

# What are US troops dying for in Afghanistan?

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At least 21 US soldiers and Marines have been killed in Afghanistan since last weekend, making October the bloodiest month for US forces since they invaded the country eight years ago. Still more have been wounded by roadside bombs, rocket-propelled grenades and small arms fire.

Among those killed in the last several days was a 24-year-old California mother of two young daughters, Sgt. Eduviges Wolf, who died of wounds suffered when her vehicle was attacked with a rocket-propelled grenade in Kunar province.

Devin Michel, a 19-year-old Army private, little more than a year out of high school in Stockton, Illinois, was killed by a roadside bomb in Zhari province.

Gregory Fleury, a 23-year-old Marine corporal, lost his life in one of the three helicopter crashes on Sunday. The *Anchorage Daily News* quoted his grandfather as saying that, after serving two tours in Iraq, Fleury was set to end his active duty, but “the government extended his service” for deployment to Afghanistan. He had been scheduled to come home in early November.

The escalation of the war, which President Barack Obama is expected to announce soon, will only drive up casualties, as tens of thousands of additional soldiers and Marines are sent into Afghanistan to suppress popular resistance to foreign occupation.

What are these sacrifices for? Why are young American men and women being sent seven-and-a-half thousand miles from US shores to face horrible deaths and to carry out brutal repression against a population that does not want them there?

These questions are posed all the more sharply by the revelation that the US Central Intelligence Agency has kept President Hamid Karzai’s brother, a reputed kingpin in Afghanistan’s multibillion-dollar drug trade, on its payroll for the last eight years.

The CIA’s ties with Ahmed Wali Karzai raise

“significant questions about America’s war strategy, which is currently under review at the White House,” the *New York Times* said Wednesday in reporting the connection.

This is putting it rather delicately. The ties between the Karzai brothers and the CIA are a further demonstration that “America’s war strategy” is a criminal enterprise pursued by criminal methods.

The newspaper describes a highly intimate relationship between the CIA and Ahmed Wali Karzai, who helped found a paramilitary outfit known as the Kandahar Strike Force that “operates at the CIA’s direction” in carrying out assassinations of suspected “insurgents.”

CIA special operations agents, meanwhile, utilize compounds provided by Karzai as bases for their own operations in the south of the country.

According to the *Times*, military officers and other American officials say that “Mr. Karzai’s suspected role in the drug trade, as well as what they describe as the mafia-like way that he lords over southern Afghanistan, makes him a malevolent force.” Nonetheless, he remains one of Washington’s key assets in the country.

Afghanistan currently supplies 90 percent of the world’s heroin. Since the US invasion of the country, opium production has increased by more than 300 percent.

CIA ties to drug trafficking are longstanding. Before 1979, there was no large-scale poppy cultivation or any production of heroin in Afghanistan and Pakistan. These countries became the center of world heroin production as a byproduct of the CIA’s fomenting of a war by Islamist mujahedin against the Soviet-backed government in Kabul. While the US poured in billions of dollars in money and arms to fuel this war, drugs provided a major supplementary funding source for the CIA-backed guerrillas.

In the 1980s war against Nicaragua, the shipment of cocaine into the US provided resources for the CIA-backed contras at a time when the US Congress had cut off funding. And in the Vietnam War, the CIA allied itself with heroin-trafficking warlords in Laos who exploited the US troops as a market.

In all of these wars, US intervention has produced death, destruction and social degradation, including the proliferation of drug production and consumption. An inevitable byproduct of the ongoing intervention in Afghanistan will be a steady rise in heroin addiction in the US and around the world.

Are US troops dying to keep in power a government dominated by drug-trafficking warlords? Will more be killed in the coming month to protect another fraudulent election aimed at lending a façade of legitimacy to this regime?

So it would seem. But the Karzais and their warlord allies are puppets of US policy, used by Washington as merely a means to an end.

The end itself is patently not the furthering of “democracy.” Nor are 100,000 US and NATO troops fighting terrorism in Afghanistan, where military officials admit there are no more than 100 Al Qaeda members.

The real objectives of this war were spelled out in fairly candid terms in an article published last year in the magazine of the US Army War College by Dr. Stephen Blank, the college’s professor of National Security Studies.

Entitled “The Strategic Importance of Central Asia: An American View,” the article wastes little time on the pretexts of combating Al Qaeda or building democracy in Afghanistan.

Blank argues that the US is pursuing an “open door” policy in Central Asia “for American firms seeking energy exploration, refining, and marketing.” US policy, he says, is aimed at “the prevention of a Russian energy monopoly” in Central Asia or the region’s domination by China. It also seeks to isolate Iran, another potential regional rival.

“Not surprisingly,” Blank continues “the leitmotif of US energy policy has been focused on fostering the development of multiple pipelines and links to foreign consumers and producers of energy” that bypass the control of these regional rivals. Among the most important of these, he writes, is the proposed

Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TAP) pipeline, which would pump oil and natural gas out of Central Asia across the territory now occupied by US troops.

It would appear from this paper that, while soldiers and Marines are told that they are fighting and dying for democracy or to end terrorism, at least the US Army’s rising senior officers are being given a more concrete objective.

The American military is fighting in Afghanistan as part of a 21st century version of the “Great Game,” in which US imperialism is seeking to dominate Central Asia and its energy resources at the expense of its strategic rivals.

There is no doubt that the Obama administration will continue to pursue these aims through an escalation of the Afghan war.

The costs of this war, now pegged at \$3.6 billion a month, will rise even higher with the deployment of more troops, and will be paid by working people in the US through attacks on their living standards and basic social benefits. The death and maiming of American soldiers and Marines will escalate, along with the slaughter of both Afghan and Pakistani civilians.

The interests of the working class in the US and internationally stand opposed to those being pursued through the killing and dying in the so-called AfPak war. Working people must demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all American and foreign troops from the region and an end to the drive for imperialist domination in Central Asia.

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