

The economic crisis and war

24 October 2008

While the world's attention has been focused on the global economic crisis, the United States has continued to prosecute its neo-colonial war in Iraq and has expanded its military violence in Afghanistan and the adjoining border regions of Pakistan.

Early Thursday morning, a US drone fired four missiles into a religious school, or madrassa, in a tribal area of Pakistan's North Waziristan, killing 11 people, according to *Agence France-Presse*. It was the latest in a series of US strikes into Pakistan, including at least one commando raid by Special Forces ground troops, launched since the beginning of September. That the US has embarked on a deliberate policy of spreading its war of occupation in Afghanistan into Pakistan was underscored by last month's revelation that President Bush signed a secret order in July authorizing the use of American ground troops in Pakistan.

In Afghanistan itself, the US and its NATO allies have stepped up their attacks on military and civilian targets in an attempt to stem a widening war of resistance against foreign occupation. An overnight airstrike by US-led coalition forces in Khost Province in eastern Afghanistan killed nine Afghan soldiers, in an apparent "friendly fire" incident. The civilian toll from US air strikes has risen sharply in recent months, including an attack on an alleged Taliban compound last August that killed more than 90 civilians, a majority of them women and children.

Human Rights Watch reports that American and NATO air strikes have killed some 500 Afghan civilians over the past five years, very likely a serious underestimation of the actual toll. As the *New York Times* reported on Thursday, "The latest air strike came as fighting in Afghanistan reached its highest level since late 2001," i.e., in the first months of the US invasion.

The deteriorating US military and political situation in Afghanistan has become a focus of the presidential election, with Democratic front-runner Barack Obama taking the lead in pledging a major escalation of the US intervention. In a campaign speech in Virginia on Wednesday, Obama said he would order a surge of US

troops, perhaps 15,000 or more, as soon as he gained the White House. "It's time to heed the call ... for more troops," he declared. "That's why I'd send at least two or three additional brigades to Afghanistan."

Obama has brushed off as a "rhetorical flourish" statements made at a Seattle fundraising event by his running mate, Senator Joseph Biden, that within six months of Obama's inauguration, the new president would respond to a major foreign policy crisis by taking "incredibly tough" and unpopular decisions. Biden cited five possible flashpoints—the Middle East, Afghanistan, Pakistan, North Korea and Russia.

That Biden's chilling remarks were no mere "rhetorical flourish" is substantiated by a lengthy article published in Thursday's *New York Times* by the newspaper's White House correspondent, David E. Sanger. Discussing the foreign policy positions advanced by Obama and his Republican opponent, Senator John McCain, Sanger points to key areas where Obama has articulated an even more aggressive posture than McCain.

On Iran, for example, the McCain campaign has suggested that it would be willing to accept a deal that allowed Iran to produce uranium on its territory, while the Obama campaign told the newspaper that an Obama White House "would not allow Iran to produce uranium on Iranian soil, the same hard-line view enunciated by the Bush administration."

Sanger notes that Obama has declared that "we will never take military options off the table" and that he would not give the United Nations "veto power" over a decision to hit Iranian nuclear facilities. Sanger goes on to say that US intelligence officials claim the "threshold" for a possible military strike—the point where Iran produces sufficient nuclear material to build a weapon—"may be crossed fairly early in the next presidential term."

Obama has also suggested that the US should impose a blockade on Iranian imports of gasoline and refined petroleum products. Noting that the Bush administration has stopped short of proposing such a move, he writes, "A blockade, however, could constitute an act of war..."

On Pakistan, Sanger writes, "it is Mr. Obama who has been far more willing than Mr. McCain to threaten sending in American troops."

Obama, no less than McCain, speaks as a representative of the American ruling class, which will determine the foreign and military policy of the United States in accordance with what it perceives to be its global economic and strategic interests.

The economic crisis, global in scope but centered in the decline of the world economic position of American imperialism, will inevitably drive that policy in an even more aggressive and belligerent direction, regardless of which capitalist party occupies the White House. The economic crisis injects into world affairs an ever-greater element of tension and conflict between rival imperialist and capitalist nations.

Even more so than in the previous decade, the United States will seek, under conditions of financial turmoil and economic slump, to offset its economic decline by military means. It is necessary to learn the lessons of history. The last great world economic crisis—the Depression of the 1930s—set off escalating military conflicts that culminated in the holocaust of World War II.

The 2008 elections, unfolding under conditions of deepening recession and escalating military violence, demonstrate the immense dangers posed by political illusions in Obama and the Democratic Party. Once again, the enormous anti-war sentiment of the American people has been preempted by being channeled behind the Democratic wing of American imperialism.

Should Obama win the election, as appears increasingly likely, the struggle against militarism and war will be waged against his administration.

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