

Obama to announce Afghanistan surge of over 30,000

Tom Eley**25 November 2009**

Early next week President Obama will announce a surge of more than 30,000 soldiers in the US occupation of Afghanistan. The increase sets the stage for a deepening of US military violence in Central and South Asia and for a confrontation with the US working class, which increasingly opposes the war.

Citing anonymous Obama administration and military officials, media reports put the increase at between 32,000 and 35,000 soldiers, who will be deployed in waves beginning in March. It will be Obama's second major escalation in Afghanistan. Soon after entering office he authorized an increase of 21,000 soldiers.

While not revealing details of the plan, Obama declared at a Tuesday joint news conference with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh that he intends to "finish the job" in Afghanistan. "I feel very confident that when the American people hear a clear rationale for what we're doing there and how we intend to achieve our goals, that they will be supportive," Obama said.

The plan was reportedly finalized at a Monday night meeting of Obama's "war council." Attending the gathering were proponents of three different strategies, all of which propose a massive increase of militarist violence.

Vice President Joe Biden, Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel, and US Afghanistan ambassador Karl Eikenberry are said to have favored a smaller increase of 10,000 to 15,000 soldiers, while Afghanistan commander General Stanley McChrystal and Central Command head General David Petraeus argued for an increase of 40,000. A third group led by Defense Secretary Robert Gates, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Michael Mullen, favored an increase of more than 30,000, sources say.

While media accounts say that Obama "split the difference" between the Biden and McChrystal proposals by joining the third camp, his surge will be much more in line with that proposed by McChrystal than the Biden plan, if the reported numbers prove correct.

Officials told McClatchy that the plan includes "off-ramps" beginning next summer by which "Obama could decide to continue the flow of troops, halt the deployments and adopt a more limited strategy or 'begin looking very quickly at exiting' the country." The plan is also to contain an "exit strategy."

This is for public consumption only. The US has no intention of diminishing its occupation for years. Administration officials

privately concede troops will remain for at least a decade.

The buildup will be concentrated in the south, and the deployed troops will, in most cases, be diverted from planned tours in Iraq. Administration sources told the AP that the new forces would not alter occupation levels in the north, where militant activity has increased dramatically in recent months. "In the absence of large additions of ground forces, dealing with the north would probably require relying more heavily on air power," the AP learned from defense department officials.

The plan will include new demands that Pakistan increase its military operations in its tribal regions that border Afghanistan. Pakistan's military operations have already resulted in the killing of thousands and the dispossession of hundreds of thousands more.

Obama's announcement also will be followed by ramped up pressure on NATO member states to increase their own troop presence. British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, who is lobbying Europe on behalf of Washington, has said he hopes that the non-US occupying powers can contribute an additional 5,000 soldiers.

Obama's new surge in Afghanistan comes amidst a sharp decline in public support for the occupation in the US and NATO countries, and a rapid deterioration in conditions in Afghanistan, where the overwhelming majority of the population opposes the US presence. Recent months have set fresh records for US and coalition casualties, and 2009 has been the deadliest of the occupation, now in its ninth year.

The decision comes, moreover, days after the re-installation of Hamid Karzai as Afghan president, the result of an election—ordered and overseen by the US and United Nations—characterized by such rampant fraud that even the Obama administration was forced to acknowledge doubts over its legitimacy.

In the days leading up to Obama's announcement, Washington has sought to polish Karzai's image. According to McClatchy, beginning last week "Clinton suddenly adopted a more conciliatory tone toward Karzai, whom she and other administration officials had been pressing to clean up the rampant corruption and cut his ties to local warlords, some of whom traffic in opium." Among these "local warlords" is Hamid Karzai's brother Ahmed Wali Karzai.

At the same time the Obama administration seeks to dust off Karzai, the new plan will reduce his government's role in the occupation. The Obama administration will "work around" Karzai, an anonymous defense official told McClatchy, by building

relations “directly with provincial and district leaders.”

After the debacle of the Afghan elections, all of the pretexts for launching and carrying on the war have been exposed. The re-installation of the Karzai regime makes absurd declarations that the occupation is “a war for democracy.” And long since dropped is the claim that the war’s aim is to “capture or kill” Osama bin Laden.

What is left is Obama’s hollow and repetitious line that the Afghanistan war is “a war of necessity” being waged to “protect the American people” from the reemergence of al Qaeda. On Tuesday Obama offered that the surge aims “to make sure that al Qaeda and its extremist allies cannot operate effectively in those areas. We are going to dismantle and degrade their capabilities and ultimately dismantle and destroy their networks.”

Abetted by a docile press, Obama makes no effort to explain, much less prove, this bald assertion. In fact the Obama administration has itself acknowledged that the insurgency against the occupation is native to the region, and that al Qaeda fighters in Afghanistan number in the dozens.

Obama cannot utter the real motivation for the surge. The war’s initial aim was to place the US military astride the vast oil and natural gas reserves of the Caspian Basin and, just as critically, to prevent the emergence of a combination of Eurasian powers that might undermine US global preeminence.

Now added to these concerns is the cognisance in ruling circles that a “loss” in Afghanistan would irretrievably undermine the global position of US imperialism.

Obama’s surge will translate into the deaths of tens of thousands of Afghan and Pakistani civilians, and the death, maiming, and psychological destruction of thousands of US soldiers. It will destabilize the entire region, and threatens a global conflagration.

The US military presence in the region has already heightened tensions between Pakistan and India and between India and China. On Tuesday, a Pakistani foreign ministry spokesman said he believes India is preparing for a limited regional war, and China and India have engaged in heated exchanges over disputed border regions that led to war in 1962. The US military presence also threatens Iran, which is bordered by Afghanistan in the east and Iraq in the west. Russia and the Central Asian states could also easily be drawn into a wider war.

The US, Pakistan, India, China, and Russia are all nuclear-armed powers.

Nor is there any reason to believe that US military operations will remain confined to Afghanistan and Pakistan. The past two decades of US history is a chronicle of wars and military interventions spanning presidential administrations and Congresses controlled by Democrats and Republicans alike.

There are now 68,000 US soldiers in Afghanistan, and another 115,000 remain in Iraq. The combined total of the two occupations surpasses the size of the twin wars at the height of the Bush administration’s surge in Iraq in 2007. Military spending has also increased to record levels under Obama, who in grotesque irony will travel to Sweden on December 10 to receive the Nobel peace prize.

The staggering financial cost of the war in Afghanistan will be paid for by the US working class.

Present at the final war council meeting was White House budget director Peter Orszag, who has repeatedly claimed that the greatest threat to the fiscal health of the US is not the enormous costs associated with military expenditure and wars, nor the multi-trillion dollar Wall Street bailout, but the rising costs of entitlement programs, especially Medicare.

Yet Orszag’s own estimates put the cost of the Afghanistan war at \$1 million per soldier per year. If so, Obama’s latest surge in Afghanistan will add at least \$30 billion to the federal ledger book each year. This is probably an underestimate. The war, “some administration officials privately concede could cost \$700 billion to \$1 trillion over 10 years,” McClatchy reports.

To date the combined direct costs of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is also nearing \$1 trillion. These figures do not include the regular military outlay, every year the largest discretionary feature on the federal budget.

Obama’s escalation of the war in Afghanistan will inevitably result in deeper cuts to social services and education in the US. And while Obama claims that there is no money for a jobs program that would put millions to work on desperately needed infrastructure and housing projects, he finds unlimited funds to cover the bad debts of the banking industry and to carry on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Obama won the Democratic nomination for the presidency, it should be recalled, by appealing to mass antiwar sentiment against his chief rival, Hillary Clinton. His victory over Republican John McCain, as well as crushing Democratic congressional victories in 2006 and 2008, was based in part on widespread opposition to war and militarism.

The unchecked growth of militarism under Obama demonstrates the undemocratic character of the US two-party system and the bankruptcy of those who claim that the only way to oppose war is by electing Democrats, or by appealing to Democrats already in office. Obama’s war policies represent nothing more than the continuation and deepening of those of the Bush administration.



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