US in Afghanistan to stay

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When President Obama delivered his speech outlining a major escalation of the Afghanistan war one week ago at West Point, he presented it as the prelude to a withdrawal that would begin in July of 2011. It has taken less than a week for this suggestion of a short-term "surge" and early withdrawal to be turned into its opposite.

Obama's cynical attempt to package his escalation as a means of shortening the war was only one of the many lies in his address, which sought to portray the escalation of US violence and killing as an altruistic effort to protect the Afghan people and secure their freedom and independence. This included the claim that the US has no interest in occupying Afghanistan or any other country.

Obama's reference to a supposed time table was a dishonest attempt to provide political cover for the administration's liberal supporters and disarm the mounting popular opposition to the war. In fact, as the *Washington Post* noted on Monday, Obama has adopted virtually in full the military plan pushed by the US commander in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal. The newspaper wrote that McChrystal will "implement a war strategy that is largely unchanged after a three-month-long White House review of the conflict."

Obama's top officials have spent the week since the West Point speech repudiating any notion of an early withdrawal and stressing instead the open-ended character of the US occupation of Afghanistan.

Within minutes of the address, administration officials began backpedaling on Obama's suggestion that the surge would pave the way for a withdrawal of US forces. They were responding to media criticisms of the July 2011 date and attacks on the suggestion of an early withdrawal by Republican and some Democratic congressmen.

To the extent that there are elements within the Obama administration who may be concerned about the implications of an open-ended military occupation of Afghanistan, they have been silenced by the administration's predictable rush to placate those criticizing it from the right.

Toward the anti-war sentiment of the majority of Americans, the administration shows nothing but contempt.

The day after the speech, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Admiral Michael Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, gave testimony to Congress on the escalation. The three emphasized Obama's own caveat that any reduction of US force in Afghanistan would be determined by "conditions on the ground."

The caveats and disavowals from high-ranking Obama officials and military spokesmen continued throughout the week. They reached a crescendo on Sunday, when Obama's national security team appeared on the major TV interview programs to issue categorical statements that the US military would not leave in July 2011, or any time soon thereafter.

Clinton, speaking on NBC's "Meet the Press," said, "We're not talking about an exit strategy."

Gates, on "Meet the Press," was more explicit. He said, "'We will have 100,000 forces, troops there, and they are not leaving in July of 2011. Some handful or some small number, or whatever the conditions permit,

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we'll begin to withdraw at that time."

General David Petraeus, head of the US Central Command, declared on "Fox News Sunday:" "There's no timeline, no ramp, nothing like that."

National Security Adviser General James L. Jones was interviewed on CNN's "State of the Union," where he said, "[C]ertainly, the president has also said that we're not leaving Afghanistan."

Driving the point home, Mullen on Monday addressed Marines at Camp Lejeune who are set to depart as part of Obama's surge. "President Obama has not said we're leaving," Mullen said. "I want to say for emphasis there's no deadline, no amount of troops to come out in 2011, and there's no withdrawal date or anything like that."

The most revealing comments were given by Jones on CNN. When asked by host John King whether or not the US military might still be occupying Afghanistan in 2020, he said this would "be predicated on exactly how much progress we're making."

"We have strategic interests in South Asia that should not be measured in terms of finite times," Jones explained. "We're going to be in the region for a long time."

This echoed statements Jones made the day after Obama's speech, when he told Fox News, "We are not leaving the region. We have enormous strategic interests in Afghanistan, east of Afghanistan in Pakistan, and we intend to be supportive and helpful partners with them for many years to come."

While Jones did not reveal the strategic interests at stake in Afghanistan and Pakistan, he pointed to the broader, indeed, global dimensions of the US intervention in the two countries. It has nothing to do with defeating Al Qaeda, fighting terrorism or protecting the American people. Jones himself has acknowledged that there are less than 100 Al Qaeda fighters currently in Afghanistan.

The escalation of the war in Afghanistan and Pakistan is part of a global strategy to maintain a dominant position for US imperialism in Asia by installing client regimes and placing the American military in proximity to the region's vast oil and gas reserves, thereby countering the influence of rival powers, including China, Russia and Iran.

These aims are well understood and supported by the entire political and media establishment.

The American people have absolutely no say in Obama's Afghanistan policy. In the last two elections, in 2006 and 2008, the electorate repudiated the war policies of the Bush administration. But this has had no effect on government policy.

Obama is continuing and escalating the militarist policies of his predecessor, setting the stage for new war crimes and even greater killing in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the death and maiming of thousands of US troops, and future wars that will arise from the intensification of international conflicts resulting from the current war.

The struggle against war can proceed only in the form of a political fight against the Obama administration and a break with the Democratic Party and the two-party system. Such a struggle is inseparable from the fight against layoffs, poverty and attacks on democratic rights.

The fight against war is an international struggle. It must be based on the independent mobilization of the international working class against the capitalist system, the real source of war.

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