

Twenty-one Years Ago: US Invasion of Afghanistan

By [Shane Quinn](#)

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More than two decades ago on 7 October 2001 the United States, backed by its close allies Britain, Canada and Australia, began a military invasion of Afghanistan in south-central Asia. The US offensive started with aerial bombing raids over Afghanistan’s capital and largest city, Kabul, while American air attacks were simultaneously launched against targets in the country’s second biggest city Kandahar, 300 miles south-west of Kabul, and Jalalabad, less than 100 miles east of Kabul.

The opening air raids were carried out by 15 American B-1 and B-52 heavy bombers, which descended upon Afghanistan from a US military base on the island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. Around the same time, more than two dozen American F-14 and F-18 fighter aircraft entered Afghan air space, having flown from US naval carriers in the Arabian Sea to the south. A pair of B-2 Spirit stealth bombers flew all of the way from the Whiteman Air Force Base, in Missouri, to join in the air raids against Afghanistan. (1)

About 50 cruise missiles were fired at targets in Afghanistan from US Navy destroyers, cruisers and British Royal Navy submarines. From 18 October 2001, landing on Afghan soil were hundreds of special forces soldiers from the US Army and Air Force, supported by SAS commandos of the British Army.

CIA personnel were present in Afghanistan on 26 September 2001, just 15 days after what can be called the second 9/11 (the first 9/11 being the US-backed coup in Chile on 11 September 1973, which per capita was much more destructive). The CIA operatives in Afghanistan were quickly joined by Anglo-American special forces contingents, who supplied military equipment, arms and advice to local militants opposed to the Taliban (2). US-British covert operations commenced from late September 2001, and these elite units assisted in co-ordinating the bombing of Afghanistan a few days later.

Major aid and relief organisations, greatly concerned about the effects of the US air attacks, agreed with academic specialists that the bombings posed a “grave risk” of starvation for

millions of Afghans (3). Three weeks into the invasion, in late October, 1,000 anti-Taliban Afghan leaders convened a meeting across the border in Peshawar, northern Pakistan. They could not see eye-to-eye on various subjects, but were unanimous in their belief that the US-British air strikes over Afghanistan were harmful, and they appealed to the international media to demand an end to the “bombing of innocent people”. (4)

In years to come, the offensive was termed by the mainstream press as one of the US’s “forever wars”. However, since America’s official foundation on 4 July 1776, the US Armed Forces have been waging war in one form or another almost uninterrupted: for 93% of the country’s near 250-year long existence. (5)

Afghanistan as a nation had committed no aggression against America or its military; unlike say Imperial Japan, in their December 1941 bombing of the Pearl Harbor naval base in Hawaii, which killed nearly 2,500 Americans; but this attack took place in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, over 2,000 miles from the American mainland. Furthermore, Hawaii had been taken over by America in the late 19th century, without the consent of the island’s native population.

Seldom mentioned is that the Japanese bombing, though clearly a criminal action, was scarcely an unprovoked one. The attack on Pearl Harbor came as a response to ongoing US expansion in the Eastern hemisphere, and therefore encroachment into Japan’s sphere of interest. There was no Japanese presence in the Western hemisphere, nor would it have been tolerated; while the Roosevelt administration had applied other pressures on Tokyo prior to Pearl Harbor, such as an oil embargo instituted in July 1941 which immediately wiped out 90% of Japan’s oil imports (6), a very serious matter for a resource-poor country like Japan.

Image on the right: Robert Mueller



Meanwhile, 8 months after the bombing of Afghanistan had started, in June 2002 the FBI Director Robert Mueller, after leading a rigorous investigation, said that “investigators believe the idea of the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon came from Al Qaeda leaders in Afghanistan... We think the masterminds of it were in Afghanistan, high in the Al Qaeda leadership” (7). One can take note of Mueller’s use of the words “believe” and “think”, indicating the FBI’s suspicions in mid-2002 on who the 9/11 terrorists were.

Mueller was unable to furnish solid proof about those that had committed the terrorist acts. He could not say for certain that the Al Qaeda boss, Osama bin Laden, was personally responsible for organising it. Leading historian and analyst Noam Chomsky wrote,

“If the indirect responsibility of Afghanistan could only be surmised in June 2002, it

evidently could not have been *known* eight months before, when President Bush ordered the bombing of Afghanistan. According to the FBI, then, the bombing was a war crime, an act of aggression, based on mere supposition". (8)

The invasion of Afghanistan was concerned partly with restoring US prestige after the 9/11 atrocities against America, which had shocked much of the world and drawn ample pity. Other key factors included taking control of Afghanistan for geostrategic purposes, with oil rich Iran and Iraq nearby in mind; and for matters relating to the flow of raw materials via pipelines through Afghan terrain, which would be protected by US and NATO troops.

The Bush administration was steeped in the oil business, with the president, his vice-president (Dick Cheney) and National Security Advisor (Condoleezza Rice) among others having long-held links to the American oil industry. Veteran US author Gore Vidal insisted,

"the conquest of Afghanistan had nothing to do with Osama. He was simply a pretext for replacing the Taliban with a relatively stable government that would allow Union Oil of California [UNOCAL] to lay its pipeline for the profit of, among others, the Cheney-Bush junta". (9)

Bush and company were planning to invade Afghanistan by at least mid-July 2001, according to experienced Pakistani diplomat Niaz Naik, who said so a week after the 9/11 attacks on America (10). In July 2001, Naik was told by senior American officials at a UN-sponsored gathering in Berlin that their intervention "would go ahead by the middle of October". Naik was informed that US advisers were then already stationed in Tajikistan, which borders Afghanistan to the north.

Bush's plan to move on Afghanistan may well have been developing as early as March 2001. That month, vice-president Cheney's Energy Task Force was sketching Iraq's oil fields to be exploited by fossil fuel companies (11). The attack on Afghanistan was indeed part of a broader strategy, by which Washington hoped in the short-term to conquer Iraq, whose plentiful and cheap oil sources meant that country was of greater importance to the White House than Afghanistan. The conquest of Iraq, so it was expected, would allow the Americans to tighten the noose on old enemy Iran.

The Taliban itself had been viewed with initial favour by Washington. Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid, an expert on Afghanistan, explained how

"The Clinton administration was clearly sympathetic to the Taliban, as they were in line with Washington's anti-Iran policy, and were important for the success of any southern pipeline from Central Asia that would avoid Iran. The US Congress had authorised a covert \$20 million budget for the CIA to destabilize Iran, and Tehran accused Washington of funnelling some of these funds to the Taliban". (12)

At the beginning, military action against Afghanistan was hugely supported by the American population. A few hours after the bombing was unleashed, a CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll stated that 90% of respondents approved of a US military assault on Afghanistan "in retaliation for the terrorist attacks that occurred in the US on September 11th" (13). The American public's majority backing (77%) extended to their wish to see US ground forces deployed, with somewhat less people consenting (65%) if it meant that Afghan civilians were to be killed.

Significant support from the American people (78%) was also forthcoming, should the Pentagon decide to “take military action against other countries that the US believes are harbouring terrorists”. The public approval in America for military operations, can be explained by anger and a desire for revenge amongst ordinary Americans, regarding the callous nature of the 9/11 attacks on their country. Moreover, the sense of outrage was manipulated by falsehoods and presumptions spread by government officials and the media.

Most British people polled early on likewise supported the bombing of Afghanistan. Three or four days after the attack, 74% of Britons questioned said they approved of the offensive, in the first national opinion poll conducted since the bombing began (14). Across most of the rest of the world, support for US military action was meagre – especially in Latin America – where people are all too familiar with US interventionism.

Only 11% of those questioned in Venezuela and Colombia, in late September 2001, backed military means over diplomacy “Once the identity of the [9/11] terrorists is known” in the country or countries where they are based. As little as 2% of Mexicans said they would support a US armed attack in such an event. Throughout Latin America, the highest level of backing for a US military intervention was recorded in Panama, where 16% said they would agree with military action and 80% preferred the peaceful route. This Gallup poll was completely ignored by the US media. (15)

Chomsky wrote, “Notice that even this very limited support for the bombing was based on a crucial presupposition: that those responsible for 9/11 were known” (16). President Bush was undeterred by having no evidence regarding the 9/11 perpetrators. He declared in his Address to the Nation (on 7 October 2001) that he had just ordered US forces to attack “Al Qaeda terrorist training camps and military installations of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. These carefully targeted actions are designed to disrupt the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base of operations, and to attack the military capability of the Taliban regime”. (17)

Image below: Donald Rumsfeld



Yet by the second half of 2001, the Taliban were a beaten docket – demoralised, weakened and asking for amnesty (18). US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld stressed, “We don’t negotiate surrenders”. A week after the bombing started, the Taliban tentatively offered to hand Bin Laden over “to a third country” (19). They would do so on condition “the Taliban is given evidence that Osama bin Laden is involved” in the 9/11 attacks, a high-ranking Taliban member said, Haji Abdul Kabir, while another condition was that the US air raids be stopped.

Even before the bombing of Afghanistan, the Taliban had asked for proof of Bin Laden’s

guilt, and they offered to make him stand trial in an Islamic court in Afghanistan. This was rejected by the Americans. It was hardly within president Bush's own interests, that Bin Laden be captured alive or placed before a court.

There had been business ties between the wealthy Bush and Bin Laden families. On the actual day of the 9/11 atrocities in America Bush's father, George Senior, was due to meet one of Osama bin Laden's brothers, Shafiq bin Laden, at the Ritz Carlton Hotel in Washington. Bush Senior had met Shafiq bin Laden at the same location the day before, 10 September 2001. (20)

Several Bin Laden family members invested millions of dollars in the Carlyle Group, a Washington-based private equity corporation involved in the weapons and fossil fuel industries. For five years until late 2003, Bush Senior had a highly paid advisory role with the Carlyle Group – and through this position the elder Bush for a time was a consultant to the Bin Ladens (21). His son Bush Junior, president from 2001 to 2009, was a director at the Carlyle Group in the early 1990s. (22)

Other prominent politicians held roles with the Carlyle Group like Bush Senior's former Secretary of State, James Baker, ex-CIA Deputy Director and Secretary of Defense, Frank Carlucci, and also John Major, the British prime minister and Conservative Party leader for most of the 1990s. Bush Junior established an oil company in Texas in 1978 with Salem bin Laden, Osama's eldest brother (23). Gary Berntsen, the CIA commanding officer in eastern Afghanistan, said that Bin Laden was allowed to evade capture by the Americans in December 2001, as the Saudi-born extremist departed the Afghan mountains and arrived in Pakistan's tribal region.

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Shane Quinn obtained an honors journalism degree. He is interested in writing primarily on foreign affairs, having been inspired by authors like Noam Chomsky.

He is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

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[America's "War on Terrorism"](#)

 by Michel Chossudovsky

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In this new and expanded edition of Michel Chossudovsky's 2002 best seller, the author blows away the smokescreen put up by the mainstream media, that 9/11 was an attack on America by "Islamic terrorists". Through meticulous research, the author uncovers a military-intelligence ploy behind the September 11 attacks, and the cover-up and complicity of key members of the Bush Administration.

The expanded edition, which includes twelve new chapters focuses on the use of 9/11 as a pretext for the invasion and illegal occupation of Iraq, the militarisation of justice and law enforcement and the repeal of democracy.

According to Chossudovsky, the "war on terrorism" is a complete fabrication based on the illusion that one man, Osama bin Laden, outwitted the \$40 billion-a-year American intelligence apparatus. The "war on terrorism" is a war of conquest. Globalisation is the final march to the "New World Order", dominated by Wall Street and the U.S. military-industrial complex.

September 11, 2001 provides a justification for waging a war without borders. Washington's agenda consists in extending the frontiers of the American Empire to facilitate complete U.S. corporate control, while installing within America the institutions of the Homeland Security State.

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