

# Oppose the Afghanistan-Pakistan war

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The US summit with Afghanistan and Pakistan currently underway in Washington marks the onset of a major escalation of military violence in both countries. The purpose of the meeting is for the Obama administration to bully into line its stooges—Afghan President Hamid Karzai and Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari—and map out a comprehensive war strategy to pacify large areas on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistan border currently controlled by Islamist rebels.

The significance of the tripartite summit is underscored by the presence of key figures of the US military, intelligence and foreign policy establishment, including Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, CIA Director Leon Panetta, FBI head Robert Mueller and US Central Command chief Gen. David Petraeus, and their counterparts from Afghanistan and Pakistan. Further tripartite meetings are planned to coordinate the joint war that will inevitably take a further terrible toll of lives in both countries.

Flanked by Karzai and Zardari, Obama told the media yesterday that America was on the side of the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Such remarks should be rejected with the contempt they deserve. US imperialism is stepping up its wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan not “to advance security, opportunity and justice” for the local peoples, but to pursue Washington’s strategic goal of dominating energy-rich Central Asia.

Under intense US pressure, the Pakistani military is currently waging an offensive in the Buner district involving 15,000 heavily armed troops backed by helicopter gunships and warplanes. The operation, which is being applauded in Washington, has already sent long lines of refugees fleeing for safety. According

to local officials, 40,000 have already left the region and the exodus could reach half a million.

In neighboring Afghanistan, US air strikes that killed up to 150 people in the western Bala Baluk district early this week are just the latest atrocity in a war aimed at terrorizing the Afghan people and suppressing any opposition to the neo-colonial occupation. Obama barely referred to the incident, simply repeating pro-forma that the US would make “every effort” to avoid civilian casualties. Ominously, he warned that there would be more violence, but that US “commitment will not waiver.”

Both the Afghan and Pakistani presidents pledged their fealty to Washington and its “war against terrorism.” While Obama referred to them as “democratically elected leaders,” the US would have no compunction in removing them, by one means or another, if they failed to follow orders. In recent months, US officials have been highly critical of Karzai, who is facing an election in August, for his corrupt and ineffective administration as well as his criticisms of the US military for their killing of civilians.

Top US officials have also put Zardari on notice over this reluctance to launch an all-out war against Taliban guerrillas. The *New York Times* cited an unnamed senior administration official as saying that the war in Pakistan would hinge on the Pakistani military, “particularly given the country’s refusal, thus far, to allow American troops on the ground.” While the US military has been intensifying its missile strikes with impunity, Washington is clearly pressing for a far greater military role inside Pakistan.

The same newspaper has published a rash of

sensational stories in recent days highlighting the danger of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal falling into the hands of Islamist extremists—the same pretext that was used by the Bush administration to carry out “regime change” in Iraq. The Obama administration is obviously weighing a range of options to replace Zardari if he fails to live up to his pledges in Washington.

Editorials yesterday in the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* gave uncritical and fulsome support for Obama's new war plans. Both newspapers urged Congress to rapidly pass Obama's request for billions in supplemental funding to bolster the Afghan and Pakistani governments and militaries, with the *Wall Street Journal* demanding no political caveats from Congress that would “gum up the requests” and place restrictions on the US military's conduct of the war.

This consensus demonstrates that the entire American political establishment—the liberal Democratic wing no less than its conservative Republican counterpart—is backing Obama's two-front war. The escalating conflicts in Afghanistan and Pakistan underscore the fact that the previous criticisms made by Obama and sections of the media of the war in Iraq were of a purely tactical nature. Obama was selected and thrust to the fore in last year's election by sections of the US ruling elite that regarded Iraq as a disastrous diversion from more crucial American aims and interests in Central Asia.

Having won the election by appealing to widespread anti-war sentiment, Obama is now carrying out the mission for which he was chosen. Overseen by key Bush personnel—Defence Secretary Robert Gates and General Petraeus—the US military has prepared the ground for a major summer offensive in Afghanistan with the doubling of US troop numbers to 68,000. At the same time, the Pentagon has secured alternate supply routes in the event that the planned escalation of warfare in neighboring Pakistan threatens existing supply routes that pass through that country's border areas.

The *Wall Street Journal* concluded its editorial by urging the Obama administration to make clear that

“the US is committed to the region's security for the long run,” adding: “The greatest danger is that Pakistan's weak institutions and uncertain leaders lose their will to defeat the Islamists. That is how the Shah of Iran fell in 1979. We don't want a repeat in Islamabad.”

In fact, the ruthless US-backed dictatorship in Iran fell not because the Shah lost his will to imprison and murder opponents, but as a result of a popular uprising which fell under the sway of the Islamic clerics. Already there are signs in Afghanistan and Pakistan of broad social and political opposition to the US and its puppets. The *Wall Street Journal's* advice to Obama is that the US must do whatever is necessary and for as long as necessary to violently suppress any challenge to US economic and strategic dominance in the region.

Obama's escalating war can only have a profoundly destabilizing impact across the region, laying the seeds for even wider and bloodier military conflagrations. It cannot be opposed by appeals to the Democratic Party or to Congress, but only through the independent mobilization of workers in the United States together with the working class and oppressed masses of South and Central Asia and internationally. That struggle must be based on a socialist perspective to overturn the capitalist system which is the source of imperialist oppression and war.

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