

The murderous face of Obama's surge

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“The surge has begun in earnest,” a Pentagon spokesman announced Thursday. While only a few advance elements of a single Marine battalion have arrived in Afghanistan, the escalation in killing and destruction that will accompany the deployment of an additional 30,000 US troops is already underway.

A series of events over the past few days have begun to expose the murderous and protracted character of the so-called surge ordered by President Barack Obama at the beginning of this month.

Obama said in his December 1 speech at West Point that he was implementing “a strategy that works on both sides of the border” separating Afghanistan and Pakistan. What is becoming clear is that this strategy entails intensified killing in both countries, with the potential for triggering a far more explosive regional crisis.

On Thursday and Friday, US pilotless Predator drone aircraft carried out one of the most intense in an escalating series of missile attacks on Pakistani targets near the Afghanistan frontier. What was described as a “fleet of drones” pummeled a village in North Waziristan, killing as many as 17 people Thursday. According to media reports, 10 Hellfire missiles were fired into a residential compound allegedly occupied by “militants.” Two other missiles were fired at a car, killing three people. On Friday, three more people, also described as “militants,” were killed in a separate attack.

The choice of targets for these missiles—fired remotely by CIA employees sitting before video screens in Langley, Virginia—was evidently political. The Obama administration and the Pentagon have been pressuring the Pakistani government to launch an offensive in North Waziristan, but Islamabad has thus far refused.

Pakistani security forces have formalized a truce with Taliban elements in the area, and there are fears that

any move against them “will spark the nationalist elements of the [Pakistani] Army and ISI [Inter-Services Intelligence] to side with the pro-Islamists, and spark a civil war within the military,” according to a US intelligence official who spoke to the *Long War Journal*.

The unprecedented barrage of missiles is a none-too-subtle message to Pakistan's government that, if it will not do as Washington commands, the CIA and the US military will do it themselves.

Meanwhile, according to the *Los Angeles Times*, there is a heated debate within the US administration over a proposal to extend the Predator missile strikes into Baluchistan, Pakistan's largest province, and even target its capital, the crowded city of Quetta, where some Afghan Taliban leaders have allegedly sought refuge.

The increasingly aggressive and adventurist US policy toward Pakistan raises the threat that Obama's surge will profoundly destabilize the nuclear-armed nation and create the conditions for a far wider and more catastrophic war.

On the other side of the border, civilian casualties continue to mount as elements of the surge strategy are put in place.

Three unarmed civilians were killed and a woman wounded when US helicopter gunships swept down and opened fire on their minivan as they traveled down Afghanistan's main southern highway late Thursday night. A spokesman for the US-led occupation forces said that the helicopters were responding to a report of men planting IEDs (improvised explosive devices) on the road.

US military commanders have warned that the surge will entail a sharp increase in American and Afghan casualties. Incidents like the one Thursday night will increase even more as the US military unleashes bombs, missiles and artillery barrages in the name of

“force protection.”

Much of the increased killing, however, will be far more carefully targeted. As the *Los Angeles Times* reported Thursday, “The US military command has quietly shifted and intensified the mission of clandestine special operations forces in Afghanistan.”

The report indicates that these secretive units have been ordered to mount a campaign of assassinations aimed at eliminating leaders, members and supporters of the Taliban—a term that is loosely applied by Washington and the media to any Afghan resisting foreign occupation.

“The number of raids carried out by such units as the Army’s Delta Force and Navy’s Seal Team Six in Afghanistan has more than quadrupled in recent months,” the newspaper reported.

According to the *Times*, these units had been employed in the Afghan theater largely to pursue members of Al Qaeda. Now, however, the Pentagon has ordered them to shift their focus to the Afghan resistance.

Apparently, under the guise of “protecting the Afghan people,” the US strategy will involve the deployment of conventional combat troops to “clear and hold” population centers, using raids and repression to squeeze out resistance elements, who can then be hunted down in more rural areas.

The character of the Obama surge has also been illuminated by a report released Wednesday by a Senate subcommittee charged with contract oversight, which found that between June and September of this year there has been a 40 percent increase in the number of civilian contractors working for the Pentagon in Afghanistan. This includes the doubling of private security contractors over the same period, from 5,000 to 10,000.

According to a report prepared by the Congressional Research Service, the total number of contractors in Afghanistan is expected to rise to between 130,000 and 160,000, far outnumbering uniformed military personnel.

Finally, US Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry (a retired general who formerly commanded US troops occupying the country) assured Afghan officials in a speech at the puppet government’s Ministry of Foreign Relations, that Washington has no intention of ending the US military occupation,

Obama’s pledge to begin pulling out troops in July 2011 notwithstanding.

“This is not a deadline, despite what some people in the United States and Afghanistan have said,” Eikenberry told his audience. He insisted that “our military commitment will not end or decline even as our combat forces [withdraw].”

In other words, promises to begin pulling out of Afghanistan within a year and a half are meant solely for domestic consumption—a means of deceiving the American people about the real nature of the US intervention. For the officials of the Karzai regime, whose survival depends entirely on the protection of US troops, the truth is important: Washington intends to militarily occupy Afghanistan on a permanent basis.

Thus, the outlines of Obama’s escalation begin to emerge. It entails a dangerous expansion of the war into Pakistan, a sharp increase in civilian casualties, the use of assassination squads to murder suspected members of the resistance, and the employment of mercenaries on an unprecedented scale. It is in all respects a dirty, colonial-style war aimed at suppressing popular resistance and subjugating Afghanistan—and ultimately the entire oil-rich region of Central Asia—to US domination.

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