For the mobilization of the working class to end the war in Afghanistan

Joe Kishore
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There are clear signs of growing popular opposition in the US and around the world to the war in Afghanistan.

A CBS News poll released on Tuesday found that 41 percent of respondents in the US want to decrease troop levels, up from 33 percent in April and 24 percent in February. The percentage of people who want to withdraw US troops is nearly twice the percentage favoring an increase. A number of recent polls show a clear majority opposed to the war.

Popular opposition is as high if not higher in other countries with troops in Afghanistan. In Britain and Canada, 52 percent favor withdrawal; in Australia, 66 percent oppose the war; in France, the figure is 64 percent; in Italy, 56 percent; and in Germany, 62 percent.

This rapid growth in antiwar sentiment is in direct conflict with the plans of the imperialist powers, led by the Obama administration. A major escalation is being prepared, to include tens of thousands more troops beyond the "surge" of 21,000 troops initiated by Obama earlier this year.

There are presently some 100,000 foreign soldiers occupying the country, including 62,000 US troops (not including the 6,000 additional troops scheduled to deploy before the end of the year, nor the more than 70,000 military contractors).

A classified report issued this week by Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the US commander in Afghanistan, sets the stage for a formal request for between 10,000 and 45,000 additional US military personnel.

The Obama administration has sent clear signals that it is prepared to approve any request that is made. On Thursday, Defense Secretary Robert Gates told a news conference that he was "very open to the recommendations and certainly the perspective of" McChrystal.

Expanding US military forces in Afghanistan and the US military intervention in Pakistan has been the central foreign policy priority of the Obama administration. A massive military operation is still underway in the south, and the number of drone attacks on Pakistan—and the civilian casualties that accompany them—have increased sharply this year.

The administration is responding to growing concerns that NATO forces and the US-backed puppet regime in Kabul have already lost control of most of the country. The recent election debacle in Afghanistan, marked by massive vote fraud, has only further weakened the government—prompting some commentators to call for dropping support for Hamid Karzai. The comparison is now being openly made to the US-backed coup against its puppet Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963, which set the stage for a major expansion of the war in Vietnam.

Obama's escalation—which has already led to record US casualties and the deaths of an untold number of Afghanis and Pakistanis—will yield only more carnage in the coming months. Nor will it be short-lived. As Bruce Riedel, one of Obama's chief advisors on Afghanistan and Pakistan and a vocal supporter of additional troops, recently put it, "Anyone who thinks that in 12 to 18 months we're going to be anywhere near victory is living in fantasyland."

The determination of the Obama administration to escalate the war in the face of mounting popular opposition, accompanied by an economic crisis that is having a devastating impact on the lives of millions of people, is setting the stage for major social and political upheavals, above all in the United States. As Obama's plummeting poll numbers clearly demonstrate, the "honeymoon" of the new administration is rapidly turning into disillusionment and popular anger.

Afghanistan has been sold by the liberal establishment to the American people as the "good war" against

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terrorism, in contrast to the "war of choice" in Iraq. The attempt to make such a distinction between these two wars, however, is quickly falling apart, a fact acknowledged by the *New York Times* in an article published Thursday.

The *Times* writes: "The simple political narrative of the Afghanistan war—that this was the good war, in which the United States would hunt down the perpetrators of the Sept. 11 attacks—has faded over time, with popular support ebbing, American casualties rising and confidence in the Afghan government declining."

In fact, the war in Afghanistan, no less than Iraq, was from the beginning an act of aggression, aimed at securing US control over Central Asia, a key geostrategic region rich in oil, gas and other natural resources.

In expanding this war, as in every other action he has taken, Obama is carrying out the policy of the social layer that he represents—the corporate and financial elite. There is absolutely nothing "progressive" about this government. While millions of people voted for Obama in the hope of seeing "change," the section of the ruling class that supported him did so for very different reasons. His personal background and hollow rhetoric, it was thought, would more effectively cloak an extremely right-wing policy.

This basic political truth is becoming part of popular consciousness. If renewed opposition to war is to have a successful outcome, however, it must be consciously directed against the Obama administration and both corporate-controlled parties.

In the run-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, mass opposition was expressed in the largest international antiwar demonstrations in history, including millions who marched in the US. This movement was smothered and defused precisely because it was subordinated to the Democratic Party.

Various middle-class protest groups insisted that war could be opposed through the election of Democrats. Since then, the Democrats have gained control of both houses of Congress and now the presidency. Far from ending war, however, the occupation of Iraq continues and the war in Afghanistan is expanding. As tragic and bloody as these wars have already been, they are only setting the stage for a far broader conflict.

Those organizations that channeled opposition behind the Democratic Party bear a major political responsibility for the present situation. They are not, in fact, "oppositional" organizations, but rather play an essential role as part of the political establishment. Though their perspective has been utterly discredited, they nevertheless insist that opposition to war must be based on support for the Obama administration. (See: "Afghan war escalation: The *Nation* seeks to 'protect' the Obama administration from itself")

Obama's expansion of war abroad is inextricably linked to the administration's attack on the working class in the United States—to the policy of bank bailouts and the demand that the working class pay for the capitalist crisis through the destruction of jobs, wages and social benefits. These are two sides of the same class policy.

The struggle against war must be linked to the struggle against attacks on the living standards and democratic rights of working people. The American and international working class is the only social force that can stop militarism and war.

Only a perspective based on the mobilization of the international working class against the profit system, which is the source of imperialist war, can end the present wars and prevent a new global conflagration. This requires the building of an independent party of the working class based on a socialist program.

The SEP calls for:

• The immediate and unconditional withdrawal of foreign troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, with reparations paid to the populations.

• An immediate halt to US attacks on Pakistan.

• The dismantling of the US war machine and the redirection of military spending to meet critical social needs.

• The prosecution of those responsible for these illegal wars, including leading Democrats and Republicans.

We urge all those looking for a way forward in the fight against war to contact the Socialist Equality Party today.

Joe Kishore

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