

More recriminations over US/NATO quagmire in Afghanistan

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An increasing number of politicians, diplomats, military commanders and media commentators are describing the US-led occupation of Afghanistan as a failure and warning that American and NATO forces face defeat at the hands of a strengthening resistance movement led by the Islamist Taliban movement.

The most prominent example in the past week has been a comment published in the British *Independent* on October 20 by David Davis, a Conservative Party parliamentarian. He has been promoted by various liberals and "lefts" in Britain as a defender of civil liberties, due to his opposition to aspects of the Labour government's anti-terrorism laws.

The column, based on Davis's observations during a recent fact-finding trip to Afghanistan, was an indictment of the occupation and the puppet government in Kabul.

Davis began: "It is time to face facts in Afghanistan: the situation is spiraling downwards, and if we do not change our approach, we face disaster. Violence is up in two-thirds of the country, narcotics are the main contributor to the economy, criminality is out of control and the government is weak, corrupt and incompetent. The international coalition is seen as a squabbling bunch of foreigners who have not delivered on their promises. Although the Taliban have nowhere near majority support, their standing is growing rapidly among some ordinary Afghans."

Davis noted that three quarters of the police "actively steal from the people". The Afghan government of President Hamid Karzai, he continued, "appears to have been run for the financial benefit of 20 families", who are "old-time warlords and faction leaders responsible for past atrocities" and "operate with impunity, even over acts of violence and attempted murder".

Corruption is so pervasive in the security forces,

Davis wrote, that a farmer attempting to take produce from the British base at Lashkar Gah to the city of Kandahar has to pay bribes or "tolls" at as many as 12 police checkpoints. "The ordinary Afghan must feel caught between competing protection rackets in the police, the Taliban, the narco-bandits and the warlords... This is the regime we are defending and are perceived to be supporting."

Davis's solution, however, was no different than that being proposed by scores of pro-war commentators: more US and NATO troops, more Afghan government troops and more repression against the legitimate resistance among the Afghan people to foreign occupation.

The corrupt character of the US-backed Afghan state was reinforced by a feature on the Afghan police in this week's edition of *Time* magazine.

Time noted: "A long history of corruption has reduced the image of Afghanistan's police to little more than uniformed thieves." Individuals are said to have paid government officials bribes of up to \$US200,000 to be appointed to major police commands, as they can generate fortunes from "tolls, pay-offs and unofficial taxes on merchants".

The corruption reaches the highest circles of the Karzai government. Captain David Panian, a US soldier assisting in the training of police recruits, told *Time*: "It's like a feudal system. The baron pays the count, the count pays the duke, the duke pays the king... In order to maintain your job you have to give X amount to the provincial guy, and he has got to give it to the regional guy and so on all the way to the top."

Police corruption, stand-over tactics and abuses make them a prime target for anti-occupation insurgents. According to Interior Ministry statistics cited by *Time*, 1,119 police officers out of a total force of about 70,000

were killed between March 2007 and March 2008. Since March, another 720 police have been killed.

The insurgency has reached its most intense phase since the initial invasion more than seven years ago. The Taliban and other guerilla groups are attacking US, NATO and Afghan government forces across a growing area of the country, including in the capital Kabul. The occupation, consisting of just 70,000 troops, simply does not have enough manpower to adequately control the country.

The European members of NATO are continuing to resist Washington's calls for them to increase the size of their contribution and to lift the caveats that limit where and how their troops can be used. The bulk of the large German, French, Italian, Spanish, Polish and Turkish contingents—more than 11,000 troops in total—cannot be deployed into the southern and eastern provinces where the Taliban insurgency is the strongest.

Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini ruled out sending any extra troops during a visit to Pakistan this week. The Italian contingent mainly operates in the western province of Herat. Dismissing US calls, Frattini stated: "I do not think sending more troops is the right solution today." The German parliament has approved the dispatch of 1,000 additional personnel—boosting German troop numbers in Afghanistan to 4,500—but their sphere of operation is limited to the northern provinces.

The stance of the European powers was openly condemned on Monday by the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, US general John Craddock. Addressing a forum in London, Craddock pointed to the "70 caveats" restricting the use of European troops and declared: "We are demonstrating a political will that, in my judgment, is sometimes wavering. We in NATO have the ambition, we have the military capability, but the question is, do we have the will to address these challenges?"

Craddock described the US-NATO operations in Afghanistan as "disjointed in time and space". With no other NATO ally offering troops, the Netherlands withdrawing its contingent in mid-2010 and Canada withdrawing by the end of 2011, Craddock stated that Britain would need to send additional forces to boost its 8,300-strong contingent in the southern province of Helmand.

Additional American troops are scheduled to deploy

from January. Particularly if Barack Obama wins the presidency, it is likely that at least four extra combat brigades will be sent to Afghanistan in the first half of 2009, boosting the US force in the country to over 60,000.

The endemic corruption of the Karzai regime, the broad and growing hostility of Afghans to foreign troops, the daily abuse of democratic rights, the dysfunctional economy and the lack of elementary social services all underscore the fact that the aim of US-led occupation was never to improve the lot of the Afghan people. Rather it was to establish a base of operations for Washington's broader ambitions in the resource-rich regions of Central Asia and the Middle East.



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