

Obama seeks \$83.4 billion to continue US wars

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The Obama White House Thursday submitted its formal request to the US Congress for \$83.4 billion in “emergency” supplemental funding to pay for the continuation of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan launched under the Bush administration.

The funding will pay for the two wars through the current fiscal year, which ends September 30. By that time, tens of thousands more US troops will be deployed in Afghanistan as part of the administration’s escalation there, while the deployment of 140,000 troops in Iraq will remain largely unchanged.

Also included in the funding bill are \$350 million for the further militarization of the Mexican border and \$400 million in counterinsurgency assistance to Pakistan.

Echoing the “support our troops” rhetoric of the Bush administration, Kenneth Baer, a spokesman for the White House budget office, declared, “We look forward to working with Congress to give our men and women in uniform what they need this year to do the hard work we are asking of them in Iraq and Afghanistan.”

While the White House claimed that beginning in fiscal 2010 the administration will include the war funding in the regular Pentagon budget, the use of the “supplemental,” which comes just days after the unveiling of the \$534 billion Pentagon budget, only underscores the fundamental continuity between the policies of the two administrations. Such “emergency” funding bills were a staple of the Bush administration, used to conceal the wars’ real cost and override congressional spending limits.

Between the money for the two wars being sought for the remainder of the current year and the funds included in the fiscal 2010 Defense Department budget, the direct cost to the US Treasury for America’s two wars of aggression will top \$1 trillion.

There is no question that the Democratic-led Congress will pass the war funding bill. Under the Bush administration, the Democrats went through the motions of attempting to attach timetables for partial withdrawals from Iraq and other restrictions on war policy before ultimately bowing to the Bush White House and passing the war funding with no strings attached.

Now, with a Democrat in the White House, even this limited show of opposition will largely evaporate. As the *Wall Street Journal* reported Wednesday: “Rep. John Larson (Democrat, Connecticut) suggests Democrats may be less inclined to joust with the current White House on the issue than they were with former President George W. Bush. ‘We have somebody that

Democrats feel will level with them,’ said Mr. Larson, the House’s fourth-ranking Democrat.”

In his letter to Congress requesting the funding, Obama stressed the deteriorating situation for the US occupation in Afghanistan. “The Taliban is resurgent and Al Qaeda threatens America from its safe haven along the Afghan-Pakistan border,” he said.

“This funding request will ensure that the full force of the United States—our military, intelligence, diplomatic and economic power—are engaged in an overall effort to defeat Al Qaeda and uproot the safe haven from which it plans and trains for attacks on the homeland and on our allies.”

By contrast, the president’s letter gave scant attention to Iraq, where he said that “violence has been reduced substantially because of the skilled efforts of our troops and the Iraqi people’s commitment to peace.” Because of this, he added, Washington is “positioned to move forward with a responsible drawdown of our combat forces, transferring security to Iraqi forces.”

All of this amounts to a combination of half-truths and outright lies. The reality is that the bulk of the supplemental will go to fund the continued occupation of Iraq. If Obama conceals that fact it is because he knows that sections of his own party’s leadership, including congressional Democrats, had postured as opponents of the Iraq war, while supporting the supposedly “good war” in Afghanistan.

The claim that the US is doubling the number of troops on the ground in Afghanistan and spending billions of dollars to “defeat Al Qaeda” is preposterous. Just last month, the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, Gen. Michael Maples, testified before a Senate committee that Al Qaeda’s presence in Afghanistan is “still at a relatively minor scale.”

Even though his administration has adopted a tactical change in terminology, Obama’s invocation of Al Qaeda as the principal target of the US escalation and his talk of “attacks on the homeland” amount to the recycling of Bush’s repeated “war on terror” justifications for the wars in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

The reality is that Obama’s “surge” in Afghanistan is aimed at the violent suppression of popular armed resistance to the US occupation. It is the continuation of a dirty colonial-style war directed at installing a stable US client regime in Kabul as part of Washington’s attempt to assert its domination over the strategic oil reserves of Central Asia and the pipeline routes for extracting this wealth.

Obama’s rosy depiction of Iraq, meanwhile, was belied by the

eruption of violence over the past week in which hundreds of Iraqis were killed or wounded in a series of coordinated bombings in Baghdad and elsewhere.

On Friday, just a day after Congress received Obama's letter, the US military suffered its worst attack in a year, with five soldiers killed in the northern city of Mosul when a suicide bomber drove a truck packed with explosives into a security checkpoint. Two other soldiers were wounded. The city, wracked by sectarian divisions between Arabs and Kurds, is the scene of continuing major combat operations by the US military.

In an interview with the *Times* of London published Friday, before news of this latest deadly attack, the US commander in Iraq, Gen. Ray Odierno, said that the violence in Mosul and Baqubah, another city in the north of Iraq, called into question the withdrawal timetable set by the Obama administration. "US troop numbers" in the two cities "could rise rather than fall over the next year," the *Times* reported. The interview amounted to a public warning that the military is prepared to veto Obama's plan.

Under the timeline announced by the administration, US combat troops were supposed to have been withdrawn from Iraqi cities by June. The pullback was the first stage in what the White House terms a "responsible withdrawal" that supposedly would see all US "combat troops" removed by August 2010 and all US military personnel out of the country by the end of 2011.

The term "combat troops" is used to refer to specific units, while others will stay behind continuing to engage in armed repression. Pentagon officials have acknowledged that if need be, some of the so-called "combat troops" will simply be redefined as noncombat units and kept in Iraq. It is estimated that this stay-behind force will number up to 50,000 under the Obama plan.

As for the 2011 deadline, it is written into the Status of Forces Agreement signed between the Bush administration and the US-backed government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and is by no means binding. It is widely anticipated that it will be amended to allow US forces to remain in Iraq and continue their original mission of subjugating the country and placing its oil wealth under Washington's domination.

Tens of thousands of Iraqis took to the streets of Baghdad April 9 in a demonstration demanding an end to the US occupation. The protest, called on the sixth anniversary of the fall of the Iraqi capital to the US invasion force, was dominated by supporters of the Shiite cleric Muqtada al Sadr, but also included some Sunni Arabs. A similar protest took place in the predominantly Sunni city of Fallujah, which was decimated by a US siege at the end of 2004.

Meanwhile, in Afghanistan, the US military was compelled to revise its claims about a raid conducted in the eastern city of Khost near the Pakistan border. Following reports by local officials, it acknowledged that the "armed combatants" it claimed to have killed in a nighttime raid Wednesday were actually five innocent civilians. Among the dead, according to Afghan officials, were a seven-day-old infant boy, two women and two men. Another woman, who was nine months pregnant, was wounded and lost her baby.

Afghanistan's US-backed president, Hamid Karzai, issued a statement protesting the killings and asking that "international

forces carry out their counterterrorism in ways that do not cause civilian casualties." Karzai's is utterly dependent on foreign occupation forces, and such hollow protests are aimed at deflecting some of the popular anger against his corrupt regime.

According to a report issued by the United Nations in February, a record 2,118 civilians were killed in Afghanistan last year, nearly 40 percent of them by US-led occupation forces. These figures are undoubtedly an underestimation of the real death toll.

In Pakistan, the government released a report showing that out of 60 missile attacks carried out by US pilotless drones in the country's tribal areas over the past three years, only 10 had struck their actual targets, killing 14 people identified as Al Qaeda operatives. The other 50 claimed the lives of 687 Pakistani civilians, including women and children. This death toll is steadily rising, with 385 civilians killed in 2008 and 152 in the first 99 days of this year alone.

The supplemental funding bill sent to the Congress by Obama will pay for an escalation of this carnage as the Obama administration moves to nearly double the size of the US force currently in Afghanistan to 68,000 troops, while aggressively extending the war across the border into Pakistan.

Less than three months after Obama's inauguration, the actions of his administration have demonstrated the impossibility of bringing an end to war by means of the ballot box under America's present two-party system.

While millions of Americans voted for the Democratic candidate last November out of anger and disgust over the eight years of militarism under Bush, it is now clear that not only will the occupation of Iraq continue, but the war in Afghanistan will be escalated and extended deeper into Pakistan.

Obama's policies are determined not by these mass antiwar sentiments, but by the interests of the financial oligarchy and the agenda of the military, for which he serves as a mouthpiece.

The fight to end war can go forward only as a struggle for the independent political mobilization of working people against the Obama administration and the capitalist profit system which is the source of militarism.



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