

Obama administration pushes for more war funding

Bill Van Auken
27 March 2010

Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton appeared on Capitol Hill Thursday, March 25, to launch the Obama administration's drive to secure nearly \$40 billion in supplemental appropriations, the bulk of it to fund the escalation of the Afghanistan war.

The push for additional off-the-books funding for the current fiscal year comes as Congress is also debating the administration's proposed \$159 billion to pay for the wars and occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan in fiscal year 2011. The request for the Pentagon's so-called base budget, which covers military spending outside of the war costs, amounts to \$548.9 billion.

In her opening remarks, Clinton was compelled to acknowledge the implications of the massive war spending—a total of \$322 billion for the current and next fiscal years—under conditions in which funding is being cut for vital social programs, deficits are soaring and next to nothing has been done to create jobs for the country's 15 million unemployed.

"I am well aware of the economic strain we all face here at home," declared Clinton. Referring to Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan as "front-line states," she justified the spending, insisting that "the challenges we face demand that we draw on all of the tools of American leadership and American power."

Defense Secretary Gates sounded a similar note. "These times of economic and fiscal stress place enormous pressure on all of us to be good stewards of taxpayers' dollars," he said in his opening remarks. "However," he continued, "even at a time of budget pressures, I believe it is critical to sustain an adequate, sustainable level of investment in the instruments of national security—be it defense, diplomacy, or development—that are so essential to America's security and position in the world."

Gates delivered an extremely cautious assessment of the results produced by the ongoing escalation of the war in Afghanistan, stating that there existed "grounds for guarded optimism," but that there would be "many long and tough days ahead."

The defense secretary added that he "would also caution against an overly ambitious view of what true stability and security will look like in a place that has known nothing but war for three decades."

Gates reported that the total number of US troops in Afghanistan would reach approximately 98,000 by the end of September. Last December, President Barack Obama announced his "surge" in Afghanistan by ordering the deployment of an additional 30,000 US soldiers and Marines there.

In testimony before the House appropriations panel on Tuesday, Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that by this summer, there will be more US forces in Afghanistan than in Iraq for the first time since 2003. He said that 97,000 troops are presently deployed in Iraq. Under a US-Iraqi agreement, US troop levels in Iraq are supposed to fall to 50,000 by next September, although US commanders have reserved the right to halt the drawdown if political instability leads to renewed fighting.

The appearance of Gates and Clinton together was aimed at promoting the conception that the wars being waged by Washington are, in the secretary of state's words, "a fully integrated civilian and military effort, one in which security gains are followed immediately by economic and political gain."

Yet the funding request is overwhelmingly geared to paying for stepped-up military operations. The Pentagon would receive \$33 billion of the supplemental funding, the bulk of it going for the war in Afghanistan. Only \$4.5 billion would be allocated for civilian

operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan. The remainder would go to pay for US operations in Haiti.

When the administration requested an \$80 billion supplemental funding bill to pay for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in April of last year, President Obama vowed that this would be the last such request.

He criticized the Bush administration for having submitted 17 separate emergency supplemental funding bills totaling \$822 billion—all passed by Congress with Democratic support.

“We must break this recent tradition [of supplemental funding] and include future military costs in the regular budget so that we have an honest, more accurate, and fiscally responsible estimate of federal spending,” he wrote at the time. “And we should not label military costs as emergency funds so as to avoid our responsibility to abide by the spending limitations set forth by Congress.”

This new supplemental funding bill is expected to sail through Congress with the backing of both the Democratic and Republican leadership.

In a budget hearing last week, Secretary of the Army John McHugh was unabashed in admitting that such supplemental funding measures would continue. Asked by Senator John McCain, the ranking Republican member of the Senate Armed Services Committee whether the military really needed such bills, McHugh replied, “If we’re going to operate in these types of theaters, yes, we absolutely do.”

Both the Senate and House appropriations committees will take up the emergency supplemental funding measure next month after returning from Congress’s two-week recess that begins March 27.

Meanwhile, the bloodshed in Afghanistan continued unabated. At least two Afghan civilians were killed and four others wounded late Wednesday night when their house was hit by a mortar round fired by NATO troops.

The incident took place in the Ali Sher district of Afghanistan’s southeastern Khost province after insurgents attacked a base of the occupation troops. The NATO response included the mortar fire, which killed a teenage couple and wounded a man, his wife and two of their children.

The US commander in Afghanistan, Gen. Stanley McChrystal, has publicly stated a commitment to curtailing the slaughter of civilians, issuing orders restricting the use of aerial bombardments and night

raids by US special operations troops. Nonetheless, the killings of civilians continue.

The *New York Times* reported Friday that while McChrystal has also ordered stricter limits on shooting at Afghans who pose supposed threats to troops manning roadblocks and moving in convoys, it has failed to stem these killings.

“We have shot an amazing number of people, but to my knowledge, none has ever proven to be a threat,” the *Times* quoted McChrystal as telling troops in a recent video conference.

Citing United Nations figures, the newspaper reported that 36 civilians were killed in such shootings last year and 41 in 2008. The real toll is believed to be far higher, as these figures do not account for Afghans killed by US military contractors.

As an example of such killings, the *Times* pointed to the case of Mohammed Yonus, 36, described as an “imam and a respected religious authority” who taught 150 students at a madrasa in Kabul. While traveling to the school two months ago, he passed a military convoy and soldiers opened fire “ripping open his chest as his two sons sat in the car.”

According to the *Times* the killing turned people in Yonus’s village of Hodkail against the occupation. It quoted a village elder, Naqibullah Samim: “The people are tired of all these cruel actions by the foreigners, and we can’t suffer it anymore. The people do not have any other choice; they will rise against the government and fight them and the foreigners. There are a lot of cases of killing of innocent people.”

Wednesday also saw the deaths of two US Marines, Sgt. Maj. Robert Cottle, 45, and Lance Cpl. Rick Centanni, 19, who were killed when their vehicle hit a roadside bomb. The latest casualties brings the number of troops of the US-led occupation forces killed in Afghanistan to 1,700, according to figures compiled by the web site icasualties.org.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact