

The fall of the Afghan puppet regime: A historic debacle for US imperialism

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The sudden fall of the US puppet regime in Afghanistan on Sunday is a humiliating debacle for American imperialism. It marks the collapse of a regime that was imposed through a criminal war and occupation, promoted on the basis of lies, and maintained in power through assassination, torture and the bombing of civilians.

As Sunday began, the Pentagon announced that two battalions of Marines and a US infantry battalion were arriving at Kabul International Airport to bolster the Afghan regime. The puppet Afghan president, Ashraf Ghani, issued a video calling on his regime's security forces to maintain "law and order."

However, Taliban troops, after briefly pausing their lightning advance at the gates of Kabul, seized key points in the Afghan capital during the day. By nightfall, Taliban officials reported they had taken over the presidential palace and would soon announce the formation of a new government. Bagram airbase, the infamous NATO prison and torture center, fell to the Taliban, who freed the 7,000 prisoners housed there.

As Sunday progressed, Ghani and his national security adviser fled the country. In the morning, American time, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said US officials were abandoning the embassy for the Kabul airport. But by evening, US diplomats had to admit Washington no longer controls even the Kabul airport and that US citizens in Kabul have been instructed to hide.

In an article titled "Taliban Sweep in Afghanistan Follows Years of US Miscalculations," the *New York Times* admitted: "President Biden's top advisers concede they were stunned by the rapid collapse of the Afghan army in the face of an aggressive, well-planned offensive by the Taliban. ... As recently as late June, the intelligence agencies estimated that even if the Taliban gained power, it would be at least a year and a half before Kabul would be threatened."

In reality, the much-vaunted "democratic" regime set up by Washington and its NATO allies in Afghanistan amounted to a political zero. Maintained in power only by tens of thousands of NATO troops and US warplanes, it dissolved virtually overnight as US and NATO troops were withdrawn.

If American ruling circles were unprepared for the sudden collapse of the regime they propped up at such an enormous cost, it is because to a significant extent they believed their own propaganda. During the course of two decades, no major newspaper, television network or mainstream media outlet examined this neocolonial war of occupation with a modicum of

honesty.

The human and social costs of the war in Afghanistan are catastrophic. Official tallies, no doubt massively understated, claim 164,436 Afghans were killed during the war, together with 2,448 US soldiers, 3,846 US military contractors and 1,144 soldiers from other NATO countries. Hundreds of thousands of Afghans and tens of thousands of NATO personnel were wounded. The financial cost to the United States alone is estimated at \$2 trillion, financed by debt that will cost a further \$6.5 trillion in interest payments.

Yesterday's events inevitably recall the famous photographs of US diplomats boarding helicopters on the rooftop of the embassy in Saigon, nearly a half-century ago, at the end of the Vietnam War. In its implications and political consequences, however, the US debacle in Afghanistan is if anything even more significant.

The collapse of the Afghan government shatters the delusionary conceptions the American ruling class embraced following the Stalinist bureaucracy's dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The disappearance of Washington's main military rival was viewed by the American ruling class as an opportunity to overcome its global decline and domestic contradictions through the use of force. US military and foreign policy planners proclaimed a "unipolar moment" in which the unchallengeable power of the United States would oversee a "New World Order" in the interests of Wall Street.

The victory of the US and its allies in the first war against Iraq in 1991, before the final collapse of the USSR, was taken as a demonstration that "Force Works!" as the *Wall Street Journal* proclaimed at the time. President George H. W. Bush declared that through its criminal bombing of a largely defenseless country, American imperialism had "kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all." One year later, in 1992, the Pentagon adopted a strategy document declaring that the objective of the US was to militarily "discourage advanced industrial nations from challenging our leadership or even aspiring to a larger regional or global role."

At the time of the 1999 NATO bombing of Serbia, under the Clinton administration, the delusion emerged that US dominance in precision-guided munitions would transform world politics and establish Washington as an unchallenged world hegemon. Responding to these conceptions, the WSWs wrote:

The United States presently enjoys a “competitive advantage” in the arms industry. But neither this advantage nor the products of this industry can guarantee world dominance. Despite the sophistication of its weaponry, the financial-industrial foundation of the United States’ preeminent role in the affairs of world capitalism is far less substantial than it was 50 years ago. Its share of world production has declined dramatically. Its international trade deficit increases by billions of dollars every month. The conception that underlies the cult of precision-guided munitions—that mastery in the sphere of weapons technology can offset these more fundamental economic indices of national strength—is a dangerous delusion.

In the context of the project for global conquest, the war in Afghanistan was seen as central to the US strategy of controlling Central Asia and the “world Island” of Eurasia, so as to strengthen the position of US imperialism against China, Russia and the European imperialist powers. After the September 11, 2001, attacks, the WSWS rejected the arguments that the invasion was part of a “war on terror” against Al Qaeda and the Taliban, which were themselves the product of US efforts to destabilize the Soviet Union two decades earlier:

The US government initiated the war in pursuit of far-reaching international interests of the American ruling elite. What is the main purpose of the war? The collapse of the Soviet Union a decade ago created a political vacuum in Central Asia, which is home to the second largest deposit of proven reserves of petroleum and natural gas in the world. ... By attacking Afghanistan, setting up a client regime and moving vast military forces into the region, the US aims to establish a new political framework within which it will exert hegemonic control.

In 2003, the US invaded Iraq, based on lying claims, trumpeted by the entire US media, that the Iraqi government had weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) that it would give to Al Qaeda. Comparing the unprovoked attack on defenseless Iraq to the 1939 Nazi invasion of Poland that began World War II in Europe, the WSWS wrote:

Whatever the outcome of the initial stages of the conflict that has begun, American imperialism has a rendezvous with disaster. It cannot conquer the world. It cannot reimpose colonial shackles upon the masses of the Middle East. It will not find through the medium of war a viable solution to its internal maladies. Rather, the unforeseen difficulties and mounting resistance engendered by war will intensify all of the internal contradictions of American society.

These words resonate powerfully today. Taken collectively, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, along with the invasion of Libya and the CIA-instigated civil war in Syria, have left millions dead and entire societies shattered. Far from establishing the unchallenged global domination of American imperialism, they have led to one debacle after the next. Conditions in Iraq, three decades after the first Gulf War, are, if anything, even worse than in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is a metaphor for the entire rotting edifice of American capitalism. US budget deficits have been papered over by electronically printing trillions of dollars of fictitious capital in “quantitative easing” funds handed over to the super-rich in bank bailouts. To the fictitious capital on which US capitalism’s bubble economy is based, corresponds the fictitious power conferred on the Pentagon by “smart bombs” and drone murder strikes in countries like Afghanistan.

A serious warning is in order: powerful elements of the American ruling elite are no doubt preparing many contingency plans, each more reckless than the last, to respond to this debacle. They have no intention of simply abiding by the devastating loss of prestige and credibility involved in their defeat at the hands of an Islamist movement armed only with light weapons in one of the world’s poorest, most war-torn countries.

The remarks by former CIA Director and retired Army General David Petraeus in a radio interview Friday point to the discussions taking place behind the scenes. Calling the US position in Afghanistan “disastrous,” Petraeus declared: “This is an enormous national security setback, and it is on the verge of getting much worse unless we decide to take really significant action.”

The US military has a great deal of its prestige invested in Afghanistan and the broader project of imperialist conquest of which it was a part. The American ruling class will not retreat from its efforts to control the world through military force, upon which its wealth depends.

Unlike Vietnam, the American ruling class cannot blame the debacle in Afghanistan on an anti-war movement. With the assistance of the organizations of the upper middle class, which bought into the “war on terror” and “human rights imperialism,” broad-based opposition to war within the United States has been suppressed and directed behind the Democratic Party, which is, no less than the Republicans, a party of Wall Street and the military.

The homicidal response of the ruling class to the pandemic, however, shows that the ruling class has no more regard for the lives of workers within the major capitalist countries than they do for the masses in Central Asia and the Middle East. Even as the pandemic continues to spread, there are growing expressions of working class opposition.

The development of this opposition into a conscious political movement for socialism is inextricably connected to the fight against imperialist war. This is the fundamental lesson of the entire criminal debacle that is the US war in Afghanistan.



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