

US troops out of Afghanistan

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The Pentagon announced Wednesday that Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the commander of US-NATO forces in Afghanistan, will formally submit his request that tens of thousands more American troops be sent into the eight-year-old colonial-style war.

This request follows on the heels of a report written by McChrystal—and leaked from the Pentagon—warning that Washington faces defeat in Afghanistan unless it follows his prescription for a “properly resourced” escalation of a counterinsurgency campaign aimed at breaking the resistance of the Afghan people to foreign occupation.

This is a war that Obama has claimed as his own, having criticized the Bush administration for allowing a “war of choice” in Iraq to divert US military might from a “war of necessity” in Afghanistan. Last February, he initiated the first phase of the war’s escalation, ordering another 21,000 troops into Afghanistan and subsequently sacking the US commander there, replacing him with General McChrystal.

However, according to media reports, McChrystal’s report and the coming request for more troops have sparked a debate within the Obama administration over what strategy to adopt in the face of the deepening debacle in Afghanistan.

According to the *New York Times* Wednesday, Vice President Joseph Biden has opposed a troop buildup in Afghanistan, instead advocating the launching of a more direct US war in Pakistan. “Rather than trying to protect the Afghan population from the Taliban, American forces would concentrate on strikes against Qaeda cells, primarily in Pakistan, using special forces, Predator missile attacks and other surgical tactics,” the *Times* wrote in summarizing Biden’s position.

The real significance of this debate is unclear. The *Times* article cites administration aides as saying that Obama “might just be testing assumptions—and

assuring liberals in his own party that he was not rushing into a further expansion of the war—before ultimately agreeing to the troop request from General McChrystal.”

In other words, Obama may merely be following his now familiar modus operandi: attempting to project an image of “change” while maintaining and deepening the right-wing policies of the previous administration and bowing to the demands of America’s military-intelligence complex.

To the extent that there is any real debate, it likely mirrors disagreements within the US military command itself, elements of which have questioned the strategic value of Afghanistan and voiced deep concerns that an escalation of the war, combined with the continued occupation of Iraq, could lead to a breakdown of the all-volunteer armed forces.

The Obama administration is in deep crisis over Afghanistan. The American people are no longer prepared to buy his arguments about Afghanistan representing a “good war” which must be fought if another 9/11-style Al Qaeda attack is to be avoided. Poll after poll has shown a widening majority opposed to the war, with even greater numbers against its escalation.

Obama’s claim, which echoes the rhetoric of the Bush administration, is a political lie. General McChrystal has himself acknowledged that there is no significant Al Qaeda presence in Afghanistan, while Osama bin Laden has become Washington’s forgotten man.

The attacks of September 11, 2001 were exploited as a pretext for executing long-standing plans to employ America’s military might to assert US hegemony over two of the world’s most strategically vital energy-producing regions, Central Asia and the Persian Gulf.

The real origins of this war go back well before 2001. It is the outcome of over 30 years of intense and

destructive US intervention in Afghanistan, beginning with the CIA's backing of Islamist guerrillas against the country's Soviet-backed government in 1978. The agency poured in some \$5 billion in aid and weapons to foment a protracted war that cost some 1.5 million lives and wrecked Afghan society.

Among those the CIA worked with was Osama bin Laden, whose Al Qaeda is very much a product of the US intervention in Afghanistan.

In its present crisis over Afghanistan, the Obama administration is reaping the results of the tragedy that US imperialism unleashed upon the country. The dilemma confronting General McChrystal is that he is proposing a counterinsurgency campaign in a country that has no legitimate government, much less a functioning army.

Washington is expressing increasing frustration over the role played by President Hamid Karzai, whose writ extends no further than the Kabul city limits. The last pretense of legitimacy for this regime was shattered in an August 20 presidential election dominated by wholesale ballot stuffing, electoral fraud and intimidation.

But Karzai is a creature of the US imperialist intervention, a long-time CIA asset whom Washington installed as a puppet president following the October 2001 invasion.

The current disquiet over Karzai recalls the debates within the Kennedy administration over what to do with South Vietnam's Ngo Dinh Diem, whose corruption and abuse had alienated the population. In the end, the decision was taken to support his overthrow and assassination by South Vietnamese generals. This criminal episode set the stage for a massive escalation of the US war in Vietnam. A similar fate may well await Washington's Afghan puppet.

The Obama administration is planning to confront the catastrophe that imperialism has inflicted upon Afghanistan by escalating the killing and destruction. And, no matter which of the plans supposedly being debated in the White House is adopted, this escalation will be accompanied by a widening US war in Pakistan, carrying with it the threat of destabilizing the entire region and unleashing a far bloodier conflagration.

The price for this policy will be paid, in the first instance, with the lives of Afghan and Pakistani civilians, as well as those of US soldiers and Marines.

The projected \$100 billion cost of the intensified war will be met through redoubled attacks on jobs, living standards and social benefits. And sustaining a wider war in the region—which most analysts project will last a decade or more—will not be possible without the resumption of military conscription.

Working people must oppose any escalation of the war in Afghanistan and Pakistan and demand instead that all US troops be immediately and unconditionally withdrawn from the region. The vast military apparatus developed by US imperialism must be dismantled and the resources allocated to maintain it used to provide reparations for the devastation inflicted upon the peoples of Afghanistan and Iraq and to confront the growing social crisis engulfing workers in the US and around the world.

The first eight months of the Obama administration have decisively refuted the perspective of the middle-class protest groups that the struggle against war could be waged by driving out Bush and electing Democrats. With the Democratic Party controlling the White House and both houses of Congress, the occupation of Iraq continues while the war in Afghanistan is being escalated.

What is required to fight war is the independent political mobilization of working people against the Obama administration and the profit interests of the corporations and banks that it represents—the real source of militarism. This means building the Socialist Equality Party as the mass party of the working class.

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