

General Petraeus calls for 2,000 more troops to Afghanistan

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General David Petraeus, the US/NATO commander in Afghanistan, has called for 2,000 more troops to be deployed. He made the request just days after the last of the 30,000 additional American troops in the Obama administration's surge arrived, pushing the total US and NATO occupation force to over 150,000.

Officials leaked Petraeus's request ahead of a meeting in Washington yesterday between Obama and NATO secretary general Anders Fogh Rasmussen, and a planned NATO summit in Lisbon on November 19-20. An anonymous NATO official indicated that at least 750 of the troops would be requested for training Afghani government army and police personnel. He gave no indication as to the role of the other 1,250. The general's request has reportedly been "relayed" already to the 28 member states of the NATO alliance.

The call for more troops is calculated to increase political pressure on various European governments and non-NATO US allies, such as Australia, to boost their contributions to the occupation. Pentagon spokesman Colonel Dave Lapan told Reuters yesterday that the Obama administration would "look for NATO to first fill that requirement".

Petraeus's request is a further reflection of the fact that the war has become a quagmire. After nine years, the conflict has no end in sight. In every country that has deployed troops, there is rising popular opposition and calls for withdrawal. The dispatch of even more troops, however, is the inevitable logic of the failing neo-colonial attempt to transform Afghanistan into a client state that the US can use as a base to dominate the resources of Central Asia, against key regional rivals such as China and Russia.

Obama's troop surge has not curbed Afghan resistance. Opposition to the foreign occupation and its corrupt puppet government headed by President Hamid Karzai has instead seen the Taliban-led insurgency grow in size and extend its

operations well into areas north of the capital Kabul.

The intensified fighting has caused a spike in casualties. American and NATO deaths in Afghanistan for 2010 have reached 502, compared to 521 in all of 2009. US casualties for the year, currently 330, are already the highest annual toll of the war. Thousands of other occupation troops have been wounded.

The staggering scale of the losses being suffered by the Afghanistan government's army and police, as well as their demoralisation, was indicated by Lieutenant General Bill Caldwell, the head of the NATO mission to train them. He estimated last month that the occupation forces would need to recruit 141,000 people to increase the size of the Afghani security forces from 250,000 to more than 300,000 over the next 15 months. In other words, NATO expects some 90,000 local soldiers and police—one in three—to be either killed, wounded, injured, desert or resign over the coming period.

No-one in the White House, the Pentagon or NATO countries takes seriously Obama's so-called July 2011 timetable to begin to draw down American troop numbers. It is based on a scenario that sizeable sections of the dysfunctional Afghani military would be able to replace US forces in major combat operations. Even optimistic analysts do not anticipate such a situation for two, three or maybe five years.

NATO's best case scenario is that Afghan troops could be responsible for all security operations by the end of 2014. NATO chief Rasmussen, however, pointed to the reality of an indefinite war yesterday, telling journalists in Washington that any troop withdrawals were "condition-based not calendar driven". Rasmussen stated: "I give you no guarantee that we will be in that position by the end of 2014. We will not leave until we have finished our job."

The parliamentary election scheduled to take place on

September 18 is shaping up as yet another debacle for the US-led occupation. The Karzai government's Independent Electoral Commission has already announced that 938 out of 6,835 polling booths will not even open due to Taliban influence where they are located. The turn-out in the majority ethnic Pashtun south of the country, where the Taliban is strongest, is expected to be minimal.

Across Afghanistan, the parliament is viewed with as much contempt as Karzai, who retained the presidency after an openly rigged election last year. Parliamentarians are widely considered as corrupt figureheads for the various warlords and ethnic powerbrokers who dominate over regions of the country, in collaboration with the occupation forces and the central government.

Revelations that numerous figures in the Karzai government are on the payroll of the Central Intelligence Agency, and that billions of dollars have been squirreled out of Afghanistan by people with connections to the pro-US regime, have heightened popular resentment.

A public servant in Kabul told Reuters: "Many [politicians] are just after making themselves rich and working for their own interests. I do not want to vote because I have lost my trust in the government, parliament and the election under the current situation."

Fear over the amount of cash that is being removed from the country contributed to a run on a major bank, the Kabul Bank, last week, after two of its top executives were removed by the Central Bank for giving large loans to relatives of Karzai and one of his vice-presidents to make real estate purchases in the Middle East.

An investor queuing to withdraw his savings told *Time*: "Corruption and nepotism are rotting the system, both public and private." Another declared: "There are no standards in our banking system or our government. How can we trust anymore?" The Central Bank has reportedly intervened to provide as much as \$300 million to enable Kabul Bank to pay out hundreds of businessmen closing down their accounts.

Anger toward the occupation boiled over on Monday as word spread of plans by a Florida-based church, the Dove World Outreach Center, to burn copies of the Quran on the anniversary of 9/11. Hundreds of Kabul residents demonstrated in the streets to demand the withdrawal of foreign troops and denounce the war as an attack on the Islamic faith of the majority of Afghans.

Both General Petraeus and NATO head Rasmussen issued nervous condemnations of the reactionary book-burning plans, warning that it would only fuel support for the Taliban insurgency.

On Monday, the Taliban leadership issued a statement calling for a mass boycott of the September 18 election, describing it to AFP as "a process orchestrated by the foreign occupiers, in the interests of the foreign occupiers". Taliban spokesman Zabibullah Mujahid declared that attacks would be launched on people seeking to vote.

The Taliban also dismissed the weekend announcement by President Karzai of a "High Peace Council", or *shura*, to arrange talks between the government and the insurgents. Taliban spokesman Qari Muhammad Yousaf told Afghan Islamic Press (AIP): "The *shura* makers and its members are slaves of others and they have no power. All problems are because of the presence of occupying forces. All the problems will be resolved after the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan."

The *New York Times* revealed on September 6 that an earlier plan to bribe rank-and-file Taliban fighters to lay down their arms has failed. The Afghani government's "Peace and Reconciliation Commission" did not receive the vast bulk of the \$250 million in funding from the US and other occupying countries it was promised. During the most intense fighting season of the year, it spent barely \$200,000 trying to buy-off insurgents, with dismal results. Only "several hundred" changed sides, according to a US official. By contrast, NATO estimated that the Taliban had increased its strength to 25,000 fighters by the end of 2009.



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