

The Afghan peace talks and the “war on terror”

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US and NATO officials revealed earlier this month that they are facilitating talks between senior Taliban leaders and the Afghan government of Hamid Karzai—a regime that Washington and its allies have sustained in power through a nine-year-long counter-insurgency war.

Based on information fed it by the Obama administration and the US national security apparatus, the *New York Times* reported that US and NATO forces have ensured the safe conduct of Taliban leaders to Kabul, including providing air transport for at least one leader of the insurgency.

Soon after, Gen. David Petraeus, the US commander of all foreign forces in Afghanistan, and NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen publicly spoke of their role in enabling Taliban leaders to join the peace talks.

At the request of the White House, the *Times* is withholding the names of the Taliban officials involved in the talks, but they are said to include at least three leaders of the Quetta Shura and one leader of the Peshawar Shura.

Since 2008, the beleaguered Karzai regime has been seeking talks with at least sections of the Taliban and allied anti-occupation groups, using Saudi Arabia as a go-between. The admission that Washington is itself assisting such negotiations represents a significant shift and is yet another indication of the crisis confronting the US-NATO intervention in Afghanistan.

The Obama administration has dramatically expanded the Afghan War. It has more than tripled the number of US troops in Afghanistan to over 100,000, bringing the total number of foreign troops deployed there to more than 150,000, and it has bullied Pakistan into mounting major military operations in its Pashtun-speaking borderlands.

But the US-NATO forces have failed to stanch, let alone defeat, the insurgency. The corrupt and repressive Karzai government is reviled by the Afghan people as a colonial puppet regime, dependent upon massive US-NATO firepower to maintain control over Afghanistan’s major urban centers. Popular opinion in the US, Britain and other NATO countries has shifted sharply against the war, and a number of countries, including the Netherlands and Canada, have withdrawn or announced plans to withdraw their troops.

The US ruling elite and its military are determined to prevail in Afghanistan no matter the cost in lives and the devastation wreaked on Afghan society. But there is a growing apprehension in Washington that the heavy commitment of US geo-political and military power to waging war in Afghanistan is weakening the US in the face of other challenges, including China and Iran. Hence the interest in seeing whether a deal can be made with sections of the Taliban, offering them a role in a reconfigured but still US-dominated regime in exchange for renouncing the insurgency.

Of course, this new ploy undermines the entire public rationale for the war in the first place. The invasion and occupation of Afghanistan have been promoted and justified by the entire US establishment as vital to the “war on terror.” Only, or so the story goes, by crushing the Taliban can the safety of the American people be secured.

But now, to better serve US interests in Central Asia, sections of the Taliban are apparently to be brought in from the cold. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently told ABC’s “Good Morning America” that she does not discount the possibility that Washington and its Afghan clients will cut a deal with those whom the US press and politicians have denounced ad infinitum as Islamist fanatics and terrorists.

“You don’t make peace with your friends,” said Clinton. She added that although she thought it “unlikely that the leadership of the Taliban that refused to turn over bin Laden in 2001 will ever reconcile” with Washington, “stranger things have happened in the history of war.”

The truth is that the “war on terror,” like Iraq’s alleged “weapons of mass destruction,” was a pretext, a propaganda ruse, invoked to justify the pursuit of US imperialism’s predatory agenda. The US ruling class seized on the still unexplained events of September 11, 2001 to implement long-planned changes in Washington’s geopolitical-military strategy, waging wars in Afghanistan and Iraq with the aim of gaining a stranglehold over the world’s principal oil exporting regions and thereby arresting the historic decline in the world position of US capitalism.

By occupying Afghanistan, Washington sought to secure a strategic beachhead in Central Asia, which has exportable oil reserves second only to the Middle East. Afghanistan, moreover, borders on China and Iran and lies close to Russia, three countries whose ambitions have long been viewed with suspicion and hostility by the US.

In sponsoring talks with the Taliban and Taliban-aligned groups such as the militia led by the Hekmatyars, Washington is renewing old acquaintances. The leaders of the Taliban, and for that matter the leaders of Al Qaeda, including Osama bin Laden, were US allies and CIA “assets” in the anti-Soviet war that the Islamic fundamentalist Mujahedeen waged during the 1980s.

This war, as Zbigniew Brzezinski, US President Jimmy Carter’s national security advisor, has boasted, was fomented by the US in the late 1970s. With the aim of luring the Soviets into invading Afghanistan, ensnaring it in a Vietnam-type guerrilla war, and transforming the Central Asian country into a Cold War killing field, the US instigated tribal and Islamist opposition to a pro-Soviet government in Kabul.

A decade after the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, Washington came to view some of its former Mujahedeen allies as obstacles to its drive to establish US hegemony over Central Asia and launched its colonialist project in Afghanistan.

The second pretext the US and its allies have cited to justify the Afghan war—that they are waging war for

democracy—is equally threadbare. The Karzai government is a regime of corrupt war lords, many of them fervent Islamic fundamentalists. Like last year’s Afghan presidential election, this September’s parliamentary elections saw massive vote-rigging and other anti-democratic practices, including the arbitrary exclusion of candidates deemed inimical to Karzai and his allies.

The revelation that Kabul is involved in peace discussions with Taliban leaders suggests a possible shift in US tactics. No one should have any illusion, however, as to Washington’s brutal aims. The talks are viewed as complementary to the “surge”—a massive increase in violence now being mounted by the US-led occupation forces.

Since General Petraeus took over command of Afghan operations in July, the number of air attacks has more than tripled, reaching 700 in September. And Special Forces death squads are reportedly carrying out 10 missions a day.

As in Iraq, where Petraeus engineered a similar strategy, the US military aims to inflict maximum death and destruction against insurgent groups while at the same time seeking to split the armed resistance by offering political and financial pay-offs to those ready to accept US domination.

The Afghan war has been a criminal enterprise from its beginning nine years ago this month. That the Obama administration has massively expanded the war is testament to its basic role, which has been to deepen the drive of the US ruling elite toward reaction all down the line—militarism, the assault on democratic rights at home, the looting of the state to preserve the wealth of the financial aristocracy, and the attack on the living standards and rights of working people.

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