

Twelve Reasons to Demand an End to the U.S. Occupation of Afghanistan

(1) The occupation of Afghanistan by U.S. and NATO forces has killed large numbers of civilians, and the death rate is rising. More than 11,000 Afghan civilians have been killed since 2001, many from U.S. air strikes, which have obliterated wedding parties and village meetings. The United Nations reported in September that U.S., NATO and Afghan Army forces killed 577 Afghan civilians in the first nine months of 2008, a 21% increase from last year. Human Rights Watch reported that the number of civilian deaths caused by U.S. and NATO airstrikes tripled from 2006 to 2007. In August, a U.S. airstrike killed 90 civilians, 60 of them children who were asleep at the time of the attack. According to the *NY Times* (7.23.08), U.S. airstrikes are becoming more frequent and deadly: "In June alone, 646 bombs and missiles were used in Afghanistan, the second highest monthly total since the end of major combat operations in 2002."

(2) U.S. and coalition forces have committed many human rights violations – bomb and missile attacks on civilians; the detention, and in some cases torture, of hundreds of Afghans for years without trial at Bagram air base and Guantanamo Bay; and house invasions. These violations have become so grotesque, and have created so much resentment toward the occupiers, that even the Karzai government's Council of Ministers has bitterly complained.

(3) More than 1,000 U.S. and coalition soldiers have died since 2001, and they are now dying at a record rate. Coalition casualties in 2008 were the highest since the war began; in fact more soldiers were killed this year than in the first four years of the war combined. CUNY students have been and will be sent to Afghanistan. We should oppose all wars in which our students are being asked to fight for economic and strategic advantages that accrue to elites (see # 10 below).

(4) There is no foreseeable end to the occupation and no realistic expectation that the U.S.-led coalition will defeat the insurgents. A RAND analyst recently pronounced, "It is generally accepted now across all [U.S.] government agencies that the situation in Afghanistan has significantly worsened and has become quite dire." The top British military commander in Afghanistan was clearer when he recently stated, "**We are not going to win this war.**"

(5) Last year's surge in troop numbers didn't work, and there's no reason to believe the new surge will succeed. There are now 52,000 U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan, up from 36,000 at the beginning of 2007. Yet the Taliban now has a permanent presence in 72% of Afghanistan, up from 54% in 2007. In the first three months of 2008, attacks around Kabul increased by 70%. The Taliban and other rebel groups continue to recruit fighters angered at the civilian casualties caused by U.S. attacks, the corruption of government officials, dire poverty and worsening conditions.

(6) In October 2008, the Congressional Research Service reported that the war in Afghanistan has already cost \$173 billion. That price will rise as more troops are deployed and as the war drags on, adding to a huge federal budget deficit and denying money for needed social programs.

(7) Just as the Vietnam War spread into Laos and Cambodia, with terrible consequences, so the war in Afghanistan has spread to Pakistan. Repeated U.S. attacks on Pakistani territory have killed hundreds of civilians, have destabilized Pakistan, and have heightened tensions in the Indian subcontinent, contributing to the threat of a war between India and Pakistan.

(8) The war has worsened living conditions for many Afghans. When the U.S. invaded in 2001, it promised a "bright future" for the people of Afghanistan. People are still waiting. The 2007 Afghanistan Human Development Report revealed that only 31% of households

have access to clean water, that life expectancy is 43.1 years, adult literacy is 23.5%, 50% of Afghan children under five are malnourished; and 6.6 million Afghans do not meet their minimum daily food requirements. With the flourishing drug trade had come a huge increase in drug addiction, including 60,000 child addicts. Refugees from the countryside have swelled the population of Kabul to over 3 million, with many living in desperate poverty, not far from the palatial mansions of the politicians, drug lords, and racketeers who have gorged themselves on drug money, bribes and foreign aid.

(9) The majority of the Afghan government is composed of Northern Alliance warlords and Islamic fundamentalists, some of whom are heavily involved in the lucrative drug trade. The Northern Alliance is no more progressive than the oppressive Taliban. The warlords of the Northern Alliance have a well-earned reputation for brutality, cruelty toward women, and unrelenting greed. Each warlord controls his own fiefdom and receives a cut of the thriving drug trade that supplies 90% of the world's heroin. President Karzai's own brother, Ahmed, is reputedly the country's biggest drug lord. The national government has very little presence outside the capital, and Karzai is commonly referred to as the "mayor of Kabul." Corruption is rampant and 73% of Afghans polled say that paying a bribe is necessary to get government assistance.

(10) The U.S. occupation is part of a global resource war and not primarily about defeating Al Qaeda. The purported goal of the U.S. and NATO invasion was to destroy Al Qaeda bases in Afghanistan. This was accomplished. The bases are closed and most Al Qaeda forces have fled the country. So why does the U.S. occupation continue? It's impossible to ignore the tremendous strategic importance of Afghanistan in the contest to secure control over the planet's largest remaining reserves of oil and natural gas and their transit routes. Both the Clinton and Bush administrations expressed a keen interest in having pipelines built that would transport oil and gas from the energy-rich Caspian Sea region through Afghanistan to Pakistan and then the Arabian Sea, avoiding Russian or Iranian territory. In addition, the U.S. has built two large permanent military bases in Afghanistan, which can be used in an attack on neighboring Iran, owner of the world's second largest reserves of oil and natural gas, a rival to the U.S. for influence in the oil-rich Persian Gulf, and the big winner in the overthrow of Iraq's Baathist regime.

(11) Laura Bush has assured us that Operation Enduring Freedom has liberated the women of Afghanistan. This is a lie. The Taliban cruelly oppressed women, and when they were ousted, Afghan women hoped they could achieve freedom and equality. The sad reality is that the Northern Alliance warlords and jihadists who were empowered by the U.S. invasion have rivaled the Taliban in their repressive policies – insisting that women cover themselves in burqas, and imprisoning those who refuse to accept arranged marriages. Sonali Kolhatkar, the author of *Bleeding Afghanistan: Washington, Warlords, and the Propaganda of Silence*, has reported that "Women are being imprisoned in greater numbers than ever before, for the crime of escaping from home or having, quote-unquote, 'sexual relations'--'illegal sexual relations.' Most of these women are simply victims of rape." Warlords and those who work for them have raped with impunity. Recently the Karzai government pardoned two brothers convicted of rape and sent them back to the same neighborhood as their victims.

(12) With the planned surge of 20,000 additional troops in Afghanistan, and growing U.S. conflict with Pakistan, now is the right time to fight for withdrawal. Without pressure from an anti-war movement, the U.S. will not withdraw from Afghanistan, for the reasons stated in #10 above. Some of our friends hesitate because they don't want the Taliban back in power. The irony is that the U.S., through Saudi Arabia, has already begun negotiating with the Taliban to bring them into a coalition government with Karzai and the Northern Alliance. The force of U.S. weapons gave state power to the oppressive Northern Alliance, first in the early 1990's and then in October 2001. Only the people of Afghanistan – with fraternal assistance from progressives around the world – can liberate themselves.