

Washington elaborates AfPak strategy amid calls for US troop buildup

Bill Van Auken
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The Obama administration presented a document to a closed session of the Senate Armed Services Committee Wednesday spelling out a US war strategy that places special emphasis on Pakistan. The secretive briefing follows signals by US military commanders that a substantial increase in the troop presence in Afghanistan is needed to counter growing opposition to the US-NATO occupation of Afghanistan.

President Barack Obama claimed Wednesday that no decision on a further buildup of the US troop deployment in Afghanistan is imminent, and that any escalation there will be preceded by a clarification of Washington's strategy in the eight-year-old war.

"One of the things that I'm absolutely clear about is you have to get the strategy right and then make determinations about resources," said Obama. Until now, he added, the US military has "lacked as clear of a strategy and a mission as is necessary in order to meet our overriding objectives."

Obama's remarks came a day after Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that waging the war against the popular resistance to the US-NATO occupation would require "more forces."

"A properly resourced counterinsurgency probably means more forces," Mullen testified. "It's very clear to me that we will need more resources."

Mullen's statement followed reports that Gen. Stanley McChrystal, who Obama appointed as commander of US-NATO forces in Afghanistan, had submitted a report to the White House presenting a grim picture of the situation facing the occupation forces and is expected to submit a formal request later this month for another troop increase.

Military sources have suggested that this request could amount to as much as 45,000 more US troops, on

top of the present deployment, which is to reach some 68,000 by the end of this fall. Other NATO member countries have an additional 39,000 troops in the country.

Last spring, Mullen had indicated his opposition to deploying significantly more troops in Afghanistan, over and above those ordered in then by the Obama administration. Defense Secretary Robert Gates, who had expressed reservations about a further troop buildup, voicing concerns about the stress being placed on the military, also appears to have shifted his position in line with that attributed to McChrystal.

The "surge" of 17,000 more US combat troops and nearly 4,000 "trainers" into Afghanistan ordered by Obama last March has produced only a rise in the general level of violence in the country and a sharp spike in US casualties. At least 345 US and other NATO troops have been killed so far this year—already 51 more than for all of 2008—while the last two months have seen record fatalities, with 77 killed in August and 76 in July.

Three more US soldiers were killed Wednesday by a roadside bomb in southern Afghanistan.

The document presented to the Senate panel claims that the goal of the US war is "to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qa'ida in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future."

While the document includes so-called "metrics" for US progress in the region—much of them nebulous references to "support for human rights," combating "government corruption" and "increased trust and confidence in the government"—in the section entitled "Disrupt terrorist networks in Afghanistan and especially Pakistan," the supposed measures of progress were kept classified.

This stress on Pakistan echoes the arguments made by

Frederick Kagan, a leading figure in the right-wing think tank, the American Enterprise Institute, who was one of the architects of the Bush administration's "surge" in Iraq.

In a recent opinion piece in the *Wall Street Journal*, Kagan argues in favor of a similar escalation in Afghanistan, on the grounds that it is necessary to achieve US strategic aims of creating "stability" in Pakistan.

"Pakistan's stability cannot be secured solely within its borders any more than can Afghanistan's," writes Kagan. "Militant Islam can be defeated only by waging a proper counterinsurgency campaign on both sides of the border."

According to *ForeignPolicy.com*, Kagan, who has served as an adviser to General McChrystal, gave a speech last week in which he argued that the Obama administration "had made a mistake early on in putting too much rhetorical emphasis on al Qaeda."

"The reason to be in Afghanistan is not to be fighting al Qaeda in Afghanistan," Kagan is quoted as saying. "This is a two-front war on both sides of the Durand Line [separating Afghanistan and Pakistan]."

Along similar lines, General McChrystal himself undercut the Obama administration's official justification for the Afghanistan war—destroying al Qaeda and preventing another 9/11—telling reporters last week that he did not "see indications of a large al Qaeda presence in Afghanistan now."

Behind the pretext of waging a "war on terrorism," Washington is escalating the war in Afghanistan and threatening to spread it more directly across the border into Pakistan not to protect the American people against acts of terror, but to further definite geo-strategic objectives of American imperialism in the region. In particular, it is seeking, as in the Iraq war, to assert US hegemony over a region that contains vast energy resources as well as the pipeline routes for extracting them from the Caspian Basin. At the same time, it is seeking to establish a permanent military presence on the borders of China.

This is why the war continues, despite the opposition of the American people, which has now reached the levels that were previously recorded against the war in Iraq. The election of a Democratic administration, thanks in large part to popular antiwar sentiments, has only resulted in the war's escalation.

Some leading Democrats in Congress have voiced cautious opposition to a further troop buildup. Last week, Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi told reporters that there wasn't "a great deal of support for sending more troops to Afghanistan in the country or in the Congress. Meanwhile, Michigan Senator Carl Levin, the Democratic chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, argued against the deployment of more troops during the hearing with Admiral Mullen, calling instead for expanded US training of Afghan puppet forces.

There is even less reason to believe that the Democrats will mount any consequential opposition to an escalation of the war in Afghanistan under Obama than they did to that of the Iraq war under Bush.

The further elaboration of US strategy has produced signs of consternation in Pakistan, particularly within its military command.

The Pakistani daily, *Dawn*, reported Wednesday that "The Pakistan Army leadership has informed the US administration about its reservation over the new US policy regarding the Pak-Afghan region."

The paper reported that senior Pakistani military commanders had expressed strong opposition to the new US policy during recent visits by Admiral Mullen and US Central Command chief Gen. David Petraeus.

"The army leadership communicated that there was a large difference between the situation in Afghanistan and that in Pakistan, and if the US tried to implement the same policy in Pakistan then it would not only yield negative results but it will also affect Pak-US relations," the paper reported.



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