest Provinces and supporting them with Afghan troops. Reacting to this provocation, the British attacked once again, embarking on the third Anglo-Afghan war in eighty years in June 1919. The British suffered early setbacks and responded by bombing Kabul and Jalalabad by air. Neither side had the stomach for a long war, and in August of 1919 a peace treaty was signed which granted Afghanistan full independence, but maintained the status quo of the Durand Line.

Meanwhile Britain’s control over the Pashtun tribal areas remained more of a wish than a reality. Between 1849 and 1900 no less than 42 military operations were conducted that did little more than reconfirm the stubborn independence of the mountain tribes. When Amanullah continued to push for reunification after the 1919 war, Britain responded with a ruthless and bloody effort to pacify the Northwest Territories. In 1920 a five-day battle took place in which two thousand British and Indian troops and four thousand Afghan tribesmen were killed.<sup>6</sup>

Amanullah himself became a beacon of liberalization in Afghanistan. He attempted drastic changes in the country by reforming the army, abolishing slavery and forced labor, and encouraging the liberation of women. He discouraged the use of the veil and the oppression of women, introduced educational opportunities for females. Britain resented Amanullah, fearing that the liberalization of Afghan society would spread



The Durand Line--the black boundary between Afghanistan and Pakistan--divides the Pashtun people and is the cause of multiple war.

to India and become a threat to British rule there.<sup>7</sup> Britain therefore initiated support for conservative and reactionary Islamists in the country to undermine Amanullah’s rule.

In 1924 there was a violent rebellion by conservative Islamists in the border town of Khost which was quelled by the Afghan army. The rebellion was a reaction to Amanullah’s social reforms, particularly public education for girls and greater freedom for women. The Afghan historian Abdul Samad Ghaus wrote in 1988, “Britain was seen as the culprit in the affair, manipulating the tribes against Amanullah in an attempt to bring about his downfall.”<sup>8</sup> In 1929 there was a larger rebellion of conservative tribespeople, and Amanullah was forced to flee the country. Many historians suspect Britain was behind this uprising as well. In Abdul Ghaus’s view, “Afghans in general remain convinced that the elimination of Amanullah was engineered by the British because he had become....an obstacle to the furtherance of Britain’s interests.”<sup>9</sup>

The new King, Nadir Shah submitted to Britain’s dictates, including acceptance of the Durand Line. Britain launched a ferocious new military campaign in 1930 in another bid to gain control of the Northwest Territories. The offensive went poorly, and Britain was about to lose control of Peshawar to the tribal warriors when it initiated a massive aerial bombardment of civilian Afghans to prevent defeat. MIT professor Noam Chomsky later pointed out that, “Winston Churchill

felt that poison gas was just right for use against ‘uncivilized tribes’ (Kurds and Afghans, particularly),” while the respected British statesman Lloyd George observed that “We insist on reserving the right to bomb niggers.”<sup>10</sup>

One of the root causes of the enduring animosity between Afghanistan and Pakistan was the seemingly permanent loss of Afghan lands taken by the British, including Baluchistan (with its access to the sea), and the Northwest Territories to Pakistan when that country was created by Britain in 1947. The British excluded the Afghans from the partition negotiations and the partition agreement, which finalized Pakistan’s boundaries—on the Durand Line. In addition to institutionalizing the artificial boundary created in 1893, Britain’s parting act hobbled the Afghan economy, permanently denying Afghanistan its former territory over the Hindu Kush with access to the sea.

In response to the partition agreement, the government of Afghanistan created an independent Pashtunistan movement that called for independence in the Northwest Territories. In reply, Pakistan hardened its position regarding the territories. In 1948 Pakistan greatly increased its military presence there. The action provoked the Afghan King Zahir Shah to renounce the Durand Line and demand the return of its territory. Kabul convened an Afghan tribal assembly (a Loya Jirga) which voted its full support for a separate independence for the tribal areas from Pakistan. The assembly also authorized the Afghan government to abrogate all of Afghanistan’s treaties with Great Britain regarding the trans-Durand Pashtuns.

American involvement in Afghanistan began in earnest soon after the end of World War II. In 1950 the top-secret U.S. policy document National Security Directive 68 warned of the Soviet Union’s alleged “design for world domination.” The U.S. initiated aid projects in Afghanistan starting in 1945. Soviet President Nikita Khrushchev wrote in his memoirs, “It was clear to us that the Americans were penetrating Afghanistan with the obvious purpose of setting up a military base.”<sup>11</sup> In fact in 1956 the U.S. built a fairly useless International Airport in Kandahar that was widely seen as a refueling base for U.S. bombers. Wikipedia notes that, “Since the airport was designed as a military base, it is more likely that the United States intended to use it as such in case there was a show-down of war between the United States and former USSR.”<sup>12</sup>

By the early 1970s the U.S. had decided that the best way to counter the Soviet’s “design for world domination” was to support the strict Islamists in Afghanistan, who were opposed to the progressive reforms of the Afghan government. According to Rog-

er Morris, National Security Council staff member, the CIA started to offer covert backing to Islamic radicals as early as 1973.<sup>13</sup> In August 1979 a classified State Department Report stated: “the United States larger interests ... would be served by the demise of the current Afghan regime, *despite whatever setbacks this might mean for future social and economic reforms in Afghanistan.*” Fundamentalist Islamists opposed to the Afghan government and supported by the U.S. became known as Mujahideen, or ‘fighters for Islam.’

Zbigniew Brzezinski, National Security Advisor to President Carter, admitted after the Soviet-Afghan war that the CIA was providing covert aid to Afghan Mujahideen fully six months before the Soviet invasion.<sup>14</sup> He pointed out that the U.S. intention in providing this aid was to “draw the Russians into the Afghan trap....the day the Soviets officially crossed the border, I wrote to President Carter: We now have the opportunity of giving to the USSR its Vietnam War.” The Soviet’s invasion of Afghanistan in December of 1979 was in their minds based largely on the knowledge that the U.S. was purposely destabilizing the Afghan government for its own purposes.

When the Soviets did invade, the U.S. was quick to provide weapons to the Mujahideen. By February 1980, the Washington Post reported that they were receiving arms coming from the U.S. government. The amounts were significant: 10,000 tons of arms and ammunition in 1983 which rose to 65,000 tons annually by 1987, according to Mohammad Yousaf, the Pakistani general who supervised the covert war from 1983-87. Milton Bearden, CIA station chief in Pakistan from 1986-1989 who was responsible for arming the Mujahideen, commented, “The U.S. was fighting the Soviets to the last Afghan.”<sup>15</sup>

It is estimated that the U.S. and Saudi Arabia gave \$40 billion worth of weapons and money to the fundamentalist Mujahideen over the course of the war.<sup>16</sup> The money was funneled through the Pakistan government, which used some of it to set up thousands of fundamentalist Islamic religious schools (madrassas) for the Afghan refugee children flooding into the country; these became the formative institutions for the Taliban.<sup>17</sup> Many of the madrassa students and Taliban-to-be were traumatized Afghan war orphans, who were then raised in these all-male schools where they learned a literal interpretation of Islam and the art of war, and not much else. Fifteen years later the U.S. was at war with these same fighters, which it had itself created through its funding of the madrassas and the fundamentalists. The 9/11 attacks on the United States were carried out by the same radical Islamists that the

U.S. had nurtured and supported during the Soviet war years.

In 2001, three weeks after the 9/11 attacks, the then prime minister Tony Blair sold the case for war in Afghanistan by insisting that the invasion would destroy the country's illicit drug trade. In an impassioned speech to the Labor Party, he told his supporters, "The arms the Taliban are buying today are paid for by the lives of young British people buying their drugs on British streets." But in fact the Taliban had outlawed the cultivation of poppies in May of 2000, and by the time of the U.S./NATO attack and invasion of Afghanistan the drug trade in Afghanistan had almost completely disappeared.<sup>18</sup>

As soon as the Taliban were overthrown the growing of poppies and production of heroin and opium surged, such that record amounts are produced almost every year, and Afghanistan has become the world's primary supplier of these drugs. Production of heroin by Afghan farmers rose between 2001 and 2012 from just 185 tons to a staggering 5,800 tons. Ninety per cent of the heroin sold on Britain's streets today is made using opium from Afghanistan, and after twelve years of U.S. occupation, heroin and opium now account for about half of Afghanistan's GDP.<sup>19</sup>

Well over one million Afghans were killed in the Soviet-Afghan war, along with over four million injured. More than five million refugees fled the country during that war, and two million were internally displaced.<sup>20</sup> 400,000 more died in the civil war, and 40,000 have died during the U.S. occupation.<sup>21</sup> 30 years of war combined with 250 years of manipulation by foreign powers have left Afghanistan one of the poorest and most ecologically damaged countries in the world.<sup>22</sup>

*Civil disobedience is not our problem. Our problem is civil obedience. Our problem is that people all over the world have obeyed the dictates of the leaders of their government and have gone to war, and millions have been killed because of this obedience. Our problem is that people are obedient all over the world in the face of poverty and starvation and stupidity, and war, and cruelty. Our problem is that people are obedient while the jails are full of petty thieves, and all the while the grand thieves are running and robbing the country. That's our problem.*

Historian Howard Zinn

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