

NATO summit to embrace indefinite Afghan war

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The NATO summit that began yesterday in Lisbon, Portugal has one primary objective in regards to the US-led war in Afghanistan: to shelve all talk of President Barack Obama's July 2011 deadline for beginning the withdrawal of troops.

In recent weeks, the Obama administration has banished the word "withdrawal" from its statements on Afghanistan. July 2011 has become simply the beginning of a "transition."

The end of 2014 is now being invoked by the US and its allies as the key date in the war. By that time, the Army and National Police of the puppet Afghan regime of President Hamid Karzai will purportedly be sufficiently large and trained to undertake the main combat operations against the Taliban and other anti-occupation insurgent organisations.

US special envoy Richard Holbrooke told reporters this week in Pakistan: "From Lisbon on, we will be on a transition strategy with a target date of the end of 2014 for Afghanistan to take over responsibility for leading the security." American forces would still remain after that date, however. "We have a transition strategy. We do not have an exit strategy," Holbrooke stressed.

The *New York Times*, having been briefed by administration officials, on November 14 summed up Obama's perspective: "By the end of 2014, American and NATO combat forces could be withdrawn if conditions warrant, although tens of thousands very likely will remain for training, mentoring and other assistance, just as 50,000 American troops are still in Iraq."

In other words, Washington plans an indefinite presence of US occupation forces in Afghanistan. Even if "conditions warrant" that foreign troops are not required for direct combat by 2014—a prospect dismissed by virtually all analysts—the Pentagon will assert that an enduring presence is required to provide "training, mentoring and assistance."

This is particularly the case as Afghanistan has no air force. The US military intends to operate indefinitely from the

massive air base it has constructed at Bagram, in the very heart of Central Asia.

The repudiation of withdrawal timetables underscores that Obama's rhetoric was always a cynical exercise in deception. The truth is that both parties of American imperialism, Democratic and Republican, are equally committed to imposing a permanent US military footprint in two of the key energy-producing regions of the world, Central Asia and the Middle East.

The fundamental motive of the wars, carried out under the fraudulent banner of a "war on terrorism," has been to gain for American corporations a greater share in the exploitation of lucrative resources and position the US military to disrupt or even shut down energy supplies to strategic rivals such as China.

For nine terrible years, significant sections of the impoverished but fiercely independent Afghan population have resisted the agenda of US imperialism and its allies. Tens of thousands have lost their lives, including thousands of women, children and elderly who have been slaughtered by air strikes or gunned down during raids on villages and homes. Amid the destruction and disruption of war, an unknown number have died from malnutrition, disease and lack of medical treatment.

Thousands have died in North West Pakistan as well, where the pro-US Pakistani government has waged brutal campaigns against tribal populations that support the Afghan resistance, and US Predator drones regularly unleash missiles against civilian sites allegedly sheltering insurgents.

The implications of the Lisbon summit for the people of Afghanistan and North West Pakistan are countless more years of death, destruction and terror.

Already, as part of Obama's surge, which boosted US and NATO troop numbers to 150,000, violence has been massively stepped up, with new offensives launched in Helmand and Kandahar provinces. Indicative of the brutal character of such

operations, the number of bombs being dropped over Afghanistan has soared. Over 1,000 bombing missions were conducted in October, compared with 660 in October 2009.

Heavy M1 Abrams tanks are being deployed to southern Afghanistan for the first time to assist Marines in suppressing the resistance they are encountering.

The civilian population is being subjected to indiscriminate collective punishment. A *New York Times* article on Tuesday reported that American troops are systematically destroying hundreds of civilian houses in former Taliban-controlled areas of Kandahar, on the grounds that they may be booby-trapped. In a statement that resonated with the brutality of the Vietnam War, the pro-occupation Afghan governor of Kandahar's Khosrow district, where as many as six villages have been levelled, told the *Times*: "We had to destroy them [the villages] to make them safe."

Equally reminiscent of Vietnam, US and NATO special forces units are carrying out an Operation Phoenix-style campaign of mass killing. An American commander gloated this week to the *Christian Science Monitor* that every 24 hours, special forces are "killing or capturing three to five mid-level enemy leaders and 24 enemy fighters."

If such a rate is sustained, close to 10,000 more Afghan lives will be extinguished just by the occupation death squads over the next 12 months.

The claim that the victims of the war are "terrorists" or a threat to the United States or any other country is a contemptible lie. The CIA itself has admitted that there are barely 50 to 100 people in all of Afghanistan with Al Qaeda links. Thousands of people are being killed, dragged off to prison or having their homes demolished because they are not prepared to accept foreign domination or a US puppet government.

What is taking place in Afghanistan is a calculated and murderous attempt to drown in blood the legitimate opposition among the population to the US-led occupation. In carrying out their neo-colonial agenda, the ruling classes of the occupying countries are likewise indifferent as to the toll of US and NATO troops killed, wounded and mentally destroyed. This year's death toll stands at 654 already, with well over 3,000 wounded. The overall number of US and NATO dead since the 2001 invasion has passed 2,200.

Various NATO and non-NATO US allies have stepped forward ahead of the Lisbon summit to pledge their continued participation in the war. Afghanistan and the "war on terrorism" continue to provide them a screen behind which they

can justify attacks on democratic rights at home, carry forward the expansion of their military forces, and insist on US backing for their own predatory colonial ambitions.

Germany is extending its mission until 2012 and increasing combat operations by its troops. Canada, which was to withdraw its contingent by the end of 2011, has announced it will leave a force of up to 1,000 "trainers" until 2014. France's defense minister, Alain Juppe, stated Wednesday that French troops would not leave until "Afghan authorities have the situation in hand."

The Australian prime minister, Julia Gillard, told a parliamentary debate last month that Australian forces would be involved in Afghanistan until "the end of decade at least".

The head of the British armed forces, General Sir David Richards, anticipated an even longer involvement. He declared this week that while most British combat troops may leave between 2012 and 2014, "everyone is clear that we will have to remain a lot longer than that."

In response to a journalist's question as to whether the US/NATO occupation could last "30 to 40 years," he replied, "I think it will."

The working class has no interest in the neo-colonial drive to subjugate the Afghan people. The governments of every country represented at the Lisbon summit, whether in North America, Europe or the Pacific, are presiding over social devastation on behalf of the same capitalist oligarchy in whose interests the war is being waged. At the same time, they are using claims of "terrorist threats" to strip away democratic rights and prepare the framework for police-states.

Not one more cent should be squandered on criminal wars of aggression. In response to the imperialist agenda being mapped out in Lisbon, the working class must take up a political struggle for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all American and other foreign troops from Afghanistan and the dismantling of the entire US and NATO war machine.

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