

Obama escalates war in Central Asia

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The new military strategy announced by President Barack Obama in Afghanistan marks a major escalation of the war in Afghanistan and the official transformation of Pakistan into a theater of US military action.

Prepared behind the backs of the American people and with contempt for anti-war opinion expressed in the presidential election, Obama's plan calls for replicating in Afghanistan Bush's military "surge" in Iraq and launching military strikes at will in Pakistan. It confirms that Obama's candidacy was not a move towards peace, but the expression of a struggle inside the American ruling elite over the strategic priorities of US imperialism. Obama served as the front man for those who believed the Pentagon had focused too much attention on Iraq and that the main target of military violence should be Central Asia.

Obama is preparing a bloody pacification campaign in Pakistan and Afghanistan, aiming to exterminate those sections of their populations that interfere with US control of the area. There will be a heavy price paid by the American people as well, in thousands of military casualties, the squandering of hundreds of billions of dollars, and an increased risk of terrorist attacks on Americans, as Washington reinforces the widely held perception that it is waging war on the Islamic world.

Pakistan, a nominal US ally, is threatened with reduction to colonial status. A country with 173 million inhabitants and a nuclear-equipped military, Pakistan is desperately poor and riven by regional and ethnic divisions. An escalation of US attacks, which have already killed hundreds of Pakistanis living in tribal regions bordering Afghanistan, will further enrage Pakistani public opinion, antagonize sections of the Pakistani army and push the country towards civil war, with incalculable consequences in the region.

Those who echo the *New York Times*' description of Obama's plan as a "narrowing" of the war, because it abandons "Mr. Bush's vague talk of representative democracy in Afghanistan," are only trying to deceive the public.

Not only are these claims belied by the expanding scope of US military action, they are directly contradicted by blunter representatives of US imperialism. Asked on a Fox Network television interview yesterday about the difference between Bush's "war on terror" and Obama's "campaign against extremism," Defense Secretary Robert Gates replied, "I think that's people looking for differences where there are none." Gates added that the US would deploy 68,000 US troops to Afghanistan, rather than the 59,000 announced thus far by Obama.

Obama's escalation is a unilateral decision by Washington, despite favorable statements from European governments. Britain has proposed contributing 1,700 more troops and several other countries may send trainers for Afghan police. However, US officials do not expect NATO allies to contribute significant numbers of troops and they are setting up a separate American military command for operations in southern Afghanistan.

The reasons given by Obama for the escalation are half-truths and lies—above all, the claim that it is a response to the threat of terrorism. This war is a continuation of the struggle for domination of oil-rich Central Asia, the stakes of which—pipeline routes, control of international commerce, military advantage—have motivated all of the US wars of the last 25 years. One could easily quote countless analyses of think tanks and US foreign policy experts establishing the strategic significance for US imperialism of this region—the crossroads between China, Russia, the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East.

The region has long been a central preoccupation of the American ruling class. This year marks the 30th anniversary of Washington's first major intervention in Afghanistan—its 1979 decision to destabilize a Soviet-backed regime in Kabul with the aim of provoking a Soviet invasion. After the Kremlin invaded, Washington financed and armed anti-Soviet mujahedin commanders and rural notables, from whom today's Afghan ruling elite of narco-warlords emerged.

In his interview on "Fox News Sunday," Gates responded to a question about Pakistani intelligence links

to anti-US insurgent forces in Afghanistan by noting his own personal involvement in the 1980s in "helping make sure that some of those same groups got weapons from our safe haven in Pakistan."

After the collapse of the USSR, the US continued its intrigues in the region, initially backing the Taliban in the 1990s and then invading Afghanistan to overthrow them after the September 11 attacks.

As with every previous war launched by Washington, Obama's intervention only sets into motion developments that will generate further, even more dangerous conflicts. Russia will view US escalation in Afghanistan with alarm. Building US supply lines to Afghanistan that avoid the war zones in Pakistan will mean increasing US influence in areas where Russia has powerful strategic interests: the Caucasus, ex-Soviet Central Asia, and possibly Iran. This comes only a few months after Washington nearly provoked a war by supporting an attack by its puppet regime in Georgia on Russian peacekeepers in South Ossetia.

The longstanding enmity between Muslim Pakistan and majority-Hindu India notwithstanding, Pakistan's descent towards chaos and civil war will pose serious threats to India. US missile strikes will further roil the Indo-Pakistani border conflict in Kashmir, and they will inflame right-wing Muslim opinion which the Pakistani state mobilizes to aid guerillas in Indian Kashmir. Besides threatening the vulnerable position of India's Muslim minority, this brings with it the risk of a fourth Indo-Pakistani war, this time between two nuclear-armed states.

As US-China tensions mount over China's reluctance to keep funding US deficits and propping up the dollar, an American intervention in Pakistan—China's main ally in the Indian subcontinent—will intensify the risk of an American confrontation with China.

Obama's plan exposes the connection between US militarism and the decayed state of American democracy. Overwhelming popular opposition to war is routinely ignored and violated. Obama's plan was adopted without congressional authorization or public debate.

Its release was timed to avoid public attention and scrutiny. Just two days before, Obama held a prime time news conference where the issue of Afghanistan was not raised. He chose to announce a major escalation of the war at a 9:30 AM no-questions-asked press conference, when most of the population was at work and unable to watch. As Obama spoke, he was flanked by Gates and other Bush administration holdovers, and he noted the

presence of military satraps, think-tank operatives and other professional war criminals.

This militarization of the office of the presidency expresses malignant tendencies in US social life. Commenting ten years ago on the US bombing of Serbia, the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote: "The widening social chasm within American society is fast approaching—if it has not already been reached—the point at which even the pretense of a broad-based social consensus, rooted in core democratic values, cannot be maintained. [...] The specific character of the wealth-generating process—that is, enrichment through rising share values—quite naturally produces social and political attitudes that are of a deeply anti-working class and pro-imperialist character." [See "After the Slaughter: Political Lessons of the Balkan War"]

The subsequent explosion of US militarism under Bush and the outbreak of a major economic crisis last year only confirm this analysis. With the US occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, and now Obama's escalation, war has become an indispensable tool of US foreign policy as well as a means of suppressing class conflict at home and ensuring the profitability of American corporations. Obama's Central Asian policy, formulated on behalf of powerful oil and gas interests, is the outer face of a domestic policy centered around trillion-dollar handouts to Wall Street and the super-rich.

Obama's policies demonstrate that his election campaign for "change" was a political fraud, aimed at setting the stage for a tactical shift in the violent assertion of US imperialist interests. War and social reaction cannot be opposed through appeals to the Democratic Party, but only through the mobilization of the working class in struggle against capitalism.

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