The Role of The United States in Afghanistan

Afghanistan is located in southern Asia, north and west of Pakistan also east of Iran. Its surrounding area, known as the “Middle East”, is an area of interest to many of the superpowers around the world. Northern Afghanistan in particular is rich in oil reserves reaching 5 trillion cubic feet as estimated in 1970 by the Soviets. Besides oil Afghanistan is also estimated to have 73 million tons of coal reserves (1). The Soviets and the United States both have shown interest in Afghanistan by invading territories, attempting to take control by influencing local factions.

Besides foreign influence within Afghanistan, there has been deeply rooted unrest within the country for decades. Civil war erupted in 1978; Muhammad Zahir Shah’s monarchy was overthrown by his cousin Daoud Khan. Khan was then quickly overthrown by his ally, the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan. Many radical groups formed to oust the new government; while secret aid was being funneled to the resistance from the United States to fund the uprising. The Soviets backed the PDPA and sent 115,000 troops to crush the rebel groups.
After the 1988 Geneva Accords the Soviet Union agreed to pull all troops out of Afghanistan by the following year. Aid was sent to help rebuild Afghanistan but a lack of interest in the area caused the aid to dwindle. Soon after the attempted reconstruction a civil war began over political control of the country in 1992. Kabul was an urban war zone while Shah Massoud and Abdul Rabbani battled for control of the country. During this time local warlords had established themselves in certain regions. This is when the more currently known Taliban group was formed. The Taliban successfully attacked local warlords and enforced their radical Islamic law. Their movement soon saw support from Pakistan and the Taliban quickly took control of Kabul forcing Massoud to retreat. Massoud quickly rebuilt the Northern Alliance. Osama bin Laden also renewed ties with the Taliban and his fighters trained alongside with the Taliban during this time (2).

The Taliban enforced their extreme Islamic law throughout Afghanistan. Women especially were oppressed in the reformed society. They were not allowed to attend school and strict dress codes were enforced. All Western influence was also shut out of the country; men had to wear beards and were not allowed to have Western style haircuts.

The Northern Alliance and Taliban continued to fight over Afghanistan during the Taliban rule. Soon the United States became involved when one of bin Laden’s camps bombed U.S embassies Nairobi and Dar es-Salaam. The United States demanded that the
Taliban turn over bin Laden and when they refused, the U.N banned Taliban-controlled aircraft from takeoff including an arms embargo on the Taliban, a ban on travel outside Afghanistan by Taliban officials of deputy ministerial rank, and the closing of Taliban offices abroad. On September 9, 2001 Massoud was assassinated by the Taliban, the assassins were linked to bin Laden’s Al Qaeda group. And a few days later on September 11, 2001 two Islamic hijackers flew two commercial airlines into the World Trade Center in New York City (3).

Operation Enduring freedom was launched in October 2001 in retaliation to the September 11 attacks. The Northern Alliance and other allies provided support. The target was Al Qaeda and the Taliban government for harboring Al Qaeda. By November 16 2001 Kabul and northern Afghanistan were secured by the alliance and Afghanistan was controlled by the alliance. After the conflict an interim government was put into place. A Pushtan leader was named Prime Minister, Hamid Karzai. The interim government is working towards the reconstruction of Afghanistan (4).

Afghanistan has a history of problems starting at the beginning of the twentieth century. Civil wars have torn apart much of their farmland and poverty blankets the country. Illiteracy among Afghans is around 90% and for a long period women were not allowed an education. The life expectancy in Afghanistan is about 40 years old (5).
Besides this there is still political unrest. Most importantly Osama bin Laden has not been found in the five years of conflict with Afghanistan. This presents a problem for the new government and the United States; with bin Laden still able to loosely coordinate with other possible Al Qaeda groups there is potential for future uprisings by the terrorist group either on Afghanistan or even the United States. The United States has been involved in the business of Afghanistan for decades. Along with the Soviets we provoked conflict and fought on their land for political self interest and resources. We puppeteered the Taliban in order to provoke the Russians and actually had a major role in their rule in Afghanistan. Consequently the Taliban fostered Osama bin Laden and we were forced to overthrow the group we once helped, the Taliban.

The future of Afghanistan looks more promising than previous governments. But their economy has taken a huge fall from decades of war leaving no jobs and famished citizens. The country most of all needs a period of peace and restoration in order to mend wounds. But the reality is that the Afghanistan government will never see the end of Islamic extremists, their ideology still has influence with the scattered remaining factions throughout the region. The United States will supposedly be a major player in the reconstruction in Afghanistan, in order to protect self interest as far as the resources of northern Afghanistan. The United States has made promises for aid to many nations and
not followed through, but the interest in Afghanistan is oil which is essential to our society as a whole. If there is potential to solve oil problems in the United States then we will be interested. But between the current situation in Iraq and the search for bin Laden you have to wonder at what lengths will we go to in order to help rebuild the tattered country. It seems as if our role in Afghanistan will be limited to protecting the northern territories. We also will most likely have to face more rebel groups in the future after they rebuild a following.

The war on terror has been declared by President Bush and his apparently ideological war is under toned with hidden political self interests. Terrorism is all over the world and Afghanistan with the Middle East could only be a preview of the beginning of this problem. If the United States hadn’t torn through Middle Eastern states in order to fight personal battles for years is it possible that these jihad terrorist factions wouldn’t have looked at us as terrorists ourselves. Now that we are a target these groups could become more integrated and organized and resurface as more of a problem than ever. The United States may have created its own monster and the battle has only started with Afghanistan.
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