

Obama's Afghan escalation and the decay of democracy

Bill Van Auken
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With President Barack Obama approaching his first anniversary in office, his escalation of the Afghanistan war is writing a new chapter in the history of Washington's shredding of democratic forms of rule in order to further militarist aggression abroad.

This has become increasingly clear since the announcement earlier this month of the plan to send an additional 30,000 US soldiers and Marines to Afghanistan. It was further spelled out in Obama's Nobel Peace Prize speech in Oslo, where he enunciated what has been widely described as the "Obama doctrine."

The Obama doctrine incorporates all of the essentials of the Bush doctrine—preemptive war and the assertion of the right of the United States, as the world's "sole military superpower," to launch military aggression unilaterally as it sees fit. Obama's contribution is to argue openly for the junking of existing international rules of war and the recognition of what was previously defined as aggressive war as a legitimate instrument of foreign policy.

Key passages of this hypocritical address tacitly recognized that imperialist war in general, and the US war in Afghanistan in particular, remain deeply unpopular at home and abroad.

Obama acknowledged the existence of "deep ambivalence about military action today, no matter the cause," adding that this "is joined by a reflexive suspicion of America, the world's sole military superpower." He lamented a "disconnect between the efforts of those who serve and the ambivalence of the broader public."

The US president dismissed popular anti-war sentiment in the US and around the world as naive. "Peace requires responsibility," said Obama. "Peace requires sacrifice." In short, peace requires war,

whether those forced to die and to pay for it like it or not.

This theme has been further amplified since the Nobel speech, both by Obama and in the media.

In an interview broadcast Sunday on the CBS News program "60 Minutes," Obama was asked why, under conditions where "most Americans...don't believe this war is worth fighting," he decided to escalate it anyway.

The president replied, "Because I think it's the right thing to do. And that's my job... If I was worried about what polled well there are a whole bunch of things we wouldn't have done this year."

Here Obama said more than he intended. This "bunch of things" includes his administration's allocation of trillions of dollars to prop up Wall Street, while doing nothing to aid the millions who have lost their jobs, their incomes and their homes.

The "60 Minutes" segment was eerily reminiscent of interviews given by Vice President Dick Cheney in 2007 and 2008, as the Bush administration was carrying out its own "surge" in Iraq in the face of overwhelming opposition.

Appearing on Fox News in January 2007, Cheney dismissed the hostility of the American public to the war. "I don't think any president worth his salt can afford to make decisions of this magnitude according to the polls," he said.

Asked on ABC News in May 2008 if he didn't "care what the American people think" about the war, Cheney replied, "No. I think you cannot be blown off course by the fluctuations in the public opinion polls."

In Obama's case, the indifference to the public's hostility to war is all the more breathtaking since the Democratic president owes his 2008 election victory precisely to such sentiments.

The media, which universally hailed the Oslo address, has expanded on the theme that the will of the people must not be allowed to interfere with the waging of war. The *New York Times* published an editorial Monday admitting that in Europe “ambivalence has long been replaced by fierce demands for withdrawal” from Afghanistan. Indeed, polls in France and Germany have shown two-thirds of the public supporting an end to the US-NATO intervention.

In the face of such mass opposition, the *Times* counseled: “Democratically elected leaders cannot ignore public skepticism, but they should not surrender to it when they know better. Mrs. Merkel and Mr. Sarkozy must educate their voters to the harsh reality that Europe will also pay a high price if the Taliban and Al Qaeda get to retake Afghanistan and further destabilize Pakistan.”

Presumably, Washington has set the standard on how best to “educate the voters”: by frightening them with manufactured terrorist threats and deceiving them with phony pretexts for war.

The real motives driving US militarism are to remain hidden from the public. This was illustrated by *Time* magazine’s Joe Klein, a journalistic conduit for the political and national security establishment, in an article posted Sunday. Klein put forward the thesis that the US military had to remain in Afghanistan to forestall an Islamist-backed military coup in Pakistan and diminish the threat of war between Pakistan and India.

“Some of the best arguments about why this war is necessary must go unspoken by the president,” he wrote.

That is, there are the real reasons for the US war in Afghanistan and the fraudulent ones palmed off on the American people.

The most fundamental of these “unspoken” motives is the drive by US imperialism to assert its hegemony in a region containing some of the world’s largest energy reserves together with the pipelines to siphon them off to the West. It was this aim that led to US plans for war in Afghanistan being hatched long before September 11, 2001.

Obama is continuing and escalating a dirty colonial war to suppress popular resistance to foreign occupation and to secure the interests of the corporate and financial oligarchy that rules the US.

Despite systematic disinformation from the government and the mass media, millions of American working people have drawn their own conclusions from more than eight years of war in Afghanistan and more than six years in Iraq. The mass opposition to war, however, can find no means of expression within the existing political establishment. After going to the polls in both 2006 and 2008 to vote against war, the American people are confronted with the continuation and escalation of military aggression.

Neither the pursuit of imperialist wars in the face of public opposition, nor the execution of economic policies that defend the profits and wealth of the ruling elite at the expense of the rest of the population, can be carried out by democratic means. Both ultimately require methods of repression and intimidation. This is the fundamental reason that the Obama administration has kept intact all of the essential police state policies and institutions created under George W. Bush.

The fight against war, like the defense of democratic rights, can be waged successfully only through the independent mobilization of the working class against capitalism, which, together with the threat of ever bloodier conflagrations, is creating intolerable conditions for billions of people around the world.

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