

GI SPECIAL 7G5:

WELCOME TO OBAMA'S WAR: D.E.H.



Exhausted U.S. Marine in the heat with his heavy pack filled with mortar equipment, ammunition, food, and water in the Nawa district in Afghanistan's Helmand province Saturday, July 4, 2009. (AP Photo/David Guttenfelder)



A medic pours water on U.S. Marines suffering from heat exhaustion as they walked with heavy packs for miles in the Nawa district in Afghanistan's Helmand province July 4, 2009. (AP Photo/David Guttenfelder)



A U.S. Marine pours water on a fellow Marine suffering from heat exhaustion as they walked with heavy packs for miles in the Nawa district in Afghanistan's Helmand province July 4, 2009. (AP Photo/David Guttenfelder)



U.S. Marine First Sgt. gives a "pep talk" to 8th Marines at an Independence Day ceremony at a remote combat outpost in the village of Sorkhdoz in southern Afghanistan's lower Helmand River Valley July 4, 2009. The Marines seized the valley earlier this week. REUTERS/Peter Graff

MORE:

**TROOP-KILLER
DOMESTIC ENEMY
UNFIT FOR COMMAND
UNWORTHY OF OBEDIENCE**



South Bend, Ind., May 17, 2009. (AP Photo/Charles Rex Arbogast)

MORE:

**“Villagers In Some Districts
Have Taken Up Arms Against
Foreign Troops To Protect Their
Homes”**

**“Hamza Said He Would Fight If
Foreigners Raided His House”
“I Will Not Allow Them”**

“I Will Fight Them To The Last Drop Of Blood”



July 2, 2009 By CARLOTTA GALL, New York Times [Excerpts]

LASHKAR GAH, Afghanistan — The mood of the Afghan people has tipped into a popular revolt in some parts of southern Afghanistan, presenting incoming American forces with an even harder job than expected in reversing military losses to the Taliban and winning over the population.

Villagers in some districts have taken up arms against foreign troops to protect their homes or in anger after losing relatives in airstrikes, several community representatives interviewed said.

On Thursday morning, 4,000 American Marines began a major offensive to try to take back the region from the strongest Taliban insurgency in the country.

Yet Taliban control of the countryside is so extensive in provinces like Kandahar and Helmand that winning districts back will involve tough fighting and may ignite further tensions, residents and local officials warn.

The government has no presence in 5 of Helmand's 13 districts, and in several others, like Nawa, it holds only the district town, where troops and officials live virtually under siege.

The Taliban's influence is so strong in rural areas that much of the local population has accepted their rule and is watching the United States troop buildup with trepidation. Villagers interviewed in late June said that they preferred to be left alone under Taliban rule and complained about artillery fire and airstrikes by foreign forces.

“We Muslims don't like them — they are the source of danger,” said a local villager, Hajji Taj Muhammad, of the foreign forces. His house in Marja, a town west of this provincial

capital that has been a major opium trading post and Taliban base, was bombed two months ago, he said.

The southern provinces have suffered the worst civilian casualties since NATO's deployment to the region in 2006. Thousands of people have already been displaced by fighting and taken refuge in the towns.

"Now there are more people siding with the Taliban than with the government," said Abdul Qadir Noorzai, head of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission in southern Afghanistan.

In many places, people have never seen or felt the presence of the Afghan government, or foreign forces, except through violence, but the Taliban are a known quantity, community leaders said.

Foreign troops continue to make mistakes that enrage whole sections of this deeply tribal society, like the killing of a tribal elder's son and his wife as they were driving to their home in Helmand two months ago. Only their baby daughter survived.

The governor of Helmand, Gulab Mangal, said extra forces were needed since the Taliban were now so entrenched in the region that they had permanent bases.

In parts of Helmand and Kandahar, resentment and frustration are rampant.

People who traveled to Lashkar Gah from the districts complained of continued civilian suffering and questioned American intentions. "They come here just to fight, not to bring peace," said Allah Nazad, a farmer.

People from Marja said that foreign troops carrying out counternarcotics operations conducted nighttime raids on houses, sometimes killed people inside their homes, and used dogs that bit the occupants.

"The people are very scared of the night raids," said Spin Gul, a local farmer.

"When they have night raids, the people join the Taliban and fight."

"Who are the Taliban? They are local people," interjected another man, who did not give his name.

One man, Hamza, said he would fight if foreigners raided his house. "I will not allow them," he said. "I will fight them to the last drop of blood."

Declared Bill Ehrhart, a marine in Vietnam:

"In grade school we learned about the redcoats, the nasty British soldiers that tried to stifle our freedom.... Subconsciously, but not very subconsciously, I began increasingly to have the feeling that I was a redcoat. I think it was one of the most staggering realizations of my life."

Troops Invited:

Comments, arguments, articles, and letters from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Write to Box 126, 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657 or send email contact@militaryproject.org: Name, I.D., withheld unless you request publication. Same address to unsubscribe. Phone: 917.677.8057

IRAQ WAR REPORTS

“Out, Out America”



Demonstrators hold up signs during a protest in Kerbala, 80 km (50 miles) southwest of Baghdad, July 3, 2009. The signs read “No, no America” (R) and “Out, out America” (L). REUTERS/Mushtaq Muhammed

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

Two U.S. Soldiers Killed, Seven Wounded In Complex Attack On Zerok Base

July 4 (Reuters) & CNN & (KUNA)

Two U.S. soldiers were killed when Taliban fighters attacked a base in the Zerok district of southeastern Paktika province that houses members of the U.S. military, Afghan national police and Afghan National Army, a U.S. military spokeswoman said.

Seven U.S. soldiers and two Afghan troops were wounded.

The Taliban first detonated a truck full of explosives, then attacked the base with missiles and rockets.

Militant spokesman Zabeehullah Mujahid said that a fuel tanker full of explosives was detonated at the US forces base in Paktika in the morning.

Hamidullah Zwak, a spokesman for the provincial governor, said a bomber driving a truck was shot dead before reaching the base but explosives in the truck went off during the shooting.

Foreign Occupation Soldier Killed Somewhere Or Other In Afghanistan; Nationality Not Announced

03 Jul 2009 Reuters

A soldier in the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was killed by a roadside bomb in southern Afghanistan on Friday, ISAF said in a statement.

Canadian Soldier Killed, Six Wounded In Zhari; “Roadside Bomb Narrowly Missed A Vehicle Carrying The Commander Of Coalition Troops In Kandahar”

07/03/09 CBC

A Canadian soldier was killed Friday in Afghanistan by a roadside bomb that narrowly missed a vehicle carrying the commander of coalition troops in Kandahar.

Cpl. Nicholas Bulger, 30, a member of Brig.-Gen. Jonathan Vance's tactical team, was travelling behind the general in Kandahar province when his light armoured vehicle struck an improvised explosive device July 3 at 11:20 a.m. local time.

In an interview on Canada Day, Bulger told CBC he was hopeful about Afghanistan's future.

"Especially when we're driving down the streets in the rural areas, to look down into the eyes of the children that are there, you get a different perspective," Bulger said Wednesday.

After Vance's vehicle passed over the bomb safely, it was set off 15 metres behind by the vehicle in which Bulger was travelling. Vance was not injured in the blast.

Five other soldiers were hurt, but are in good condition and receiving medical care at Kandahar Airfield.

Vance often travels in Kandahar province with soldiers who act as his "close-protection" force. At the time of the explosion, his convoy was in the western Zhari district — an area of intense insurgent activity, about 60 kilometres west of Kandahar city — to visit American troops who are under Canadian command.

The military detained several people after the blast, though it is not clear whether they were involved.

Just two days ago on Canada Day, Vance's group was visiting other Canadian bases when they had to rescue another convoy escorted by private guards that was ambushed by insurgents. In the ensuing battle, Vance's team killed several insurgents.

Bulger is the third Canadian death in Afghanistan in less than a month. Cpl. Martin Dubé was killed in an explosion June 14 while trying to defuse a bomb.

**British Defence Sources Say Dead
Commander Was "Dicked" By The
Taliban:
"It Is A Technique Now Being Regularly
Employed"**

[Thanks to Mark Shapiro, The Military Project, who sent this in.]

04th July 2009 By Christopher Leake, Daily Mail [Excerpts]

Afghan civilians using mobile phones acted as lookouts for the Taliban before the convoy led by the most senior British officer to be killed in Afghanistan was attacked by a roadside bomb.

Lieutenant-Colonel Rupert Thorneloe and 18-year-old Trooper Joshua Hammond died when their Viking armoured vehicle was blown up by the device last Wednesday during a major offensive in Helmand province.

Senior defence sources last night said that the convoy headed by Lieutenant-Colonel Thorneloe, commanding officer of the 1st Battalion Welsh Guards, had been 'dicked', or identified, as targets by Afghans who tipped off Taliban insurgents.

It is a technique now being regularly employed.

It enabled militants to activate the improvised explosive device, which also injured six soldiers.

Sources said the Afghans, who left the area before the attack, had formed a screen to view military vehicles driving towards a canal crossing near the provincial capital, Lashkar Gah.

A source said last night: 'The Army is holding a detailed investigation into the deaths as it does in every case, but the early signs are this was a classic dicking operation that allowed the Taliban time to set their roadside bombs.'

**IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE RESISTANCE
END THE OCCUPATIONS**

**OCCUPATION ISN'T LIBERATION
ALL TROOPS HOME NOW!**

**[No, This Is Not A Satire]
“The Commanders Directing The
Massive Marine Security Operation
Here Had Said They Hoped Not To
Rely On Airstrikes”**

“But They Were Left With Little Choice After The Insurgents Refused To Surrender”



U.S. marines patrol in the Garmsir district of Helmand province July 3, 2009. The Marines fanned out through towns and mud-brick villages in the Helmand River valley, a crescent of opium poppy and wheat fields criss-crossed by canals. REUTERS/Ahmad Masood

In other parts of Helmand, Marines encountered different obstacles as they sought to introduce themselves to residents. To the north of Garmser, in the district of Nawa, troops have hit several roadside bombs. And in the town of Khan Neshin, in the southern part of the river valley, Marines had hoped to meet with town elders but they did not show.

July 3, 2009 Washington Post Staff Writer, By Rajiv Chandrasekaran [Excerpts]

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan, July 3 -- Taliban insurgents stepped up attacks Friday against U.S. Marines in southern Afghanistan's Helmand River valley, forcing troops in some areas to spend the day fighting instead of carrying out plans to meet with residents and local leaders.

The stiffest resistance occurred in the district of Garmser, where Taliban fighters holed up in a walled housing compound engaged in an eight-hour gun battle with troops from the 2nd battalion of the 8th Marine Regiment. The Marines eventually requested a Harrier fighter jet to drop a 500 pound bomb on the compound, which was believed to have killed all of the fighters inside.

The commanders directing the massive Marine security operation here had said they hoped not to rely on airstrikes, which have resulted in numerous civilian casualties in Afghanistan over the past seven years, and officers here noted with pride Thursday that they had not used bombs or artillery in the first 24 hours of the mission.

But they were left with little choice after the insurgents refused to surrender.

The fight began Thursday, when the 2nd battalion's Echo Company, which was conducting a foot patrol after arriving in the area by helicopter, was attacked by insurgents who subsequently retreated into the housing compound, whereupon an hours-long gunfight ensued.

The firing stopped Thursday evening, after Marine AH-1 Cobra helicopters fired Hellfire missiles into the compound. It resumed Friday morning when a Marine transport helicopter landed to deliver Echo Company pallets of food and water. The helicopter was unscathed, but the fusillade soon escalated to large-caliber machine-gun fire and rocket-propelled grenades.

The incident, which the overall commander of Marine forces in southern Afghanistan called "a hell of a fight," did not result in any U.S. casualties, but it kept Marines in Garmser from meeting with village elders and other residents.

Although officers at the combat operations center here noted that their counter-insurgency effort will involve similar offensive actions against insurgents they encounter, such engagements effectively delay key elements of the Marine stabilization strategy, which is focused on winning the allegiances of the local population by promising to help protect them from the Taliban.

Other Marine units in Garmser were also attacked Friday. But when the Marines returned fire, those insurgents broke contact and retreated.

"They're not decisively engaging us," said Lt. Col. Jeff Rule, who supervises the combat operations center at this vast desert base west of the river.

In other parts of Helmand, Marines encountered different obstacles as they sought to introduce themselves to residents.

To the north of Garmser, in the district of Nawa, troops have hit several roadside bombs. And in the town of Khan Neshin, in the southern part of the river valley, Marines had hoped to meet with town elders but they did not show.

Although some Marine units have yet to accomplish initial objectives of the mission -- including finding homes to rent and convert into troop outposts -- Mellenger said the forces have succeeded in disrupting the activities of the Taliban.

**POLITICIANS CAN'T BE COUNTED ON TO HALT
THE BLOODSHED**

**THE TROOPS HAVE THE POWER TO STOP THE
WARS**

NEW GENERAL ORDER NO. 1: PACK UP GO HOME



American soldiers in a military plane before airlift to Afghanistan at U.S. Manas air base in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, May 8, 2009. (AP Photo/Azamat Imanaliev)

SOMALIA WAR REPORTS

Fighting Between Pro-Government Forces And Islamist Insurgents Continued For A Third Consecutive Day

3 Jul 3, 2009 MOGADISHU, Somalia July 3 (Garowe Online)

Fighting between pro-government forces and Islamist insurgents continued for a third consecutive day in the Somali capital Mogadishu, killing at least two dozen people and wounding scores, Radio Garowe reports.

The violence was concentrated in several districts in north Mogadishu, including Yaaqshiid, Kaaraan and Shibis.

African Union peacekeepers [translation: foreign occupation troops backed by the U.S. government] (AMISOM) were involved in the fighting on Thursday, with witnesses saying AMISOM artillery fire targeted Al Shabaab and Hizbul Islam rebel hideouts in different parts of Mogadishu.

Families in districts such as Bondheere, Shibis and Kaaraan who have survived much of Mogadishu's wars have been fleeing their homes in huge numbers, witnesses and local sources said.

Locals said it is the "largest number" of families fleeing war in these districts in nearly two decades.

Yusuf Indho Ade, a notorious former warlord, has told reporters that pro-government forces killed a number of 'foreign fighters' during recent battles in Mogadishu.

Indho Ade was recently appointed as the interim government's state minister for defense.

TROOP NEWS

HOW MANY MORE FOR OBAMA'S WARS?



June 1, 2009: U.S. medical personnel treat U.S. soldier of 10th Mountain Division in the emergency room at the U.S. hospital in Bagram Air base, north of Kabul, Afghanistan, after he was wounded at a roadside bomb in Nerkh district of Wardak province. (AP Photo/Rafiq Maqbool)

DO YOU HAVE A FRIEND OR RELATIVE IN THE MILITARY?

Forward GI Special along, or send us the address if you wish and we'll send it regularly. Whether in Iraq or stuck on a base in the USA, this is extra important for your service friend, too often cut off from access to

encouraging news of growing resistance to the wars, inside the armed services and at home. Send email requests to address up top or write to: The Military Project, Box 126, 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657. Phone: 917.677.8057

GI Humor: Iraq

“If New England Was Occupied By Canadians, I’d Still Want ‘Em To Leave”

July 03, 2009 By Mike Tharp, Baghdad Observer

A year in a war zone requires a sense of humor.

Examples from 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry, 2nd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, based in northwest Baghdad since last November:

--the army is famous/notorious for the names it gives to what it does. This outfit has deployed on Operations Sniper, Flying Dutchman, Kantana, Tarheels and many others. But somebody politically correct up the food chain thought they'd gone too far when they named one op "Napalm Rain." Change it--might offend our Iraqi allies. The new name: "Operation Campfire Sing-Along."

--soldiers hate phony gung-ho guys. Somebody created a fictitious new "Ribbon of the Day," called the Motto Language Medal. Here's how you win it: "Soldiers who never say your rank and name, but always call you Warrior, Killer, High Speed, Hard-Charger or Motivator. They always end sentences with 'Roger!' or 'Hooah!' and are always Charlie Mikeing (CM--continue to march)."

--one American liaison officer with the Iraqi army and national police in the sector unleashed a steady stream of sardonic one-liners: "The Iraqi economy is run by one giant DMV." About how sloppy the upkeep was around the local Iraqi army base: "It's like the 'Little Rascals' set up an army." On the blue and white Humvees that the national police use: "Chevy trucks with redneck armor."

On how Iraqis feel about 130,000 American troops in their midst: "If New England was occupied by Canadians, I'd still want 'em to leave."

About the makeup of the present-day Iraqi army--composed of throwbacks regulars from the Saddam Hussein era, those who joined after the 2003 invasion and recent recruits: "It's a Frankenstein army." On the Shilka Russian-made self-propelled guns atop police Humvees: "They can be rusty and never cleaned and they still work--the national police stop at company-level maintenance."

--An American officer leading a patrol became disgusted with the static and breakups on radio communications between Humvees and their base: "The comm sounds like it has the ass today--maybe a bag of ass."

--When they see a pretty Iraqi woman not wearing an abaya or hijab--the long cloaks and veils worn by many Iraqi females--GIs call it "going topless."

And this story, which has made the rounds of some public affairs specialists, is probably apocryphal and certainly didn't happen with the 1st ID battalion.

A U.S. patrol, searching a house, found \$300 in cash on a man in the house. A lieutenant, following protocol then in effect, put a hood over his head and questioned him. He then called up the line to report what they'd found--\$300 and no weapons. His superior told him to take the guy's picture and let him go. "Sgt. Frye," the officer said. "Take some pics of this guy and let him go."

A few minutes later Frye returned with a digital camera and gave it to the lieutenant. As he scrolled through the images, the lieutenant frowned. "Sgt. Frye, what did you do?" "I took his picture and let him go, like you said, sir."

Apparently, the lieutenant would have preferred that Frye remove the hood before taking the photos. The patrol's HQ later displayed a frontier-style poster of the hooded guy with "WANTED" across the top.

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS



"At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed. Oh had I the ability, and could reach the nation's ear, I would, pour out a fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach, withering sarcasm, and stern rebuke.

“For it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder.

“We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake.”

Frederick Douglass, 1852

**“Hope for change doesn’t cut it when you’re still losing buddies.”
-- J.D. Englehart, Iraq Veterans Against The War**

Crocodile’s Tears

**Those who oppress
Millions of Palestinians
For 42 years –
Rave about the freedom fighters
- in Iran.**

**Those who rejected the results
Of the Palestinian elections –
Are shocked by the thwarting
Of the people’s will
- in Iran.**

**Those who shoot and kill
Palestinian demonstrators
In Wadi Ara, Bilin and Nialin –
Shudder at the sight of
The police shooting protesters
- in Iran.**

[June 26, 2009 Gush-Shalom.org]

1915: “If Perish We Must, Let Us Perish In The Struggle For Our Own Cause”

August 1915, V.I. Ulyanov, Pravda, No. 18 (3850) [The writer used the pen name "Lenin" to keep the government from terrorizing his family. Excerpts]

The war fills the pockets of the capitalists to whom an ocean of gold is flowing from the treasuries of the great powers.

The war is provoking an unreasoning bitterness against the enemy, and the bourgeoisie does its best to direct the dissatisfaction of the people into those channels, to divert their attention from the main enemy, the government and the ruling classes of their own country.

The war, however, carrying with it untold miseries and horrors for the toiling masses, enlightens and steels the best representatives of the working class.

If perish we must, let us perish in the struggle for our own cause, for the cause of the workers, for the Socialist revolution and not for the interests of the capitalists, landowners, and Tsars - this is what every class-conscious worker sees and feels.

Revolutionary Social-Democratic work may be difficult at present, but it is possible.

It progresses in the whole world, and in this alone lies salvation.

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK



CLASS WAR REPORTS



The Generals' Dictatorship Eats Shit



Supporters of ousted Honduran President Manuel Zelaya take part in a rally to protest against the military coup. The head of the Organization of American States arrived here Friday for talks to try to resolve the political mayhem triggered in Honduras by the ousting of Zelaya. (AFP/Yuri Cortez)

The Roots Of Iran's Revolt: "The Idea That Iran's Mass Democracy Movement Is A Creation Of Washington Is Simply Ludicrous" "Divisions Between Reformers And Hard-Liners Led Each Side To Try To Mobilize Mass Support, Thereby Destabilizing The Entire System"

IF THE hardliners around Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei are seeking to crush the revolt in Iran today, it's because they well remember the revolutionary potential of the Iranian working class.

July 1, 2009 By Lee Sustar, Socialist Worker [Excerpts]

WITH REPRESSION silencing most street protests for the moment as hardliners tighten their grip, is a democratic transformation--or revolutionary change--possible in Iran?

Answering that question requires looking at Iranian history, politics and society beyond the disputed June 12 election, in which the government made the outrageous claim that incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad received more than 62 percent of the vote--24.5 million, compared to 11 million votes for his leading opponent, Mir Hussein Mousavi, who was gaining growing support in the weeks before the vote.

In the aftermath of the election, what began as a factional dispute between two wings of the Iranian ruling class sparked mass demonstrations in the capital city of Tehran that, according to the city's mayor, involved some 3 million people.

While the protests have receded in the face of vicious attacks by security forces--which killed at least 17 and arrested hundreds--Iranian politics will never be the same.

The country's rulers and institutions are discredited, and the pro-democracy movement, previously led by students and intellectuals, has greatly expanded its social depth.

Rather than end that movement, the government's crackdown marks the beginning of the movement's transformation into a more powerful social force in the months and years ahead.

But before looking at the roots of that movement and the prospects for its development, it's necessary--strangely enough--to take up the question of whether the Iranian popular struggle is a legitimate one.

Both neoconservatives on the right and some prominent figures on the left have argued--echoing Ahmadinejad--that the protests are just the noisy complaints of disgruntled middle-class minority that's sore over an election loss.

Some on the left further suggest that U.S. covert operations must be behind the protests--given Washington's funding and support for the color-coded "revolutions" that toppled leaders in Serbia, Ukraine and other countries.

Certainly the U.S. is intervening in Iran by imposing economic sanctions over that country's nuclear energy program.

It is also aiding armed rebellions by national minorities, such as the Kurds and Balochis, and allowing an Iranian Sunni Muslim extremist group, Jundallah, to conduct terror campaigns in Iran from across the border in Pakistan.

But the idea that Iran's mass democracy movement is a creation of Washington is simply ludicrous.

This argument was systematically debunked by Reese Erlich, the veteran independent journalist and author of a recent book on Iran, who was in Tehran during the elections. In an article titled, "Iran and Leftist Confusion," he wrote:

"[T]he multi-class character of the most recent demonstrations, which arose quickly and spontaneously, were beyond the control of the reformist leaders in Iran, let alone the CIA..."

"Frankly, based on my observations, no one was leading the demonstrations. During the course of the week after the elections, the mass movement evolved from one protesting vote fraud into one calling for much broader freedoms.

"You could see it in the changing composition of the marches. There were not only upper-middle-class kids in tight jeans and designer sunglasses. There were growing numbers of workers and women in very conservative chadors."

Erlich's observations are correct. The social composition of the movement has changed rapidly--and its further development will require sinking more roots into the working class.

To better understand how the movement took shape, and its future prospects, it's helpful to look briefly at the history of Iranian politics in the 30 years since the 1979 revolution.

Revolution And Counterrevolution 1978-1979

IF THE hardliners around Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamanei are seeking to crush the revolt in Iran today, it's because they well remember the revolutionary potential of the Iranian working class.

Its mass strikes compelled the U.S.-backed dictator, the Shah of Iran, to flee the country. "Indeed, the entry (into activism) of the working class made possible the eventual triumph of the Islamic Revolution," wrote Ervand Abrahamian, a leading historian of Iran. Abrahamian continued:

"By the third week of October (1978), a rapid succession of strikes crippled almost all the bazaars, universities, high schools, oil installations, banks, government ministries, post offices, railways, newspapers, customs and port facilities, internal air flights, radio and television stations, state-run hospitals, paper and tobacco plants, textile mills and other large factories.

"In effect, the working class had joined the middle classes to bring about a massive and unprecedented general strike...The Shah faced not just a general strike but a political general strike...

"[B]y December 25, a series of general strikes had again brought the whole economy to a grinding halt, and grassroots strike committees had occupied many large factories, government ministries and communications centers."

These factory councils, or shoras in the Farsi language, were classic examples of workers' power seen in previous revolutions, as in the Russian soviets in 1905 and 1917, Barcelona in 1936 and Hungary in 1956.

But the central leader of the revolution wasn't the left, but the clergy and middle-class elements who looked to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Khomeini appropriated the language and demands of the left to call for an Islamic society.

After Khomeini's return to Iran from exile in February 1979, revolutionary committees loyal to him set up an Islamist parallel to a provisional revolutionary government.

These forces dismantled working-class organization and divided the left--and later, violently smashed it. Iraq's 1980 invasion of Iran, launched with the approval of the U.S., created a siege atmosphere that helped Khomeini and the clerics consolidate their power.

As historian Nikki Keddie explained in her history of modern Iran:

"Increasingly in the post-revolution period, political power was concentrated in the hands of the Khomeinist clergy and the bazaar bourgeoisie. Soon after the revolution, there were land seizures by peasants in some regions, and factory strikes and workers' committees set up in urban areas, but the authorities, whether by compromise, persuasion or force, gradually brought such movements under control."

After imprisoning, executing or forcing into exile its opponents on the right and left, the new ruling class soon divided into rival political groupings.

Central to the debate was how to manage the economy.

Large sections of industry came under control of the state or religious foundations controlled by Shia clergymen who were closely tied to the state.

The divisions broke out roughly into three camps: an Islamist left, which maintained some of the social rhetoric of the revolution; an Islamist right, based around the most conservative clergy; and a pragmatic right dominated by clerics who were close to, or had become part of, big business interests.

Over the next two decades, these factions would clash over how Iran should engage with the world, economically, politically and culturally.

During the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-88, the Islamist left was ascendant. Mir Hussein Mousavi, then prime minister, oversaw extensive state control of Iran's economy. Government rationing was used to feed workers and the poor during periods of runaway inflation of food prices.

Mousavi justified his policies on religious grounds. "The way of Islam is to attend to social justice," he said, adding elsewhere, "the security of the revolution lies in the eradication of poverty and serving the destitute...Capital must not rule and the priority of the regime should be the poor and not the well-off."

Mousavi's economic policies emulated earlier attempts at using state capitalist methods of national development, as pursued by Egypt under the Nasser governments of the 1950s and 1960s.

The end of the war, and Khomeini's death a year later, brought the factional struggles into the open.

The cleric Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, a wealthy businessman and leader of the pragmatic right, forced a constitutional change that eliminated the post of prime minister, and soon was elected president himself. He succeeded Ali Khamanej, who went on to replace Khomeini as supreme leader, despite a lack of religious qualifications for the post.

Rafsanjani, a staunch defender of private property, favored more engagement with the West. (Rafsanjani had been a key player in the Iran-Contra scandal, in which Iran bought U.S.-made weapons in exchange for helping to get Western hostages released in Lebanon. The money Iran spent on weapons went to fund Nicaragua's right-wing counterrevolutionary uprising, in violation of U.S. law.)

In his two terms as president, Rafsanjani failed to find a way out of Iran's international isolation. The economy recovered partially from the devastation of the war years, as Rafsanjani used the state to rationalize industries with the aim of development, following the example of the East Asian "tiger" economies.

But Iran's economy was still weak, vulnerable to slumps in oil prices and beset by chronic inflation.

Workers' living standards declined, leading to riots in 1992 and, despite savage repression, again in 1994-95.

With Rafsanjani barred by Iran's constitution from seeking a third term in the 1997 presidential elections, the pragmatic conservatives aligned themselves with elements of the Islamist left. With its faith in state-controlled industry shaken by the collapse of the

USSR, the Islamist left shifted towards the pro-market, neoliberal policies that had come to dominate the world economy.

Thus, the Islamist left morphed into reformers who emphasized political freedoms, human rights and an easing of state-imposed Islamist behavioral norms.

And with the backing of Rafsanjani and his allies, the reformist candidate, Mohammad Khatami, a former minister of culture, won the 1997 presidential vote by a landslide.

But in his two terms in office, Khatami failed to deliver.

The Islamist right, thanks to support from Supreme Leader Khamane'i, controlled all key government ministries and stymied most reforms.

Khatami also failed to protect students in the pro-democracy movement, whose protests were violently attacked by police and the basij, a paramilitary force based in the mosques and controlled by the right. Pro-reform newspapers were regularly shut down by the authorities, and their editors detained. In 2004 the clerics' Guardian Council, which must approve candidates for office, barred 2,000 reformers from running for the majlis, or parliament, including 80 incumbents.

The intellectuals and middle class elements who had high hopes in Khatami felt disillusioned, if not betrayed.

Workers, who were promised little by Khatami, faced much worse conditions.

Khatami's economic program promoted privatization and deregulation, which led to stepped-up attacks on wages and working conditions, even as the traditional bazaar bourgeoisie blocked most economic reforms. Unemployment and persistent inflation added to workers' misery.

As the Khatami era wound down, workers began to make their own voices heard through a series of struggles that defied the ban on independent unions.

In January 2004, 1,500 workers at a copper smelting plant near the village of Khatonabad went on strike and occupied their plant when management fired all but 250 of them. After eight days, security forces shot into the crowd from helicopters, killing as many as 15 workers and injuring 300. Eighty were arrested; upon their release, they showed signs of torture.

Rather than having a chilling effect on strike action, the repression spurred similar action across the country in a variety of different plants, and a strike in March 2004 that involved up to a third of Iran's teachers.

Workers often organized these actions by setting up workplace-based charity committees that served as underground unions. In the northeastern town of Gilan, workers fighting privatization in 2004 revived the workers' councils, or shoras, that had first emerged during the revolution.

In their 2007 book *Iran on the Brink*, journalists Andreas Malm and Shora Esmailian interviewed several workers about their struggles.

One of the workers in the important Khodro plant, the largest vehicle plant in the Middle East, explained their brief strike action in January 2004:

“The only thing we want is the right to improve our situation. We fight for the right to go on strike, to form a union, all these basic democratic rights.

“Everything we do must be kept secret. But we can’t just sit twiddling our thumbs, waiting for the Islamic Republic to fall. We must take the right to organize, practice it, without waiting for someone’s permission. That means we must be ready to sacrifice, as the people did in Khatonabad.”

Perhaps the best-known Iranian workers’ struggle outside the country is that of the Tehran bus drivers, who have braved beatings, arrest and imprisonment for fighting to create an independent union.

In 2005, the 17,000-member Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company refused to accept riders’ fares to protest fare hikes and bad working conditions. Union leader Mansour Osanloo was arrested; upon his release, he led another strike in 2006 and was imprisoned soon afterward.

The Islamist Right Strikes Back

Khatami’s reform program was seen by the Islamist right as a mortal threat.

To counter it, the conservatives built up networks of former Revolutionary Guards, an elite military force--as well as the basij, a kind of paramilitary organization intertwined with, and funded by, the mosques and the bazaar bourgeoisie and backed by the national security establishment.

The basij were given official status by the majlis in 1992. Later on, they were charged with enforcing religious laws known as Propagation of Virtue and Prohibition of Vice. “Essentially, this meant ‘unleashing’ the basijis as the moral soldiers of the Islamic Republic, more specifically the conservative right factions,” wrote historian and author Mehdi Moslem.

The basij thus helped build the careers of a cadre of Islamist student revolutionaries from the 1970s who had become members of the Revolutionary Guard during the Iran-Iraq War.

One of those war veterans was Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, whose political connections got him promoted from governor of a small province to appointment as mayor of Tehran, where he used the basij to build a political machine.

Khamanei became the sponsor and protector of this younger generation of Islamist rightists, and threw his weight behind Ahmadinejad as the right’s candidate in the 2005 presidential race.

The high rate of abstention from pro-reform candidates, plus some likely vote-rigging, vaulted Ahmadinejad from nowhere into a runoff election against Rafsanjani.

Ahmadinejad presented himself as a populist with a modest lifestyle, in contrast to the very wealthy Rafsanjani, a figure often accused of corruption and whose family dominates the lucrative market for pistachio exports.

Ahmadinejad's Pseudo-Populism

The conventional media portrayal of Iranian politics is a contest between the populist Ahmadinejad, who has the backing of the rural poor and workers, versus the middle-class and wealthy backers of the reformers around Mousavi.

In reality, Ahmadinejad's populism is a pose, notwithstanding his grab bag of local development programs and some highly publicized, pre-election handouts and bonuses for state employees.

Ahmadinejad last year tried to remove subsidies on staple goods for the poor in exchange for higher state benefits--although inflation would have soon eliminated those gains.

To be sure, Ahmadinejad differs with the reformers about the extent to which Iran's economy should open to the West and what types of investments should be pursued.

But he shares their neoliberal framework--and his embrace of privatization bears this out.

As left-wing Iranian scholar Kaveh Ehsani points out, shortly after Ahmadinejad's 2005 election victory, Supreme Leader Khamenei himself gave privatization a major push by issuing an order reinterpreting the Iranian constitution's support for a state-dominated economy.

As a result, he writes, "the government was ordered to reduce its share in "non-essential" sectors annually by 20 percent and to privatize some 80 percent of its assets in "essential" sectors--mining, heavy industry, downstream oil and gas, banking, insurance, energy, communications and even some military industries."

Ahmadinejad pursued this agenda with gusto.

As journalist Billy Wharton points out, the Iranian president has already privatized the postal service, sold shares in two state-owned banks and a sale of 5 percent of shares in a state-owned steel company.

According to the Iran Privatization Organization, a state ministry, some 247 state enterprises been partly or fully privatized since Ahmadinejad took office in 2005.

Ahmadinejad has tried to camouflage the privatization process by doling out "justice shares" of stock in privatized state companies to the poor. These assets, distributed to

about 6 million people, were worth \$2.5 billion in the first two years of Ahmadinejad's term.

The model here is the privatization process in Russia and Eastern Europe, where crooked entrepreneurs were able to buy up the stocks for cheap to create huge new private monopolies based on former state assets.

In any case, stocks thinly scattered among the poor won't provide much help for the 8 million people (out of a population of 76 million) who live in extreme poverty.

Nevertheless, as Ehsani points out, the state still dominates the Iranian economy, with 500 big state-owned companies that account for 76 percent of the national budget and two-thirds of Iran's gross domestic product (GDP).

That means the real fruits of privatization have yet to be plucked by private Iranian capital--so the question of who will benefit from the sell-off of state assets was a looming issue behind the 2005 vote.

Indeed, if Ahmadinejad succeeds in handing the benefits of privatization to his allies in the basij and the security apparatus, it could reconfigure Iranian capitalism.

The Islamist right and the war veteran generation could make the transition from their careers in the national security apparatus and sanctions-busting smuggling operations into entrepreneurs, much as the Stalinist bureaucrats did in Russia during the 1990s.

That's a threat to established business tycoons like Rafsanjani and his allies, who could be marginalized by new players.

And at the same time, the reformers around Mousavi would lose the strategic levers that they believe they need to restructure Iranian capitalism on a more rational basis.

Election, Coup And Resistance

All this set the stage for the sharp split in the Iranian ruling class around the June 12 vote.

Rafsanjani went all out for his old rival Mousavi in order to stop Ahmadinejad and Khamanei.

And Mousavi used televised debates to cut into Ahmadinejad's claim of economic success, highlighting the difficulties facing workers and the poor.

The strategy worked, producing a late surge for Mousavi in the form of massive election rallies in Tehran and other cities that brought in supporters far beyond the stereotypical middle-class base of the reformers.

Young people were particularly energized--not only because of Mousavi's promise of a more liberal stance on social questions, but because of their terrible economic circumstances.

In recent years, the jobless rate for men in their early 20s has been above 20 percent. For women that age, unemployment is estimated at 40 percent.

This display of mass support for Mousavi panicked Ahmadinejad and Khamanei into announcing an overwhelming victory for the incumbent in order to avoid a second-round election contest between the two.

In this way, what began as a faction fight between two wings of the ruling class turned into a virtual coup.

Since the June 12 coup, the protests by millions in the street have been battered down by repression carried out mainly by basij thugs on motorcycles. The video recording of the murder of a young woman, Neda Agha Soltan, has become a symbol of the mass outrage over the repression.

While the mass protests have subsided, smaller demonstrations continue. And the splits in the Iranian ruling class have meant that the repression, while terrible enough, isn't nearly as bloody as it could have been.

That's a sign that Ahmadinejad and Khamanei are still somewhat tentative in their clampdown.

If they show weakness by making some sort of power-sharing deal with Mousavi and Rafsanjani, they risk encouraging the movement to push for even greater change.

But if they move decisively against Mousavi and Rafsanjani with arrests and imprisonment, the regime would shed whatever legitimacy it has left, and become simply a police state.

There are rough parallels here with the revolutionary crises in Eastern Europe under Stalinism, such as in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968.

There, divisions between reformers and hard-liners led each side to try to mobilize mass support, thereby destabilizing the entire system.

Ultimately, such splits led to paralysis and collapse in the revolutions of 1989.

In the case of Iran, a dispute over a stolen election has opened the way to a mass upsurge for democracy and a movement that won't simply evaporate under repression.

The size and character of the movement inevitably raises social questions and the need for the independent organization of the working class and the revival and extension of workers' struggles that emerged in recent years--most recently, in the illegal May Day protests earlier this year.

The pro-democracy movement among students, the underground unions and the street protesters that emerged in recent weeks together have the potential to interact to create a new movement for democracy and revolutionary change.

The international left must do all it can to support that struggle.

Got an opinion? Comments from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Write to Box 126, 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657 or send to contact@militaryproject.org: Name, I.D., withheld unless you request identification published.

RECEIVED

“Heroic Times And Better Days For The Republic Which Has Gone Off The Rails In Past Decades”

[The following is from Robert Sharlet, brother of Jeff Sharlet, who founded and edited Vietnam GI. His letter refers to GI Special 7G3, which carried remarks made November 18, 1777 by William Pitt, Earl of Chatham; spoken in the House of Lords, London, England: “If I were an American, as I am an Englishman, while a foreign troop was landed in my country, I never would lay down my arms — never — never — never.”]

From: Robert Sharlet
To: GI Special
Sent: July 03, 2009
Subject: NICE HISTORICAL REMINDER

Pitt's speech a nice historical reminder.

As for Arnold, of course a traitor in the end, but without his courage and leadership earlier at Saratoga we might well have lost the day and the war, it was that close.

Gates, the CIC and buffoon who hogged full credit for the victory, was analogous to the Brit generals who sent the light brigade to its death, incompetent to his collar button.

Living up in these parts most of my life, one can't escape awareness of our early more glorious military history -- I'm less than 20 miles from the Saratoga battlefield, just 40 miles from the Bennington monument where Col. Warner and the Green Mt boys stopped the Brits coming from the east to join Burgoyne, and about an hour to the west where General Herkimer defeated St Leger's forces headed for Saratoga.

These sites are part of the landscape when one goes out for a Sunday drive in the region.

Heroic times and better days for the Republic which has gone off the rails in past decades.



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