

Afghanistan — Stop the Aggression!

On August 19th, the Afghani people celebrated the 70th anniversary of their independence from British colonialism. On April 27th, they had celebrated the 11th anniversary of the establishment of a progressive government led by the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Still, today, they have yet to enjoy the fruits of independence and progress fully, due to the continuation of the counterrevolutionary war engineered and sustained by US imperialism and the Pakistani military.

In the wake of the April 1988 Geneva accords for ending the conflict in Afghanistan, the western media was filled with predictions that Najiballah's government would not survive after the Soviet troop withdrawal. Even progressive forces expressed doubts about the future in Afghanistan. Yet today, well over half a year after the last Soviet soldier departed, the PDP government has proved its viability. This fact has caused some reshuffling in the ranks of Afghanistan's enemies.

The US administration set its hopes on the so-called transitional government formed in February by the Pakistan-based, fundamentalist Afghani opposition, despite the fact that these tribalists could scarcely unite among themselves. New shipments of US arms and Saudi funding, channeled by the CIA via the Pakistani military, aimed to encourage a counterrevolutionary offensive; Jalalabad, in eastern Afghanistan, was the centerpiece. However, despite months of trying, the rebel bands just couldn't take Jalalabad or any other Afghani town of note. Instead, their own weakness and dependence on external aid was further exposed. Government counteroffensives have inflicted substantial casualties in the contras' ranks, and their dead have included Pakistani soldiers and mercenaries from various Middle East countries, primarily Saudi Arabia. The counterrevolutionaries only military «successes» have been recurring rocket attacks on Kabul and other population centers, inflicting heavy civilian casualties, and other acts of sabotage.

Setbacks in the battlefield fanned the historical rivalry among the component groups of the rebel alliance. Their internal clashes reached new proportions

in August, when at least 300 were killed in a showdown between the two largest groups of the «transitional government» which the Bush Administration wants to promote as the «democratic alternative» to the legitimate Afghani government.

Faced with the debacle of the plan to overthrow Najiballah, the US has so far resorted only to technical readjustments in its hostile policy. By early June, the counterrevolutionaries' failure to take Jalalabad had become obvious. Pakistani President Benazir Bhutto fired Hamid Gul, head of military intelligence, who had advised the rebels in the ill-fated Jalalabad campaign. According to some reports, the sacking was at the CIA's behest, in order to find a scapegoat. This occurred just prior to Bhutto's visit to Washington D.C., where she and President Bush confirmed support to the «transitional government.» Bhutto was elected on a platform of democratic promises, including a pledge to end Pakistan's interference in Afghanistan. However, any real change in Pakistan's role vis-a-vis Afghanistan, since she assumed office, is imperceptible. In fact, the only country of importance in relation to Afghanistan, to have changed its position since the Geneva accords, is India which has supported the Afghani government in the face of Pakistan's intervention.

Although US policy vis-a-vis Afghanistan has not changed, the counterrevolutionaries' failures have had repercussions. In June, US Senators demanded a policy review. In early August, there were heated discussions between congressmen and CIA Director William Webster on why the rebels failed despite massive US arms shipments to their headquarters in

Pakistan. The upshot was scapegoating and dismissing the head of the CIA Afghan task force. It is now reported that the US will attempt to deliver arms directly to the local rebel commanders in Afghanistan, rather than to the shaky coalition in exile.

Such a change in supply routing has in fact been reported before, and it is at this point that the ultimate futility of the US policy becomes most apparent. It is among the rebel commanders in the field that the Afghani government's national reconciliation policy has made some inroads. Furthering the reconciliation policy he began soon after coming to power in 1986, President Najiballah in March called on field commanders to stop the war and work to prevent Pakistan's violation of Afghanistan's sovereignty. In return, they could retain their arms, elect local councils and receive aid from the central government. A number of field commanders have taken up this offer.

US policy will fail as long as it tries to circumvent the legitimacy of the government in Kabul. The problem is not how to channel supplies to the contras, but the fact that these forces are neither a political or military alternative to the PDP government. The only result of the US, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and others continuing their interference is more human and material losses to the Afghani people. The current situation highlights the parallel to Nicaragua where the US-fueled contra war has not been able to break the Sandinista government, but has simply inflicted enormous destruction and suffering on the people.

The Najiballah government has maintained its realistic offer for ending the war via a cease-fire, talks and formation of a broad-based coalition government representing all Afghani parties. It is the counterrevolutionary alliance that has refused this option, and it has only been able to sustain its opposition because of continuing support from the US and Pakistan. It is the duty of the international community and the UN, which sponsored the Geneva accords, to take steps to end such foreign interference so the Afghani people can devote their efforts to social progress rather than war.