

# Support the People of Afghanistan and Pakistan in the Face of Imperialist War and Fundamentalist Retrogression!

## International Marxist-Humanist Organization

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As the U.S./NATO war and occupation enters its tenth year, the conflict in Afghanistan is in fact deepening. The long-suffering Afghan people have experienced war for most of the last 30 years, ever since the USSR invaded to prop up a pro-Russian regime and the U.S., Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia responded by supporting Islamist reactionaries.

Over time, elements of those Islamists developed into the Taliban and Al Qaeda, while others became warlords who are now part of the NATO-installed regime of Ahmad Karzai. The corruption and venality of the Karzai-warlord regime, which blatantly stole the 2009 elections, has created mass discontent, fueled by nationalist sentiment in the face of foreign troops on Afghan soil. This discontent will likely increase, not decrease, as result of Obama's escalation of the war.

Despite its retrogressive politics, which include a ban on girls attending school and draconian restrictions on women leaving the home, dissatisfaction with Karzai and NATO has helped the Afghan Taliban to rebound during the past two years. While the Taliban does not enjoy wide popular support, it has staged some dramatic attacks in urban centers like Kabul and Kandahar, also assuming de facto control of some rural areas in the predominantly Pashtun South.

It is true that Taliban rule means severe repression of women, on a scale not found even in Saudi Arabia or Iran. But it is also true that the Karzai regime offers not as much of an alternative to Taliban policies toward women as is often supposed. While Karzai issues general statements about women's rights for the consumption of his international backers and the global media, at home the effects of his rule are quite different, based as it is upon the support of fundamentalist warlords.

Women's rights activists are under constant pressure, many of them having been driven out of their jobs or even out of the country. Moreover, Karzai allowed a retrogressive law concerning the position of women from the predominantly Shia Hazara minority to take effect in the summer 2009, on the eve of the election. This blatant attempt to court the votes of the Hazara clergy has resulted in husbands gaining the legal right to deny food to wives who refuse sexual relations. It also gives fathers and even grandfathers rather than mothers custody rights in case of divorce. Some 300 women braved a violent backlash on the streets of Kabul in order to demonstrate against this law, to no avail.

It should be underlined that the Taliban has managed to increase its power in the face of some of the world's best-equipped militaries – U.S., French, etc. And while its support from elements of Pakistan's military intelligence network is often mentioned, it is seldom noted that the level of this support pales in comparison with what the Afghan and international jihadists were receiving during the 1980s from the U.S., Saudi Arabia, and the Pakistani state. This comparison speaks most eloquently to the utter failure of the U.S., NATO, and the Karzai regime.

The U.S./NATO occupation has helped the Taliban to rebound by playing the nationalist card, especially in the Pashtun areas of the South. The U.S./NATO reliance on air strikes and drones has spared Western forces heavy casualties in an attempt to limit antiwar sentiment in the West. But this has come at the expense of massive civilian casualties. In September 2009, for example German troops called in air strikes against what they assumed were Taliban attackers, resulting instead in the deaths of some 100 civilians. Killing of civilians (especially wedding parties mistaken for insurgent gatherings) gives Afghans reason to seek revenge.

The Afghan Taliban has also maintained its close ties to Al Qaeda. In December 2009, an Al Qaeda double agent of Jordanian-Palestinian origin managed to infiltrate a CIA headquarters in Afghanistan with the help of the Taliban. In blowing himself up, he killed eight other people, among them one of the CIA's top specialists on Al Qaeda and a high Jordanian intelligence official. This embarrassed not only the CIA, but also the Jordanian regime, which now faces protests at home over its involvement in Afghanistan.

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown claims that the war is important for the security of people in Britain and the West, as Taliban rule provides a haven for Al-Qaeda. But terrorist plots can be organized from anywhere, from a few safe houses.

Inside Pakistan, the long years of war across the border have helped local Taliban elements to develop into a force that has begun to challenge the Pakistani state. The state

has long supported them as a counterweight to India and to domestic leftists. Even now that the state has belatedly begun to confront some of the jihadists, it has left alone those who aim at India or Afghanistan, targeting only those who have directly attacked the Pakistani state. Pakistani Taliban groups allied to Al Qaeda exercise de facto power in much of the Northwest Frontier areas and were able to take and hold the Swat Valley near the capital for two years, where they prevented girls from attending school (beyond age 8-10) and forced teenage and adult women behind the burqa.

In recent months, and in response to army crackdowns in Swat and South Waziristan province, Pakistani Taliban have mounted spectacular attacks on civilians and governmental institutions. Their suicide bombers have managed to attack police, military and intelligence headquarters, while also taking truck bombs into popular market areas, killing hundreds of civilians.

These attacks have severely dented Taliban support inside Pakistan, where much of the public had earlier seen them as courageous fighters against India or Western imperialism. At the same time, however, the generalized hatred of U.S. imperialism and its ties to Israel, the weakness and corruption of the state, and the arrogance of the U.S. drone attacks offer fertile ground for fundamentalist growth, especially given the relative weakness of the Left. Moreover, the drone attacks – like other terrorist attacks – kill individual leaders, who can easily be replaced, after having gained the status of a martyr.

The global Left has tended to oppose U.S. imperialism without worrying too much about the dangers of fundamentalism in the region, even to fellow leftists. In contrast, the International Marxist-Humanist Organization (IMHO) views the region primarily in terms of how to get to a form of society in which labor, women, youth, and national minorities can achieve emancipation from oppression and alienation. Thus, it becomes imperative to oppose both imperialism and fundamentalism, as well as the rule of local despots. That is why we of the IMHO link our opposition to imperialism to our support for local forces of freedom and emancipation, whether from the socialist left, the feminist movement, labor, or national minorities.

Source: <http://www.usmarxisthumanists.org/articles/support-the-people-of-afghanistan-and-pakistan-in-the-face-of-imperialist-war-and-fundamentalist-retrogression/>