

Five more US soldiers killed in Afghanistan

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26 September 2009

Five US soldiers were killed in three separate attacks in southern Afghanistan on Thursday.

Four of the five were killed in Zabul province in the southeast, three as a result of a roadside bomb, and a fourth in a firefight with insurgents. A US marine was also shot and killed in the southwestern province of Nimruz.

The killings brought the 2009 US death toll in Afghanistan to 218, already by far the highest yearly tally since the invasion that toppled the Taliban in late 2001. The Afghan war is now second only to Vietnam as the longest in US history.

The spike in deaths among occupation soldiers and Afghan and Pakistani civilians is a direct result of President Barack Obama's intensification of the war. Soon after his inauguration, Obama ordered an additional 21,000 troops to Afghanistan, which will bring the total US contingent to 68,000 by year's end.

The deaths come as debate rages within Washington and the military brass over when to send tens of thousands of soldiers beyond what Obama has already ordered.

The US and NATO commander for the Afghanistan-Pakistan theater, General Stanley McChrystal, favors an immediate and massive increase that could bring the total US presence to nearly 110,000 soldiers.

Fox News reported that McChrystal issued a specific request for more soldiers to Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Admiral Mike Mullen on Friday. The White House and Pentagon had initially sought to delay the request, which is reputedly for between 30,000 and 40,000 more soldiers.

The specific request follows McChrystal's status review paper on the Afghanistan war, which first made the case for stepped-up troop levels and which was leaked to the media earlier this week, fuelling demands from the Republican Party and some leading congressional Democrats that Obama allow the general to testify before Congress in support of a substantial increase in the occupation force.

Obama's immediate plans—which initially coincided with McChrystal's, whom Obama appointed to command

AfPak operations—have been thrown into doubt by the debacle resulting from the Afghan elections of August.

The Obama administration had staked its calculations on the presumption that the elections would provide a democratic veneer to the occupation. They have had just the opposite effect.

Massive fraud and abstentionism have so discredited the regime of Hamid Karzai that any military surge waged in “defense” of the Kabul government has been discredited before it begins.

“According to senior administration officials,” the *Wall Street Journal* reported yesterday, “the Afghan war plan that President Barack Obama announced in March—which called for a comprehensive and manpower-intensive counterinsurgency strategy—was built around the assumption that Mr. Karzai would emerge from last month's elections with new legitimacy, a critical factor in fighting a guerrilla enemy.”

Now, according to the Associated Press, some figures in and close to the Obama administration “question the wisdom of sending more troops to support a government facing allegations of widespread fraud in last month's disputed vote.”

Among these are Carl Levin, the Democratic chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and Vice President Joe Biden, who reputedly advocates intensifying the war in Pakistan instead.

McChrystal's position is supported by General David Petraeus, US commander in the Middle East, and Mullen. So open has the military brass's politicking for a large troop increase been that McChrystal felt compelled to publicly deny a rift exists between himself and Obama in a recent interview with the *New York Times*.

McChrystal was hardly convincing. “A policy debate is warranted,” the general concluded. It is an indication of the deep erosion of American democracy that a military general feels free to demand a “debate” with the civilian leadership.

The “policy debate” notwithstanding, there is little doubt that a substantial intensification of US military

violence in the region is planned. The unresolved questions are whether this should be done before the Kabul government is reshuffled, and whether focus should be more openly shifted to Pakistan, as Biden advocates.

A *New York Times* analysis published Wednesday cites unnamed US officials and Ambassador to Pakistan Anne W. Patterson as criticizing Islamabad for insufficient zeal in prosecuting an internal war against insurgents in Pakistan. The article also accuses Pakistan's spy agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), of shielding and supporting the Taliban.

The article asserts that Taliban leader Mullah Muhammad Omar, who operates close to the southern city of Quetta, in Baluchistan province, Pakistan, has developed an extensive shadow government and elaborate military control over insurgent activity in Afghanistan—for example, ordering the “recent string of attacks kill[ing] troops from Italy and Germany, pivotal American allies that are facing strong opposition to the Afghan war at home.”

A senior US intelligence official explained that “the Taliban is trying to create trouble elsewhere to alleviate pressure” in the south, where Obama's surge is concentrated. “They've outmaneuvered us time and time again,” the official lamented.

The *Times* cites McChrystal's recent report, which states that the Taliban creates “shadow governors in most provinces of Afghanistan, levies taxes, establishes Islamic courts there and conducts a formal review of its military campaign each winter.”

Obama has already drastically increased US drone missile attacks and compelled Islamabad to mount major offensives in the border regions of Pakistan. Thousands have been killed and hundreds of thousands made refugees by these operations.

It is has already become clear that Obama's redoubled military operations in Pakistan have not stemmed insurgent attacks in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, the administration continues to terrorize the population of the rugged border regions.

On Friday, anonymous US officials said that a Predator drone missile attack in North Waziristan, Pakistan, killed 10 “al Qaeda” militants.

The attack targeted the “Haqqani network,” which is led by former Jalaludin Haqqani, a one-time Central Intelligence Agency asset during the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s.

Since August 2008, at least 570 Pakistanis, most of

them civilians, have been killed in about 60 separate US drone attacks.

About the same time the drone attack was taking place, Obama was at the United Nations in New York chairing a meeting of a group of nations and international bodies known as the “Friends of Democratic Pakistan.”

Seated by British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari, Obama declared that “violent extremists within Pakistan pose a threat to the region, to the United States, and to the world. Above all, they threaten the security of the Pakistani people.”

Obama used the gathering to demand increased international financial support for Pakistan.

The US Senate voted unanimously Thursday to roughly triple “non-military” aid to Pakistan to about \$1.5 billion every year until 2015.

In fact, the funds can be used for the Pakistani military so long as they are allocated through the Islamabad government, rather than being funneled directly to the security forces. And delivery of the money is predicated on Pakistan's performance in attacking “insurgents” and “terrorists” within its own territory.

Obama's war policies are engendering increasing popular opposition within the US.

A *New York Times*/CBS News poll released Friday substantiates other recent surveys showing majority opposition to an increase in US troop levels. About half of all Americans oppose a “surge” in Afghanistan, while only 29 percent would support one, the poll found.



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