

WAR SOLVED NOTHING



Some 50,000 people went on the 'Stop the War' march from Hyde Park to Trafalgar Square in November. Why did they do this? Non-stop American bombing had put the Taliban in flight. The sight of children playing on Kabul streets, music being played, women free to remove their burkhas - all of these will have been as welcome to the anti-war movement as to those who supported the bombings. So why did more than twice as many people come to the really as had turned out only a month earlier?

The answer is that they know the war has solved nothing and taught us less. America will conclude that its 'triumph' will be the blueprint for the pursuit of terrorists in the 40 to 50 countries it also has on its hit list. In fact, the US administration will feel compelled to continue its terrorist hunt because victory hasn't made it feel any safer from a

repeat of the terrorist attacks that shocked them to the core on September 11th.

Britain will also talk-up the military success whilst knowing in Afghanistan our troops are not wanted by the victors, not welcomed by the losers, not any closer to the terrorists and not any use to the aid programme. The figures coming out of Afghanistan confirm that more people are known to have been killed in the bombings than were killed on September 11th in the USA. Does this make us quits? No, it doesn't. An equality of death rates amongst innocent civilians resolves nothing at all. But the picture gets worse.

The last burst of activity from the World Food Programme cannot fill the food gap created by the weeks of uninterrupted bombing. Over two million people have fled inside the country, mainly to remote areas, away from the bombs but into the arms of starvation. We don't have a chance of feeding them. They don't have a chance of feeding themselves.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, our friends in the Northern Alliance have lost no time in claiming everything in their path. They are only too happy to follow the lead given in US Secretary of State Rumsfeld's declaration that America wasn't interested in taking prisoners. Nor is the Northern Alliance. Such policies are a clear violation of the Geneva Convention, but perhaps this no longer applies to consenting allies. We are no more likely to see the Northern Alliance championing civil rights and the open society than to restore the rights of women.

All those who supported the bombing because it would bring about a new deal for women are in for a rude awakening. Not one of the feudal warlords slugging it out for regional or national control of Afghanistan has gender equality on their shopping list. For this, you would have to turn the clock back over 20 years.

In April 1978 the Afghan Communist Party (the PDPA) seized power and announced a massive reform programme. At the time only 1% of women graduated from high school. They set up literacy classes for

men; women and children in the villages and by August 1979 had established over 600 new schools. By the time the Taliban arrived in 1994, 50% of the students at Kabul University were women, and 60% of the tutors. Elsewhere, 70% of teachers were women, along with 50% of civilian government workers and 40% of Kabul's doctors. The chief surgeon of the military hospital was a woman, as was the President of the Afghan Red Crescent, and there were 7 women MP's in the parliament. The trouble was that all of them were communists.

As we legitimately cast baleful judgements over the Taliban, the West needs to remember these were our creations; the products of an obsessive American desire to crush communism. It was the West that chose to fund and arm and train the Mujahadien and the Taliban. It was their fundamentalism and intolerance that we relied on. The fact that this was to destroy the only era of genuine equality for women in Afghanistan's history never mattered for the military strategists of the time, and it is hypocritical to suggest it means any more today. Nor does the 'victory' bring us any closer to understanding or answering the terrorist threat.

Both Britain and America are becoming the new war-zones. Moral panics allow both administrations to bring in emergency powers legislation that massively undermines democratic rights. Britain lurches back towards internment military courts and detention without trial. America re-awakens the spirit of McCarthyism. Once in place, the legislation will prove hard to get rid of, and the stage will be set for a war of government against the people. Under the new definition of terrorism - addressing not just the security of the state, but threats to property - global corporations will soon demand that eco-protesters be re-classified as eco-terrorists. They too will be dealt with beyond appeals to due legal processes. Meanwhile in the Middle East, Israel will still shoot innocent Palestinian children in their counter terrorism activities. Arab houses will still have their fronts blown away by Israeli tanks. Arab lands will still be eroded by Israeli settlements. And the Americans will call for peaceful co-existence; yet continue to send in the weapons that make it impossible.

Even if bin Laden is found and killed, we are no closer to a just and sustainable peace. Like Elvis, bin Laden will turn up in Bolivia, Argentina, Las Vegas and Leicester. We will look for him in our nightmares. And, by ignoring the 'justice' agenda, this is where we will eventually find him.