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Editorial 4: Choosing Sides

It takes an extreme sort of cynicism to speak of attacks on Afghanistan by the United States and its allies as an operation which will help free the Afghan people from the miserable rule of the Taliban, yet this idea has been repeated often. To speak of aiding a people while bombing them has become a cliché, as insulting as it is absurd, particularly in the case of Afghanistan, whose current situation has already been greatly shaped by the hand of the US.

In the early eighties, the US government began assisting Afghan rebels, in the hopes of repelling the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Money, arms, food and medicine, were funnelled from the US, through Pakistan, to Islamic extremists within Afghanistan - among them, Osama Bin Laden. The rebels, with tactical information and training provided by Americans, were successful in preventing communist forces from taking hold, forcing the Soviets to retreat entirely by 1989. The Soviets defeated, US concerns in the region were apparently resolved, and the Afghan people were left to live with the fallout, including the oppressive and extremist Taliban regime, which seized power in 1996.

This is but one of numerous instances of passive US aggression in the Middle East. For three successive administrations the US government either directly, or by a conspicuous lack of disapproval, supported the actions of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. The US was willing to ignore the massacre of Kurdish minorities within Iraq, provided that Hussein continued to also kill Iranians. US support of Hussein ended only when Iraq invaded Kuwait, threatening Western economic interests. The United States has also long been criticized for its continued support of Israel, and for its failure to condemn

what many see as undue Israeli aggression toward the Palestinians.

Though already bitten, the US shows no evidence of shyness in continuing to assist rebel forces in Afghanistan. Presently, the US is assisting the Northern Alliance: Tajik and Uzbek rebels who have been fighting the Taliban regime. A government led by these two minority groups could be disastrous for Afghanistan; the last Tajik led government in Afghanistan resulted in civil war in the mid-nineties.

The United States, as we are constantly reminded, is the only remaining world super-power, and as such cannot avoid having a profound impact on the world at large. Because of this, it is imperative that US foreign policy in the Middle East not continue to be so blindingly self-serving while at the same time destabilizing the region. Through its foreign policy, the US has created larger problems than it sought to solve, showing both a distinct lack of foresight, and a marked indifference to the wishes and well-being of the nations left to deal with the repercussions of its actions.

The opinion, tacitly held by many, that US foreign policy does not affect daily American life has been resoundingly proven incorrect. I may be called naive for suggesting this, but perhaps if the United States were less willing to back corrupt leaders, murderous dictators and blood-thirsty rebels, the reputation of the US abroad might not be so overwhelmingly negative. The terrorist attacks on the United States cannot be justified, but until the US is able to put long term progress and stability above short-term tactical expediency, it will continue to be the target of both hatred and violence.

Matthew Dorrell,
Editor-In-Chief