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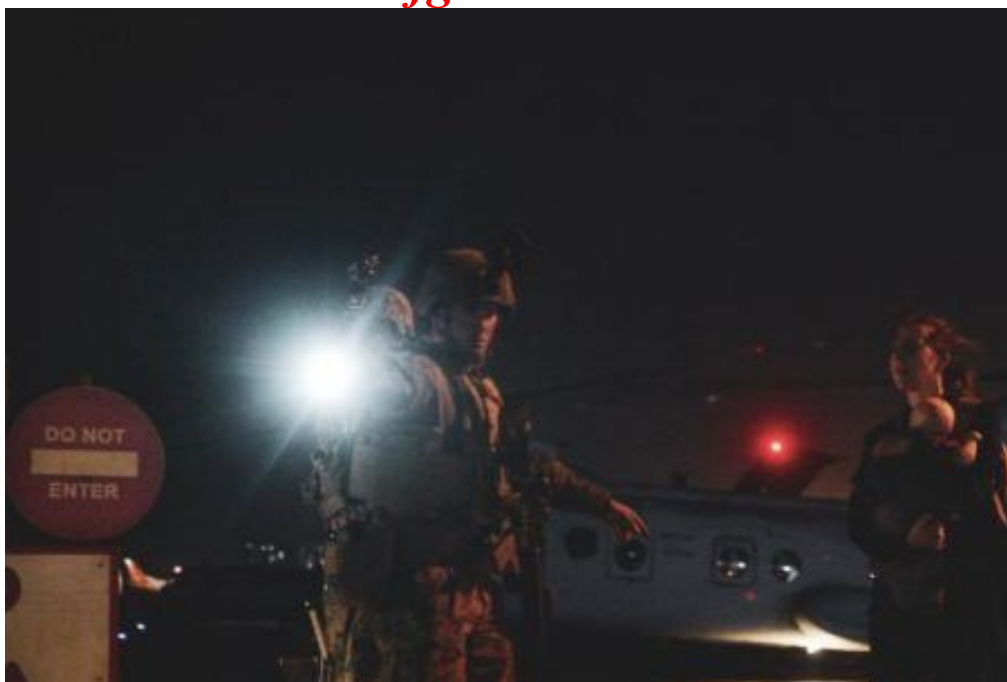
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## *Eight Key Points on America's Defeat in Afghanistan*



Photograph Source: Sgt. Isaiah Campbell – Public Domain

The humiliating defeat of the American Empire in Afghanistan – replete with “near identical images” of frantic evacuation helicopters atop a US Embassy as in Saigon in 1975 – poses a dilemma for left anti-imperialists. We must always welcome and applaud setbacks suffered by the empire, which oppresses the world with its giant global network of bases and troops and its relentless exploitation and pollution of the world natural and human resources. We do not wish “Death to America,” which is inhabited by hundreds of millions of ordinary and oppressed people who have never been consulted on US foreign

policy, but we wish Death on the American Empire, which fuels and reinforces massive inequality and oppression at home as well as abroad.

Still, with all due respect to the photographic parallels with Saigon, the United States' tail-between-its-legs flight from Afghanistan is different from the previous one in Vietnam. A leftist anti-imperialist (and all serious leftists are anti-imperialists) could welcome the fall of Saigon with little in the way of mixed feelings. The Vietnamese National Liberation Front was a heroic and revolutionary organization fighting a legitimate nationalist struggle against a ruthless Superpower that killed 3 to 5 million Southeast Asians between 1962 and 1975. The defeat of history's most lethal empire by a small peasant nation's remarkable resistance movement was one of the most celebration-worthy events of all time. The same goes for the Cuban Revolution led by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara.

The return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan is different. No leftist worth their claim of commitment to humanistic, egalitarian, and revolutionary ideals like socialism and communism would ever root for reactionary Islamic jihadists who brutally oppress women while slaughtering ordinary civilians and imposing a backwards, fundamentalist, and neo-feudal theology justifying that oppression and slaughter.

This makes it more difficult to openly embrace America's defeat in Afghanistan. The US government and media can point at the atrocities committed by the Islamic fundamentalists to encourage millions of nice middle-class Americans to wrongly identify the US Empire with humanitarian aims including "democracy," women's rights, pluralism, and rule of law.

While marred by nationalism and ultimately unable to prevent the incorporation of "socialist" Vietnam into the world capitalist system (masses of poor Vietnamese toil for low wages under miserable conditions in Western garment and other factories), the NLF was a positive and progressive force in its time. Nobody who is seriously on the portside should think the same way about the Taliban (or ISIS or Al Qaeda).

How to stay true to anti-imperial principles while not seeming to be allied with backwards Islamic jihadists like the Taliban? The way past this dilemma includes eight basic points: First, serious examination of the U.S. "foreign policy" (imperialist) record reveals beyond the shadow of any serious doubt that the United States powerfully cultivated – funded and equipped and protected – Islamo fundamentalist extremism within (and beyond) Afghanistan as part of its Cold War strategy to roll back Soviet power and appeal. The Taliban and Al Qaeda are Uncle Sam's bastard children, to no small extent.

Second, the United States does not intervene in other countries' internal affairs for humanistic purposes. The ritually stated claims of humanitarian concern are just cover for unjust US imperial wars and occupations. Uncle Sam goes in for strategic imperial reasons, including the punishment of a nation for daring to resist its commands and thereby encouraging other nations and people to do the same. The desire to look strong and even invincible – Mafia Don-like – in the wake of an assault on its territory like the jetliner attacks (ironically carried out mainly by Saudi Arabian jihadists) of September 11, 2001, was a critical reason for the US invasion of Afghanistan. The war on Afghanistan then got rapidly demoted by Washington's decision to exploit 9/11 to justify a mass murderous petro-imperialist US assault on oil-rich Iraq, also wrapped in the deceptive humanitarian rhetoric of "democracy" promotion.

Third, the US has a long record of supporting and even imposing deeply reactionary regimes around the world, including in its own hemisphere, something that should make all serious observers skeptical of its claims to care about human rights and decent government conduct abroad.

Fourth, from the mass-murderous suppression of Filipino independence fighters at the turn of the 20th Century through the Central American Wars of the 1920s and 30s and the lethal and criminal US campaigns of mass slaughter in Korea, Southeast Asia and Iraq, the US has consistently driven people into the arms of anti-imperial resistance movements through its soulless murder and maiming of masses of ordinary people in their own homelands, far from US shores and borders. A recent *Atlantic* essay by Ian Fritz, a former US Air force interpreter who participated in 99 air missions targeting Afghani jihadis between 2008 and 2013 marvels at the incredibly dogged resistance shown by ordinary Afghan men who continued to fight against a Superpower that "d[id]n't think twice about using bombs designed for buildings against individual men This isn't an exaggeration," Fritz writes:

'Days before my 22nd birthday, I watched fighter jets drop 500-pound bombs into the middle of a battle, turning 20 men into dust. As I took in the new landscape, full of craters instead of people, there was a lull in the noise, and I thought, *Surely now we've killed enough of them*. We hadn't. When two more attack helicopters arrived, I heard [Afghani fighters] yelling, "Keep shooting. They will retreat!" As we continued our attack, they repeated, "Brothers, we are winning. This is a glorious day." And as I watched six Americans die, what felt like 20 Taliban rejoiced in my ears, "Waaaaallahu akbar, they're dying!" ...It didn't matter that they were unarmored men, with 30-year-old guns, fighting

against gunships, fighter jets, helicopters, and a far-better-equipped ground team. It also didn't matter that 100 of them died that day. Through all that noise, the sounds of bombs and bullets exploding behind them, their fellow fighters being killed, the Taliban kept their spirits high, kept encouraging one another, kept insisting that not only were they winning, but that they'd get us again—even better—next time...That was my first mission in Afghanistan.'

By the time his mission was done, Fritz writes, "it finally dawned on me" that *every American bomb just drove more young Afghans into the resistance*. "Unlike me," Fritz reflects:

'when they went home, it would be to the next village over, not 6,000 miles away. Those men in the field may have just been farmers, or maybe they really were hiding the evidence of their assault. *Either way, our bombs and bullets meant the young boys in their village were now that much more likely to join the Taliban*' (emphasis added).

As the left historian and journalist Terry Thomas writes:

"The existential reality of war when you invade someone's country: it is their home, and they will fight you. No matter how much money you spend; no matter how many bombers you deploy; no matter how much propaganda you produce. Home for you is 6000 miles away; home for them is the next village. And when you bomb the village, *it simply reinforces their commitment to resist, no matter how vile you may think their ideas are.*"

Indeed – villages like Bola Boluk, where American bombs killed 130 civilians in May of 2009. The dead included dozens of children whose body parts were carried in wheelbarrows by weeping locals. Then US president Barack Obama "Empire's New Clothes" absurdly blamed the slaughter on "Taliban grenades." (*New York Times*, May 6, 2009).

Fifth, it would be nice for those of us on the radical left if the US bombs had driven Afghan peasants and villagers into the arms of secular socialist or communist movements, but U.S. imperialism has been largely dedicated to the crushing of socialism and communism as a global force. It has been successful in that endeavor, with no small help from ruling classes in other countries and critical mistakes and crimes on the part of the people who headed formerly and/or potentially socialist regimes and movements in Russia, China, and elsewhere. Islamic fundamentalism has arisen in the political and economic vacuum left by the US-led imperialist defeat of independent secular Third World nationalism in the Muslim world.

Sixth, chances of left and progressive, humanistic forces challenging the jihadists going forward in Afghanistan are only enhanced by the eviction of the American Empire, whose murderous conduct only helps legitimize the fundamentalist Taliban given its long struggle against the criminal US presence. Now the Taliban will one Afghanistan's inequalities and oppression to a greater degree than it would if U.S. troops were still stationed in "the graveyard of empires."

Seventh, the United States' claim to humanitarian and democratic concern is illegitimate not only because of its conduct abroad but also because of the nature of its society and government at home. The United States is no shining beacon of democracy, social justice, pluralism, and human rights. It's a savagely unequal, richly plutocratic monument to corporate and financial oligarchy, white supremacy, and mass incarceration that consigns millions of its own people and most especially its nonwhite subjects, to miserable poverty. Women's reproductive rights are under vicious neofascist assault in many of its states along with minority voting rights, the right of educators to tell basic truths about American history, and the right of civil rights activists to protest police brutality.

The United States is a giant, armed-to-the-teeth shooting gallery saturated with military-style assault weapons. It is plagued by rampant soulless gun violence and loaded with Christian fascist freaks who support the genocidal expansion of a deadly pandemic.

And all this oppression and madness at home is intimately and dialectically interrelated on numerous levels with the expense and power of the American Empire abroad (the subject my of my first book 17 years ago, for what that's worth). The notion that the ghetto-pockmarked US – the world's leading prison state and home to a maldistribution of wealth so extreme that the top tenth of its upper 1 Percent has a greater collective net worth than its bottom 90 percent – *has anything to tell any other nation or people about how to organize their lives and societies in accord with progressive, democratic, and humanistic ideals is truly laughable.*

Eighth, while the Taliban is terrible, it does offer a good global example and role model in one sense: it shows again (as did the Cubans and the Vietnamese from 1959 through 1975) that Superpower can be defeated even by small and poor nations through dedicated popular resistance. This at least is something from which non-reactionary movements, nations, and peoples around the world can and should draw inspiration. The Mafia Don Uncle Sam, with its 500-pound bombs and its giant network of bases, is not God. It can be made to cut and run, and *those who would align themselves with the imperial beast inside*

*occupied nations should take note: the US will leave many if not most of its collaborators and allies inside the nations it abandons to the tender mercies of those who forced it out.*

It isn't reactionary jihadism as such that has dealt Uncle Sam a deserved and necessary blow in Afghanistan; it is dedicated popular resistance. It is on left forces at home and abroad to form, regroup, expand, and thrive in ways that make progressive socialists and communists, not reactionary jihadists. the leading anti-imperialist force in the world again.

**Paul Street's** new book is *The Hollow Resistance: Obama, Trump, and Politics of Appeasement*.

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