Fourteen more US troops killed in Afghanistan: What are they dying for?

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Another 14 US troops have been killed in Afghanistan since Saturday, with the death toll so far this year already rising to the level reached for all of 2009.

A pair of roadside bombings took the lives of seven soldiers on Monday, five of them dying in a blast that tore apart a Humvee in which they were riding. Bomb blasts took the lives of four others in southern Afghanistan over the weekend, while three were killed in clashes with armed groups resisting the US-led occupation.

These latest deaths bring US fatalities for the month to nearly 50, after the record 65 killed in July.

NATO has announced that it is investigating yet another report of civilians killed in a US bombing. The air strike last Thursday hit children who were collecting scrap metal on a mountain in the province of Kunar, which borders Pakistan. A local police commander said that the six children killed by the US bombs were aged six to 12. Another child was seriously wounded.

After a much-reported decline in US air strikes, attributed to orders from sacked US senior commander in Afghanistan Gen. Stanley McChrystal that were designed to reduce civilian casualties, such strikes are back up again. According to figures released by the Air Force, US warplanes flew 5,500 "close air support" missions in June and July of 2010, compared to 4,600 in the same months last year.

With the Obama administration's Afghanistan surge having brought US troops up to the full strength of nearly 100,000, together with another 40,000 troops from NATO and other allied countries, fighting has intensified and casualties among both US troops and Afghan civilians are up sharply. New revelations of rampant corruption and CIA payoffs to the US-backed Kabul government raise the inescapable question: What are they dying for?

Among the bodies shipped back to the US through Dover Air Base in flag-draped coffins this past week was that of a 20-year-old from Elizabeth, New Jersey, Army Specialist Pedro Millet, who was killed by an improvised explosive device in southern Afghanistan.

"I feel like someone ripped my heart out. I have no heart. My baby is gone," the soldier's mother, Denise Meletiche, told reporters outside her home after making the painful journey from the base in Delaware. She said that her son had joined the Army without telling her, explaining only afterwards that he did it to get money to go to college. "I was against the Army," she said. "I'm against war."

The soldier's stepfather said that Army recruiters had been allowed into Pedro's high school and enticed him into joining the military. "We're losing kids in a war, and what are they doing about it?" he said. "This is ridiculous."

What can justify such human sacrifices? Obama, like Bush before him, has tried to frighten the American people into supporting this brutal war by claiming it is necessary to defeat terrorism. This is just as much a lie coming out of the Democratic president's mouth as it was when uttered by his Republican predecessor.

US military and intelligence officials have repeatedly acknowledged that there are less than 100 Al Qaeda members in all of Afghanistan—compared to 100,000 US troops. Moreover, the 91,000 classified documents released by WikiLeaks, most of them battlefield reports, make virtually no mention of American troops pursuing terrorists. On the contrary, they are fighting to suppress resistance to foreign occupation, a resistance that enjoys broad support from the Afghan people.

A recent poll taken in Helmand and Kandahar provinces by the International Council on Security and

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Development, a London-based think tank, bears this out. It found that three quarters of the male population believed it was wrong to collaborate with the US-led occupation forces. Roughly the same share said that the Afghan government officials in the area were connected either to drug traffickers or to the armed groups opposing the occupation.

These figures are essentially in sync with those reported by the Pentagon itself in the spring, indicating that less than a quarter of the people in the areas where US forces are battling to suppress Afghan resistance support the government of President Hamid Karzai.

Another study released by the United Nations last January provided a vivid illustration of why Karzai and his cronies are so hated. It found that 52 percent of Afghan adults had been forced to pay at least one bribe to a public official in the previous 12 months, and that, collectively, Afghans had paid out $2.49 billion in bribes in 2009, an amount equal to nearly one-quarter of the country's gross domestic product.

In a television interview broadcast at the beginning of this month, Obama admitted to the American people that "Nobody thinks that Afghanistan is going to be a model Jeffersonian democracy."

What an understatement! As media revelations of the past several days have made clear, the US-backed regime in Afghanistan is made up of warlords, drug dealers and kleptocrats, most of whom are on the payroll of the US Central Intelligence Agency.

Figuring prominently among them is Mohammed Zia Salehi, the chief of administration for the Afghan National Security Council, who was arrested by a US-created Afghan anti-corruption unit in July for taking bribes and attempting to quash an investigation into a company that is reportedly at the center of money laundering for corrupt officials and heroin traffickers. President Karzai intervened immediately to free the aide and block the investigation into the company.

The *New York Times*, citing senior officials in both Washington and Kabul, established that Zia Salehi had been on the CIA payroll for "many years."

Before joining the Afghan government, the official had served as spokesman for the Northern Alliance warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum, also on the CIA payroll. Dostum earned his money in part by massacring thousands of unarmed Taliban prisoners in the desert near Mazar-i-Sharif during the US invasion in the fall of 2001.

Earlier it was revealed that President Karzai's half-brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, was also collecting a CIA paycheck while presiding over both drug trafficking and death squads in Kandahar.

During his West Point speech last December announcing his 30,000-troop surge, Obama insisted that "The days of providing a blank check are over. We'll support Afghan ministries, governors and local leaders that combat corruption and deliver for the people."

Indeed, the checks are not blank. They bear generous figures and are signed by the CIA. They are going to criminal officials who have sold their loyalty to Washington, but are hated by their own people.

These checks are the unmistakable hallmark of a puppet regime installed in the attempt to assert neo-colonial US control in Afghanistan, against the will of the country's population. This war is not aimed against terrorism. Rather, young American soldiers, drawn overwhelmingly from the working class, are being sent to kill and die in the interests of a US financial aristocracy that is determined to advance its interests by militarily establishing hegemony over Central Asia and its vast energy resources. Working people at home are forced to bear the cost of militarism as hundreds of billions of dollars worth of cuts are imposed on jobs and social services to pay for war.

What is required is the revival of a genuine movement against war, based on the working class and joined with the struggle to defend jobs and living standards against the onslaught being carried out by the banks and corporations and their government.

It must raise the demand for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US and other foreign troops from Afghanistan and Iraq, and for all those in both the Bush and Obama administrations who are responsible for these wars of aggression to be held accountable for war crimes.

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