

# Obama's reign of terror in Afghanistan

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2010 was the bloodiest year of the now nine-year conflict in Afghanistan and the tribal border regions of Pakistan. Under the command of General David Petraeus, a massively expanded US and NATO force is waging a campaign of extermination against various ethnic Pashtun and Taliban-linked insurgent movements that have not accepted the foreign invasion of their country.

Still justified with threadbare rhetoric about fighting terrorism, the occupation is in fact a neo-colonial and criminal enterprise. Its motive is to crush resistance and transform Afghanistan into a US client state in the oil and gas-rich Central Asian region. It is part of a geo-political struggle for dominance over territory and lucrative resources, both in Afghanistan itself and in surrounding states, against US rivals such as China, Russia and Iran.

Obama had made the so-called “Af-Pak War” a cornerstone of his administration’s foreign policy. Since he took office in January 2009, American troop numbers in Afghanistan have been doubled to close to 100,000. Thousands of additional troops have also been sent by various NATO states, pushing the overall US-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to more than 150,000. By contrast, the Soviet force that occupied the country in the 1980s never exceeded 110,000.

The escalation of the war led to unprecedented violence and brutality in 2010. Thousands of US marines were sent into major offensives against Taliban strongholds in southern Afghanistan. In areas of Kandahar province, entire villages were razed to the ground, ostensibly to remove insurgent booby-traps. Kandahar itself, a city of 500,000, was turned into a maze of concrete blast walls and checkpoints. Residents are subjected to constant intimidation, searches and biometric eye scans.

Supplementing the offensives, there was a major intensification in US air strikes. In October, over 1,000 missions were flown, compared with 640 the year before. Every several days, ISAF is issuing a new press release hailing the slaughter from the air of another group of alleged insurgents.

Special forces death squads, tasked with assassinating or

detaining alleged insurgents, have increased their operations by 600 percent under Obama. The US military claimed that between mid-September and mid-December alone, such squads carried out 1,785 raids, killed or captured 880 “insurgent leaders”, killed a further 384 rank-and-file fighters and captured another 2,361 alleged insurgents.

The statistics only convey something of the reign of terror that such a scale of special forces’ operations represents. Villagers across insurgent-held areas of Afghanistan live in daily fear that their family will be the next targeted. Homes are smashed into in the dead of night, women and children bailed up with guns and the men blindfolded, bound and dragged away. If any resistance is shown, deadly force is used.

Captured men are subjected to intense interrogation and generally handed over by American personnel to be detained in the puppet Afghan government’s squalid and overcrowded prisons. The National Directorate of Security (NDS), which operates the prisons, is widely accused of abusing and torturing detainees.

Amnesty International’s Asia Pacific director, Sam Zarifi, told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation last month that the American system of handing detainees over to the NDS “is essentially a violation of international law”.

Despite the repression against the Afghan people, insurgent attacks against ISAF and Afghan government targets increased by 66 percent last year. Resistance broadened geographically as well, with the number of districts registering insurgent activity increasing.

American and NATO troops paid for Obama’s escalation with the highest number of casualties of the war. A total of 711 lost their lives—499 Americans, 103 British and 109 from other countries contributing troops to the occupation—compared with 521 in 2009 and 295 in 2008. As many as 3,000 were wounded, including dozens who suffered horrific injuries in roadside bombings.

The United Nations estimates that the number of Afghan civilian deaths soared in the first 10 months of

2010 by 20 percent to close to 5,500. A large number lost their lives as a result of detonating insurgent roadside bombs rigged to target ISAF or Afghan government forces.

The coming years are shaping up to be no less bloody than 2010. The Obama White House has repudiated any talk of withdrawing a substantial number of American troops by mid-2011. Instead, the end of 2014 has been adopted by NATO as the date when the pro-occupation Afghan army and police will be sufficiently trained to take over all security in the country. Even if such a perspective was realised, it is the intention of the US military to leave a substantial residual force in Afghanistan indefinitely.

The prospect of a direct US ground intervention into North West Pakistan is also becoming more likely. Under Obama, the CIA and military have dramatically stepped-up its covert and illegal campaign against tribal militants in the country's tribal agencies. A year-end report issued by the Conflict Management Centre found that there were at least 134 missile strikes launched by unmanned Predator drones last year in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, more than double the number in 2009. The report stated that 2,043 people, most of them civilians, have been killed in the last five years by US drone attacks, including 929 victims in 2010 alone, by far the bloodiest year. The report described the strikes as an "assassination campaign turning out to be revenge campaign."

A series of three drone strikes killed at least 19 people in the North Waziristan area on New Year's Day, an indication that 2011 will see an even worse death toll.

The hatred of US imperialism resulting from the mass killings is without doubt one factor in insurgent groups still being able to use tribal agencies as a safe haven for re-supply and recruitment. The vast majority of the people killed or maimed by Predator attacks are not fighters, but civilians. Pakistani sources estimate that the Obama administration has presided over the massacre of at least 1,300 men, women and children in North West Pakistan.

Among the numerous other crimes being committed in the Afghan war, extrajudicial assassinations and the targeting of civilian housing and vehicles are illegal under the Geneva Convention.

The Obama administration feels able to proceed with impunity, however. The European powers and Australia are complicit in the war, contributing troops and participating in US imperialist crimes. The United Nations is equally complicit, sanctioning the occupation

with resolutions and recognising the legitimacy of the utterly corrupt Afghan government of President Hamid Karzai. All the while, as governments impose unprecedented austerity budget cuts, lurid warnings of terrorist threats are being used to tear apart democratic rights and build-up the forces of state repression.

The mass media internationally plays a venal role, echoing the justifications for the war and obscuring its criminality. Even the publication in July by WikiLeaks of tens of thousands of US military documents revealing the murderous character of the death squad and assassination operations taking place in Afghanistan and Pakistan was passed over in a matter of days.

Every opinion poll verifies that there is overwhelming popular opposition to the war in Afghanistan in the US, Europe and internationally. It finds next to no political expression, however. The liberal and pseudo-left parties and organisations who promoted Barack Obama as the "antiwar" candidate in the 2008 US elections either openly support the occupation or are silent in the face of Obama continuing the imperialist agenda launched by the Bush White House.

The social force that must be mobilised against the war in Afghanistan is the working class in the United States, Europe and other countries taking part in the occupation. Against the perspective of years more carnage, workers and students should demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US and other foreign troops from Afghanistan and for those responsible for war crimes to be held accountable.

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