

'Anti-Terror Coalition' Is Stumbling Toward The Clash of Civilizations

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Since the launch of the "anti-terror" war in Afghanistan, press outlets have been celebrating the birth of a new-found "coalition" among nations which had formerly been Cold War adversaries. In particular, the cooperation of Russia and the Central Asian republics—Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakstan—as well as neighboring Pakistan, has been hailed as historic. The fact that the Islamic Republic of Iran has not been categorically opposed to anti-Taliban operations, has been read (or rather mis-read) as a signal that Tehran is now on board.

Press propaganda aside, the reality is far more complex. Each of the states sharing a border with Afghanistan, has well-grounded reasons to wish that the outlaw Taliban regime, and everything it represents, from irrationalist fanaticism, to weapons smuggling and drug trafficking, were removed from the map, as swiftly and cleanly as possible. Already from the period of the anti-Soviet mujahideen campaign launched by President Jimmy Carter's National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, Afghanistan had become a festering sore for Central Asia. Following the takeover by the Pakistani and U.S.-backed Taliban in the 1990s, culminating in the capture of the capital Kabul in 1996, the country became the headquarters, training grounds, and logistical center for not only drugs and weapons smuggling, but "Islamist" insurrectionary forces, aimed at destabilizing the governments and nation-states of the entire area.

In point of fact, overlapping groups of these countries have been working for years, to stem the flow of illegal arms and drugs, and to protect their borders from Taliban-linked insurgents. The Shanghai Five countries (now grown to become the Shanghai Cooperation Organization), and the Dushanbe Initiative, are two such groupings. On the purely diplomatic level, there has been a mechanism known as the 6+2, a grouping under the aegis of the United Nations which brought together Russia and the United States, along with Afghanistan, and its neighbors Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Iran, and China. This initiative has not made progress over the years, due to U.S. and Pakistani obstructionism.

Now, since the United States has declared its war on terrorism, together with Tony Blair's Britain, and Pakistan has

been forced to go along, a massive military campaign has begun, allegedly to root out the terrorist networks of bin Laden, and overthrow the hated Taliban regime.

As Lyndon LaRouche was the first to caution, following the Sept. 11 events, any such military action in Afghanistan could unleash a process which would destabilize the entire region. This, he said, was precisely the intention of the coup-plotters behind the Sept. 11 attacks: to set the Eurasian continent aflame in a clash of civilizations.

The Afghan Catastrophe

Afghanistan has been devastated by decades of war, from the Afghansi/Soviet conflict in the 1980s, to the internecine tribal warfare following the Soviet withdrawal, to the Taliban takeover of 90% of the country, in the 1990s. The Taliban completed the destruction of the country's economy, by transforming it into a vast drug plantation, which produced 80% of the opium and heroin flooding the Eurasian continent. Recognized until recently by only three governments—Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Pakistan—the country was effectively isolated internationally, and no investment or trade or infrastructure development has been possible.

Large masses of the population, fleeing the maniacal Taliban warlords, have abandoned the cities and ended up in refugee camps, depending on international aid organizations for mere survival. Others have fled to neighboring countries: 2.5 million to Iran, and 4 million to Pakistan, where they also live in refugee camps, handled by aid agencies.

UNICEF reported to the German paper *Tagesspiegel* on Oct. 5, that already before Sept. 11, Afghanistan was a catastrophe. For 5 to 6 million people out of 25 million, the situation was already life-threatening, and one million had no home at all. UN special envoy Nigel Fisher, reported, "From mid-November on, many regions will be completely cut off. Then, everything will change. Then, many people will starve or freeze to death." Fisher, a Canadian, painted a grim picture: "Imagine a Canadian Winter with snow and -20°C, but without shoes, without warm clothes, without warm houses, even without blankets. And in addition to that, there is not even anything to eat. It will be terrible."

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization reported that



U.S. and British bombers and missiles are not only hammering Afghanistan's Taliban; they are also blasting at the pillars of stability of numerous governments in the Islamic world, which had themselves been fighting "Talibanization."

particularly in the North and northeast of the country, 2 to 3 million people, between 30 and 40% of the population, had left their villages already, in part due to drought, which has left the lakes and rivers dry. The worst situation is reportedly in Faryab province, where 700,000 out of a population of 1 million are threatened with starvation.

On Sept. 12, after the drumbeat against Afghanistan started, all aid organizations evacuated their personnel. This meant that even those housed in refugee camps could not be fed. The UN High Commission for Refugees estimated that 1.5 million additional people would be looking for refuge in neighboring countries in the coming days and weeks.

Both Pakistan and Iran, which have enormous refugee populations, mainly Afghans, announced they could not handle further inflows. Not only do these countries fear that, among the refugees, Taliban fighters would try to infiltrate; they are simply at the limit of their abilities to house masses of more refugees. Iran has tried to construct camps on the Afghan side of the border, but, as Iranian officials complained, the Taliban were sabotaging this effort.

When the bombardments began, the United States announced that it was simultaneously dropping food and aid packets over the land. As humanitarian aid organizations, among others, were quick to point out, this was a cruel farce: Not only is the food being dropped over mined areas (there are 10-15 million mines in Afghanistan); not only is it impossible to know who will receive it; but the amounts of aid foreseen are pathetic. Were the United States to deliver the 2 million packets of food it has planned, all at once, it would

give one-third of Afghanistan's hungry food for one day.

Thus, even if the Taliban were not to trigger insurrections in neighboring countries, through their assets, the mere fact and dimensions of the refugee flows, and the feared mass deaths through starvation, would suffice to destabilize the entire region.

Pakistan On The Brink

The first country to be shaken by the ongoing war, is Pakistan. Mass protests had rocked major cities, especially Quetta and the capital Islamabad, as thousands of Pakistani and Afghan refugees manifested solidarity with the Taliban. The government had to mobilize troops and police against the crowds, and arrest several religious leaders, in an attempt to maintain control. If the war continues against Afghanistan, there is a real danger that the ethnic Pushtuns in Pakistan, who represent an enormous force, will take up arms, and call for the creation, with the Taliban, of a Pushtunistan.

In addition to the support for Taliban among large parts of the population—and not only among ethnic Pushtuns—there is a significant portion of the Pakistani military and intelligence establishment, which supports the Taliban, largely its creature. The fear that these layers could rock the boat, led President Gen. Pervez Musharraf to announce a major shakeup in both the military and the Inter-Services Intelligence on Oct. 9.

No amount of purges, however, can stabilize an inherently uncontrolled situation, and there is every reason to expect that attempts will be made to overthrow Musharraf. Once the

bombardments had begun, he manifested his nervousness in a press conference. Musharraf said, "I certainly think the operation is not over. It will carry on. I only hope it will be short." Asked how this cohered with President Bush's statements about a long war, he replied, "In this environment, the targetting is Osama bin Laden. . . . If the targetting is correct and the results of the operations are achieved against those targets, it can be finished in a day or two"!

Musharraf made clear his real concern is that, if the Taliban were defeated, the Northern Alliance, backed by Russia and Iran, may reap the benefits. He reported to the press, that he had told Blair and Bush that "this action should not be allowed to be taken advantage of by the Northern Alliance."

President Bush responded the following day, with the crude statement, that he "did not know" who had told Musharraf the war would be short.

General Musharraf is in an impossible situation.

Those Central Asian republics, such as Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kazakstan, which have reportedly agreed to support the U.S.-led operation, are now targets of the Taliban. Following reports that U.S. troops were deployed to Uzbekistan on Oct. 6, the Taliban threatened to invade the country. The Uzbek government responded by enhancing security and sending its troops to the border. Although the Taliban's claims of having 10,000 troops ready for an invasion are wildly exaggerated, Russian experts estimated that a small force of guerrillas sneaking across the border, could generate problems. Last year, armed insurgents of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (UMI) killed numerous Uzbek soldiers, and came within 100 kilometers of the capital, Tashkent. They also attempted to assassinate President Islam Karimov.

Tajikistan was wracked by civil war for years, perpetrated by Taliban-linked Islamists, before a Russian-Iranian intervention established peace. Russia still maintains 25,000 military forces to protect the Tajik border, from insurgents and refugees.

Iran's Little-Known Drug War

Iran is not a member of the "anti-terrorist coalition," but it has been a sworn enemy of the Taliban regime from the onset. This is not primarily due to sectarian considerations—Iran is Shi'ite, as opposed to the particular brand of Sunni Islam that the Taliban allegedly follow—but rather, in opposition to the massive flows of illegal drugs that have penetrated Iran, from Afghanistan. Official statistics say about 2 million Iranians, of a population of over 60 million, have become addicts.

Iran has mounted the most ambitious anti-drug effort of any country in the region, which has been acknowledged by the United Nations narcotics department. The opium produced in Afghanistan and Pakistan for the European market, travels largely via Iran, the Balkans, and Turkey. To stop this transit traffic, Iran has erected a border fence, 2,000 kilome-

ters long, on its eastern border. A 700 km wall has been built in the desert region, and 290 km worth of trenches, 4x5 meters, have been dug, to halt any vehicle or even animal traffic. In mountainous regions, barricades have been built, to block passage through valleys.

In addition, the government has deployed 30,000 men, from the police and revolutionary guards, along its borders. These are the forces which engage in battle with the drug traffickers, who are much better equipped, with vehicles of all sorts, and armed with heavy artillery, as well as, reportedly, U.S. Stinger missiles. In the military engagement, which takes place constantly on the borders, Iran has lost 3,000 anti-drug fighters over the past years.

The efficiency of Iran's anti-drug operation is impressive: It is estimated that 80% of the confiscated opiates worldwide, have been seized by Iranian forces. The dimensions and achievements of the anti-drug effort make clear that the country considers the drug plague to be a threat to its national security.

Given this background, it is understandable that Iran would welcome the elimination of the Taliban menace. However, there is great concern in the Iranian government, that the ongoing operations against Afghanistan not only will not reach the mark, but will trigger religious warfare worldwide. The Iranian authorities have stressed, that any attacks in Afghanistan must be limited to terrorist installations, sparing civilians, and that no other countries be targetted. They have supported calls for an international conference on terrorism, and urged the UN to play a greater role. Iran's position was upheld at a special meeting of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) held in Qatar Oct. 10.

The clearest indication that the Iranian leadership is not falling into the trap of the "anti-terrorist coalition," is its continuing efforts to deepen Iran's strategic relationship to Russia. Not coincidentally, just prior to the air war against Afghanistan, Iran's Minister of Defense Rear Adm. Ali Shamkhani, travelled to Moscow, to finalize defense agreements. On Oct. 2, he and Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov signed a bilateral defense and military cooperation pact, which includes deals worth \$300 million a year. The pact consolidated agreements made in March, for Russia to provide Iran with \$7 billion worth of arms over the next years.

According to ITAR-TASS news agency, which cited Russian military-industrial complex sources, Iran wants to protect its 936 km border with Afghanistan, with Russian defense equipment. The equipment is designed to help stop the flow of narcotics from Afghanistan, and defend anti-drug border guards.

Ivanov stressed that both countries have been fighting terrorism and narcotics for a long time, as perceived threats to regional and global security. Shamkhani noted that those countries complaining about terrorism today, had been its supporters until yesterday, referring to past and recent West-

ern backing for the Taliban. Both ministers emphasized the importance of bilateral cooperation for security in the Caspian Sea region and Caucasus, as well as Central Asia, and they reiterated their support for the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan.

The Broader Islamic World

Not only in Pakistan have massive anti-U.S. demonstrations taken place; Malaysia and Indonesia are also tense. Reports (though unconfirmed) that the United States was considering these two nations as on the list of states harboring terrorists, and therefore, potentially, targeted for attack, only fuelled the anti-U.S. ferment.

The Palestinian Authority was hit by extremely dangerous protests, during which desperate Palestinians raised pictures of Osama bin Laden, and expressed their solidarity. Palestinian police deployed to calm the protests, fired on the crowd, and three were killed. PA President Yasser Arafat's attempt to support the anti-terrorist campaign, has placed him in an impossible dilemma, and anything could happen—from assassination attempts against him, to civil war among the Palestinians.

Elsewhere in the Arab world, tensions have been red hot, since the air war began. In Egypt, despite official bans of protests, 4,000 students demonstrated in Cairo. Egyptian authorities arrested a large group of suspected extremists from the Jihad movement, linked to al-Qaeda, who were reportedly planning attacks. In Lebanon, government circles expressed fear, after the United States issued a list of 22 most-wanted terrorists, including the name of a Hezbollah leader. The implication was that Lebanon, or Iran, could be targeted as a result. In Jordan, extensive police and military measures, as well as tightened legal restrictions, have been introduced to control public protests. In Saudi Arabia, a visit by British Prime Minister Tony Blair was cancelled, due to the Saudis' concern that it would spark uncontrollable reactions. Friction has been reported between the Saudi royal family and parts of the Wahabite clergy, as the latter still supports bin Laden.

In short, the aerial bombardments launched by the United States, have already ignited a clash of civilizations, throughout the Islamic world, and the next casualties may well be those "moderate" Arab governments which have been trying to resist extremism.

Post-Taliban Afghanistan

Although there are no indications that the ongoing aerial bombardments will succeed in eliminating bin Laden and al-Qaeda, a debate has already broken out, regarding a post-Taliban political arrangement for Afghanistan. One option is for an all-party government, with representatives from all the tribal groups in the country, to be formed through the Loya Jirga, or assembly of tribal chiefs. There are, however, divergent views as to who should convoke the assembly, and who the components should be. The 86-year-old former King of

Afghanistan Zahir Shah, is one candidate, who has already been contacted in Rome by a State Department representative. The King, presented as a unifying force, is, however, not universally supported in Pakistan, nor his own country, which he left 30 years ago.

Then there is the idea that Tony Blair's adviser, Martin Wolf, has frankly called a "new imperialism." According to the Oct. 11 *Daily Telegraph*, Blair's neo-colonialism would involve establishing a mandate, or an international protectorate over the country, until a government can be formed (see article in this section).

Given the dynamic that has been unleashed in the region, it is more probable that the post-Taliban situation will be one of chaos, in and beyond Afghanistan's borders. Inside the country, as the Pakistani government fears, in a vacuum created by the fall of the Taliban regime, the old warlords could engage in renewed civil strife. There are reports to the effect, that a new coalition of 45 parties and organizations, has been formed, in the Afghan National Solidarity Movement. This group of Afghan refugees and former mujahideen, put together in Pakistan on Oct. 1, says it has 6,000 experienced fighters, plus 20,000 volunteers, whom it can deploy in a fight against the Taliban. The ANSM, which may enjoy the support of the Pakistani government, is also opposed to the Northern Alliance, and would take it on, after the Taliban were dealt with. The seeds for renewed civil war may already have been sown.

Macedonia Plays The 'LaRouche Card'

by Umberto Pascali

"The problem is that, when people say to the government of Macedonia, that you have to accept our conditions, and those conditions include changing the form of government in such a way that the sovereignty of the nation is destroyed, that's not arbitration, that's not peace negotiation, that's imperialism. And no agency has the moral right to do that." That statement by Lyndon LaRouche was part of an interview broadcast on Makedonska Televizija's prime-time news on Oct 5. The interview had an electrifying effect on many Macedonians struggling to save their country from the narco-terrorists of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), and even more, from the international negotiators, or "facilitators," who have forced the government in Skopje to discuss de facto partition of the country and the subversion of the Constitution, under the guns of the narco-terrorists.

U.S. Ambassador James Pardew, better known in Macedonia as "The Cowboy," represents the worst example of this