

Washington faces deepening debacle in Afghanistan

Bill Van Auken
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Today marks eight years since the launching of the US war against Afghanistan. The aerial bombardment of Kabul, Kandahar and Jalalabad was followed by the deployment of CIA and military special forces units which directed US warplanes in the annihilation of Taliban fighters. The militias of the Northern Alliance—a collection of warlords tied to the opium trade and implicated in war crimes over the previous decade—served as Washington’s proxy army.

Within two months, all of Afghanistan’s provinces had fallen to the US intervention, with large numbers of the Taliban resistance taken prisoner and massacred and others driven into the Tora Bora mountains or across the border into Pakistan. In those two months, a total of 12 US soldiers were killed.

Now, eight years later, the Obama White House and the Pentagon are engaged in a heated debate over whether to send another 40,000 troops—on top of the 68,000 US and 38,000 NATO troops already deployed—in an attempt to salvage an intervention that has succeeded only in intensifying the resistance to the US-led occupation and spreading it throughout the country.

The number of US and NATO troops killed in Afghanistan so far this year has risen to 400—nearly six times as many as died in the first year of the US intervention. The war has gone on twice as long as US forces were engaged in World War II.

The Bush administration launched the war in the name of smashing Al Qaeda and capturing or killing Osama bin Laden. It was justified as retribution for the attacks of September 11, 2001, tragic events whose real origins have not been seriously investigated to this day.

The Obama administration employs this same essential pretext, describing Afghanistan as a “war of necessity”—in contrast to the “war of choice” in still-occupied Iraq. Like his predecessor, Obama insists that the war is aimed at preventing another terrorist attack, maintaining this pretense even as his national security adviser, retired General James Jones, admitted this week that there are no more than 100 members of Al Qaeda in all of Afghanistan, with no means

of attacking the US.

The *World Socialist Web Site* rejected this rationale as a lie from the outset. In an editorial board statement posted on October 9, 2001, two days after the war was launched, the WSWS explained:

“... while the events of September 11 have served as the catalyst for the assault on Afghanistan, the cause is far deeper. The nature of this or any war, its progressive or reactionary character, is determined not by the immediate events that preceded it, but rather by the class structures, economic foundations and international roles of the states that are involved. From this decisive standpoint, the present action by the United States is an imperialist war.

“The US government initiated the war in pursuit of far-reaching international interests of the American ruling elite. What is the main purpose of the war? The collapse of the Soviet Union a decade ago created a political vacuum in Central Asia, which is home to the second largest deposit of proven reserves of petroleum and natural gas in the world.”

The statement continued, “By attacking Afghanistan, setting up a client regime and moving vast military forces into the region, the US aims to establish a new political framework within which it will exert hegemonic control.”

There is no need to revise a single word in this analysis. Since October 2001, ample evidence has emerged that the decision to invade Afghanistan—like the one to conquer Iraq—was made well before the 9/11 attacks. These served as the pretext, not the cause, of two wars of military aggression.

The debacle confronting US imperialism in Afghanistan is one of its own making. Al Qaeda and the Taliban are both the products of previous US interventions in Afghanistan. Beginning in 1979, Washington funneled billions of dollars in arms and aid to Islamist guerrillas seeking to topple the country’s Soviet-backed government. It deliberately instigated a Soviet invasion and war that claimed over a million lives, turned another five million into refugees and wrecked the entire society.

At that point, bin Laden was part of the CIA-Saudi-Pakistani pipeline. Much of the US aid went to the forces of

mujahedeen leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who is now blamed for last weekend's attack that killed eight US soldiers in the remote province of Nuristan.

The US-led occupation begun eight years ago has proven another unmitigated catastrophe for the Afghan people. Thousands have been killed in aerial bombardments and repressive raids across the country, with the civilian casualty rate steadily rising.

Already desperate conditions of life have only worsened. The United Nations recently ranked Afghanistan at 181 out of 182 countries in the world in terms of human development indices. Only Niger ranked lower.

Life expectancy has fallen to 43 since the US invasion. At least 40 percent of the population is unemployed and 42 percent live on less than \$1 a day. One in five children die before his or her fifth birthday, while one in 50 births ends in the death of the mother, one of the highest rates in the world. Two-thirds of the country's adult population can neither read nor write.

Conditions have steadily worsened even as some \$36 billion in foreign aid has been delivered to the country since October 2001, the bulk of it flowing into the pockets of the kleptocracy headed by the US-installed puppet president, Hamid Karzai.

Hated by the majority of the population and having blatantly stolen the August 20 presidential election, Karzai remains in power solely thanks to the support of Washington, which has concluded that it has nothing with which to replace him.

These conditions of violence, destitution and corruption have created broad popular support for those resisting the occupation. The ongoing debate in Washington is how best to suppress this resistance.

Two main options are reportedly under discussion: the deployment of another 40,000 troops in a redoubled counterinsurgency campaign, as demanded by Gen. Stanley McChrystal and the Pentagon, or an intensified use of drone attacks, aerial bombardment and special forces incursions into Pakistan, as proposed by Vice President Joseph Biden and others in the administration. Both spell increased bloodshed and a far wider war.

While there are no doubt bitter divisions over how the war should be conducted, all sides begin from achieving the aims upon which the war was launched: establishing a stranglehold over the energy resources of Central Asia in order to seize a decisive advantage for US imperialism over its economic rivals in Asia and Europe.

The onset of the global financial crisis has only intensified the underlying contradictions that are the driving force of American militarism, above all the conflict between a globally integrated economy and a world system divided by

rival capitalist nation states. This finds its most explosive expression in the decline in the economic dominance of US imperialism.

The majority of the American people oppose both the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, and millions voted for Obama on the basis of this opposition. Yet both wars continue, and Obama is preparing to escalate the carnage in Afghanistan and Pakistan, while threatening military aggression in Iran.

No less than Bush and the Republicans, the Obama administration represents—in both its foreign and domestic policy—the interests of the corporate and financial oligarchy that rules America. Wars abroad go hand in hand with mounting social inequality and an assault on the living standards and social and democratic rights of working people in the US itself.

The discussion now going on in the White House—and behind the backs of the American people—about how best to advance US imperialism's interests in Central Asia poses immense dangers. An escalation of the war, either with more ground troops or intensified air attacks, threatens to destabilize nuclear-armed Pakistan and all of South and Central Asia. China, a rising power, and Russia, with longstanding interests in the region, will not remain on the sidelines indefinitely while Washington attempts to exert its dominance by armed force.

The war begun eight years ago and the threat of its escalation into a far bloodier conflagration can be ended only by the intervention of the working class in the US and internationally, fighting against the capitalist profit system which is the source of militarism.

In this struggle, the demands must be raised for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all foreign troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, a halt to the US attacks on Pakistan, and the dismantling of the US military and intelligence apparatus so as to provide billions of dollars for reparations to the victims of US aggression and to secure jobs and improve living standards for working people in the US and internationally.

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