

Obama will send tens of thousands more troops to Afghanistan

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According to US press reports Sunday, President Barack Obama has decided to send tens of thousands of additional US troops to Afghanistan in an attempt to suppress growing popular resistance to foreign occupation.

The *New York Times* reported Sunday on its web site that the White House had narrowed its options in Afghanistan to three—all involving troop increases of 20,000, 30,000 and 40,000 respectively. The plans for escalating the war have come in response to the urgent request by General Stanley McChrystal, the US commander in Afghanistan.

Citing “administration and military officials,” McClatchy Newspapers reported Saturday night that Obama has already settled on 34,000 troops, but was waiting to announce it until after briefing the other governments participating in the NATO occupation and completing a trip to Asia, now set for November 11-19.

McClatchy identified the new military units to be deployed in Afghanistan as including three Army brigades from the 101st Airborne Division, based at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and the 10th Mountain Division, at Fort Drum, New York, and a Marine brigade. These forces, comprising 23,000 soldiers, would serve in combat and support roles. Another 7,000 troops would establish a new division headquarters in Kandahar, where the US is to take command of all NATO and allied forces in a Regional Command (South). Another 4,000 military trainers would likely be sent as well. The details could still change, officials told McClatchy, and would not be finalized until a NATO meeting November 23.

Two top military officers indirectly confirmed the escalation of the war in Afghanistan. Admiral Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told a Washington audience Wednesday that the

administration would request a supplemental funding bill to meet the cost of the additional troops, with Pentagon officials giving a ballpark estimate of \$50 billion. The regular Pentagon appropriations bill, signed by Obama at the end of last month, already allots \$130 billion to military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

General George Casey, the Army chief of staff, called for sending more troops to Afghanistan in the course of a series of interviews on Sunday morning television talk shows. He was brought on to the programs to respond to questions about the killing of 13 soldiers at Fort Hood, Texas by an Army major apparently upset over an impending deployment to the Afghanistan war.

“I believe that we need to put additional forces into Afghanistan to give General McChrystal the ability to both dampen the successes of the Taliban while we train the Afghan civilian forces,” he said on the NBC program “Meet the Press.” On the CNN program “State of the Union,” Casey disputed suggestions that a major escalation in Afghanistan would overstrain the military, pointing to increased military recruitment in the past two years. “Since 2007, we have added 40,000 soldiers to the active force, which is a significant step forward,” he said.

According to the *New York Times* account, Obama is leaning toward the proposal to send 30,000 troops because it is backed by Defense Secretary Robert Gates: “His view is thought to be pivotal because of Mr. Obama’s respect for him and his status as a holdover from a Republican administration.”

This speaks volumes about the real constituency of the Obama administration. Obama won the Democratic presidential nomination in large measure because of his public posture as the major candidate most opposed to the Bush administration’s war policies. His election

was fueled by an outpouring of antiwar sentiment, particularly among young people. But in this critical decision, it is the military brass and Bush administration holdovers, not the American people, who are driving White House decision-making.

The US invasion and occupation of Afghanistan were not carried out to defend the American people or to punish those who carried out the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001—contrary to the propaganda of the Bush administration, the Democratic Party, the Pentagon and the US media. Afghanistan was targeted long before 9/11, as part of the drive by American imperialism to assert its predatory interest in the oil riches of the Persian Gulf and Central Asia.

The reactionary character of the war is demonstrated in the daily atrocities in which US and NATO soldiers slaughter the people they are supposedly in Afghanistan to “liberate.” The latest such incidents took place on Wednesday and Saturday of the past week.

On Wednesday, a rocket strike by the International Security Assistance Force (the official name of the NATO contingent in Afghanistan) killed at least nine civilians, including three children, in Helmand province, scene of some of the heaviest resistance to the US occupation regime.

The next day, dozens of angry villagers brought some of the bodies to the governor’s office in the provincial capital, Lashkar Gah. The protesters were dispersed by policemen firing into the air. US officials issued their standard declaration that only “Taliban militants” had been hit, but Afghan President Hamid Karzai’s office condemned “the attack on civilians.”

In a separate incident in the same time period, an overnight air raid killed a resident of Baramkhil village in Khost province, in eastern Afghanistan. Several hundred people demonstrated the next day in protest, claiming the victim was an innocent civilian.

On Saturday, another reckless bombing raid took a toll among civilians, soldiers and policemen of Karzai’s puppet regime, and even US troops. In the course of a massive mobilization of American and Afghan forces searching for two US Green Beret paratroopers, missing in northwestern Baghdis province since Wednesday, a NATO warplane hit the search operations center.

The US military confirmed six Afghan policemen and soldiers were killed, and five American and 17 Afghan

soldiers wounded. The district mayor gave a higher death toll, including two more Afghan soldiers and 12 civilians.

Meanwhile two more British soldiers were killed in Helmand province, bringing total British losses this week to nine, including five soldiers killed in one incident when an Afghan soldier opened fire on them while they were resting at a joint British-Afghan base camp.

The *Sunday Times* of London reported that British army chiefs were drawing up plans to pull British troops back from a series of outlying bases in Helmand province, abandoning towns captured from the Taliban forces in bloody fighting last year and the year before. This would include the town of Musa Qala, where 15 British soldiers were killed in fighting in 2007.

A senior British commander told the newspaper: “The new strategy will have to be handled sensitively. But we can’t do everything, everywhere. We must concentrate our efforts in a few geographical areas. We have to select specific areas to hold and then do the job properly.”

According to the *Times* account: “Military chiefs are concerned that Musa Qala, with a population of less than 20,000, ties up several hundred British soldiers, who have to be supplied by scarce helicopters or risky land convoys.”

One unstated concern is that the overrunning of any sizeable number of troops in such an isolated town could make continuation of the war politically impossible. Popular sentiment in Britain has turned sharply against the war, with the latest BBC poll showing 64 percent of the public feel that the war is “unwinnable”, up from 58 percent in July.



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