

Growing hostility in US to Afghanistan war

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According to a new *USA Today*/Gallup poll, 42 percent of Americans now view the US invasion of Afghanistan as a "mistake," and only 38 percent believe the occupation of Afghanistan "is going well."

The poll's findings are suggestive of a broad shift in the thinking of millions of Americans—especially striking given the fact that it comes without sanction from any section of the political establishment. In February, only 30 percent of respondents labeled the war a mistake, while in November 2001, the figure was 9 percent.

Within days of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the US, politicians and media mobilized to present the invasion of Afghanistan as a necessary defensive measure. Later, in the midst of the catastrophe that resulted from the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, a section of the political establishment—looking back nostalgically on the broad international and domestic support the invasion of Afghanistan had enjoyed—determined that Afghanistan was the more critical engagement for the wider aims of US imperialism. It was, moreover, easier to peddle claims that the war in the geostrategically critical county of Afghanistan was crucial to "the war on terror."

In his campaign for the presidency, Barack Obama became the spokesman for this perspective. He criticized the Bush administration for "taking its eyes of the ball" in Afghanistan. Three months into his term, Obama has dramatically intensified the intervention in Afghanistan and stepped up drone attacks on Pakistan, in brazen defiance of international law. Seventeen thousand more US troops will arrive in Afghanistan by summer, according to the White House.

Meanwhile, opposition to the war in Iraq remains high, with 53 percent believing that war was a mistake. This has declined marginally from 60 percent last summer, owing to a months-long media campaign that

the "surge" in Iraq had worked. As a spate of recent suicide bombings suggests, the purported stability in Iraq is tenuous at best.

Gallup notes, "As the United States is reducing the size of its military force in Iraq and increasing its troop strength in Afghanistan, the public's opinions about the two wars seem to be adjusting accordingly."

Gallup warns of "implications" from its survey. "With reports of increased difficulty in achieving US objectives in Afghanistan," the polling company writes, "and with the Obama administration's committing greater resources to the mission, it is unclear whether majority support for the war will continue without tangible signs of progress."

"Progress" in Afghanistan and Pakistan has been difficult for the US and its NATO partners to come by. In recent developments:

- * On Wednesday, a car bomb blew up in Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, killing three. Home to the US puppet regime of Hamid Karzai, Kabul has been the site of an increasing number of insurgent attacks.

- * On Monday, a suicide bomber, moving on foot, blew himself up alongside a police convoy in southern Afghanistan, killing 11 and wounding 28.

- * On Monday, in Peshawar, Pakistan, around 100 fighters attacked a NATO supply center, using rocket-propelled grenades and gasoline bombs to destroy and damage Humvees, transport trucks, and tankers. The fighters escaped unharmed.

- * On Sunday, three British soldiers were killed by insurgents in Helmand.

- * On Sunday, in eastern Afghanistan, a roadside bomb killed four US soldiers. Nearly 600 Americans have died since the US invasion in 2001.

- * On Sunday, another attack near Peshawar destroyed 16 transport trucks.

- * On Saturday, militants killed a French soldier.

Militants and Taliban supporters effectively control

wide swaths of southern Afghanistan, the North-West Frontier and Peshawar Provinces of Pakistan. These forces are able, with increasing impunity, to launch attacks on coalition forces and supply routes. Seventy-five percent of NATO supplies pass through Pakistan.

The US has responded by stepping up its aggression against the civilian populations of Afghanistan and Pakistan. It now regularly violates the sovereignty of the latter, targeting for missile strikes houses and villages that are alleged "safe havens" for Al Qaeda. On March 12, a US drone fired a missile into a house in the Pakistan tribal area of Kurram, killing 24 (see "US missiles kill 24 in Pakistan").

So far, the intensified NATO intervention in Afghanistan and the border areas of Pakistan have only served to solidify popular hostility to the US, while further destabilizing the Islamabad regime, which is in the throes of a financial, political, and social crisis.

Rather than tempering its activities in response, the US is preparing a major expansion of its military actions within Pakistan, according to a Wednesday report in the *New York Times*. Citing two separate internal White House reports, the *Times* reveals that Obama is contemplating an escalation of the war to Pakistan's Baluchistan province, which the US military asserts Al Qaeda and the Taliban use as a base for their operations in Afghanistan. Baluchistan is Pakistan's largest province and home to more than 10 million people.



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