

Myths about Afghanistan

By Jeffrey J. Weiss, Catholic Peace Ministry

Myth: Our military uses strategic airstrikes in cooperation with the Afghans.

Reality: More than 2,000 Afghan civilians died in 2009 and Afghan President Hamid Karzai has gone public opposing U.S. bombings - 'airstrikes' is an Orwellian term. Unreported is the role of 100,000 private mercenaries in Afghanistan.

Myth: Government spending is 'out of control' so we can't spend on health care and education

Reality: Consider that the past eight years taxpayers have given five trillion dollars to the Pentagon, including one trillion for the wars and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq. For every dollar the U.S. Congress allocates, fifty cents goes to the Pentagon!

Myth: Without Afghanistan, September 11 would not have taken place.

Reality: September 11 was planned in Europe, and 15 of the 19 hijackers were from Saudi Arabia. The main grievance for Bin Laden and his followers is the presence of U.S. military bases in the holy lands of Islam. Bin Laden continues to say both publicly and privately that the goal is to coax the U.S. military to chase them all over the globe in order to bleed the U.S. economy dry.

Myth: This battle is between the government of Afghanistan and the Taliban.

Reality: The majority of Afghans live in rural mountainous areas, devoid of any institution providing services or security. These small villages are led by a male tribal chief -- a de facto 'city hall.' Many villagers try to avoid what they perceive as fanatics, i.e. the Taliban, and a corrupt government. The Taliban only loosely provide services, and its security is repressive; only 8% of Afghans approve of the Taliban. The Taliban is making little progress towards its stated goals. If they disappeared the country would still be unstable. Many warlords the U.S. paid to fight the Soviets in the 1980s shoot at our military today. Afghans are tired of war. They cannot find work that pays enough to survive, and they lack health care. Afghans are caught between foreign armies, the Taliban, and a corrupt government.

Myth: Afghanistan is a land of militants and warlords.

Reality: Leaders in villages provide security, supervise armed militias and attack foreign armies if they enter into their neighborhood. During the Soviet occupation, the Reagan Administration and media described the mujahedin (Bin Laden, etc.) as freedom fighters. A better term for warlord might be mafia don. Many local militias are involved in the economy as well smuggling goods or the opium trade. A man picking up a weapon to defend himself or family against intrusion, from rival Afghans or NATO, is not automatically a militant but instead is adhering to tribal code. Ambassador Matthew Hoh, in his recent resignation letter, said we are engaged in the middle of a civil war and that resistance to NATO is based on nationalism.

Reality:

The only solution is regional and would include negotiating a solution between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, and between Afghanistan and Pakistan over the Durand Line. It would also include engaging Iran and not encircling them with military bases. As for our political parties, can we afford foreign military bases and a permanent war economy while leading the world in health care costs and incarceration rates?

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