

European powers seek UN cover for war in Afghanistan

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Plans for a United Nations conference on Afghanistan early next year, announced Sunday by German Chancellor Angela Merkel and British Prime Minister Gordon Brown in Berlin, are a political fraud directed against the Afghan people and the working class.

The European powers are seeking to disorient popular opposition to the US-led occupation of Afghanistan by obtaining a UN imprimatur for their continued collaboration with Washington.

Brown's purpose in visiting Berlin was reportedly to request that Merkel increase German troop strength in Afghanistan from 4,200 to 6,000. However, as the British *Times* noted, publicly agreeing to Brown's request would have been "electoral suicide" for Merkel, who is running for re-election in the September 27 German federal elections.

Popular opposition in all the European countries and in the United States is growing. July polls found 62 percent support in Germany and 52 percent support in Britain for withdrawing their country's troops from Afghanistan.

Brown and Merkel announced that, together with French President Nicolas Sarkozy, they would propose to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon the organization of a UN conference on Afghanistan, to be held early next year. The purpose of this conference, as their comments made clear, is to organize further intervention in the Afghan war.

Brown said that the aim was to ensure the build-up of Afghan police and army forces was "properly supported." Downing Street officials said the conference would take place in Kabul or London.

Merkel declared: "The goal is not to lose sight of a lasting security structure in Afghanistan...We need decisive progress on this matter and, when Afghans will take more responsibility, we will be able to reduce international engagement."

This shameless trampling of popular anti-war sentiment comes amid the discrediting of all the ostensible justifications for the fighting in Afghanistan. The US government's stated target in launching the war—Osama bin

Laden, whose al-Qaeda network was accused of organizing the September 11 terrorist attacks—has been mentioned only intermittently after he somehow escaped US pursuit in 2001. The Western press' accusations of vote-rigging against the US-backed puppet regime of Afghan president Hamid Karzai have only highlighted the fundamentally fraudulent character of claims that the West was fighting for democracy in Afghanistan.

Nevertheless, the political establishment in the US and Europe is pressing ahead for an intensification of the war. The Obama administration recently began a large-scale offensive by Marines in the Helmand Valley, and it is in the process of sending 21,000 US reinforcements to Afghanistan—a figure that will likely be increased.

Another demonstration of the criminal character of the Afghan war was the September 4 bombing atrocity implicating German and US forces near Kunduz, Afghanistan.

Rather than sending out troops to retrieve fuel trucks captured and then abandoned by Taliban forces, the local German commander near Kunduz arranged for US fighter jets to bomb them. According to local reports, 130 Afghans were killed, including scores of civilians who were trying to siphon fuel from the trucks. This is the greatest death toll in a German military operation abroad since the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II.

The massacre has become a political issue in the German election campaign, after US officials tried to blame the atrocity on the German commander's alleged violations of NATO rules of engagement. German Foreign Ministry officials have cynically adopted the absurd position that no civilians were killed in the bombing.

The entire war stands indicted as a naked imperialist enterprise to colonize Afghanistan. The September 11 attacks were exploited as a convenient pretext to deploy US and NATO troops into a country that is the gateway to oil-rich Central Asia, and that increasingly plays a critical role in the commercial and strategic equilibrium of Eurasia.

This poses immense risks not only to the people of

Afghanistan, but of the entire world. The war into which Brown, Merkel, and Sarkozy propose to throw more European troops already threatens to assume the character of a direct conflict between the world's major powers.

Citing support for Afghan resistance fighters in Pakistani border regions, the Obama administration has seized on the Afghan fighting to launch military operations into neighboring Pakistan. Pakistan and its arch-rival India increasingly compete for political influence in Afghanistan. This stokes tensions between Pakistan's ally China and India, which the US is trying to build up as a counterweight to China in Asia, through such devices as the Indo-US nuclear treaty signed last November.

At the same time, competition for control in export routes for Central Asia's energy resources westward through the Caucasus has already led to a proxy war between the US and Russia: in August 2008, Washington encouraged the Georgian government to attack Russian forces in South Ossetia. The Obama administration continues to press for Georgia and the Ukraine to be incorporated into NATO, despite the opposition of several of NATO members, including Germany and France.

These rising tensions doubtless play a significant role in the decision to launch a conference where the European powers will be able to bargain with Washington for the interests of their own energy, defense, and other corporate conglomerates.

However, participation in the Afghan war is to a greater extent an attempt by the European powers to maintain their alliance with the US. Dependent on Washington as the world's policeman, to which the European imperialists have thoroughly accommodated themselves, they do not want to risk a return to the US unilateralism that marked the policy of the Bush administration. Their goal is an escalation of war worked out in harmony with Washington.

Working people must completely reject the cynical and militarist policies of European imperialism. The demand must be raised for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan.

The fight against war must be based on a revolutionary and socialist appeal to the interests of the international working class. The billions spent on weapons and troop deployments will be taken from the working class of all the belligerent countries, on top of the trillions already handed out to the major banks in the US and Europe. Besides the economic costs, workers will suffer the brunt of the casualties and destruction in coming wars, which increasingly threaten to spark a catastrophic global conflict.

No workers' movement against the war can develop without learning the bitter lessons of the failure of the anti-war movement before the US invasion of Iraq in 2002-2003.

Despite overwhelming international opposition to the war, expressed in the largest coordinated demonstrations in history, the brutal war crime was launched. The occupation of Iraq continues today under the Obama administration, with the full complicity of all the European powers.

The 2002-2003 movement proved impotent because it remained politically subordinate to the bourgeoisie and its parties. In the US, demonstrations were addressed by politicians from the same Democratic Party that today wages the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. In European demonstrations, organizations such as the Stop the War Coalition organized chants of "Vive la France," whose government was temporarily opposing the US war drive at the UN. Today, France has roughly 3,000 troops in Afghanistan.

The middle-class organizations that led these protests have shifted decisively to the right in the intervening six years. In the US, they have integrated themselves into the Obama administration, and through their support for this government bear political responsibility for the escalation of war in Afghanistan. Their counterparts in Europe are increasingly drawn into government or its immediate periphery. This was symbolized most prominently by the universal support among middle class organizations for the Western media campaign behind defeated Iranian presidential candidate Mirhossein Mousavi in June's Iranian elections.

The collapse of opposition to war in the bourgeoisie and the middle class ex-left paves the way for the emergence of the working class as the central social force in the coming anti-war movements. The International Committee of the Fourth International sets itself the task of politically preparing such a movement.

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