

Obama orders new Afghan surge

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7 January 2011

The Obama administration's decision to deploy another 1,400 US Marines in Afghanistan is the harbinger of a far bloodier war and a further indication that there will be no honoring of the president's December 2009 pledge to begin drawing down US forces next July.

Despite the superficial optimism that is the default mode of Gen. David Petraeus and the rest of the Pentagon command, the US military is mired in an intractable conflict with the people of Afghanistan, who refuse to accept foreign occupation and the semi-colonial subjugation of their country to the interests of US imperialism.

The response of the American ruling elite is to escalate the killing. The additional battalion of Marines is to be sent into the area around Kandahar within the next two weeks, according to a report published Thursday in the *Wall Street Journal*. A city of 500,000 people, Kandahar has long been a stronghold of the Taliban.

In an attempt to quell the growing insurgency, the US military has razed to the ground entire villages surrounding the city on the grounds that they have been booby-trapped or contain Taliban firing positions. The residents of Kandahar itself have been subjected to a state of siege, surrounded by checkpoints and blast walls and faced with continuous armed intimidation.

In addition to the Marine deployment, the Pentagon is reportedly preparing to replace support units deployed in Afghanistan with combat infantry forces in order to increase what the US military refers to euphemistically as "kinetic activity."

According to a report in *USA Today*, the Air Force has more than doubled the number of airmen deployed in Afghanistan as "joint terminal attack controllers." These forces are used to coordinate air strikes with ground units.

The increase is in preparation for a sharp escalation in

bombardments that will inevitably claim a growing number of Afghan lives. Last October, the US Air Force flew 1,000 sorties in which it bombed, rocketed or strafed Afghan targets, the largest number since the war began.

Despite this onslaught, the US military fears that its efforts will prove insufficient to quell the insurgency, which continues to grow and spread throughout Afghanistan. The Pentagon is particularly concerned that with the arrival of spring, which, with the opening of snow-bound mountain passes traditionally sees a "surge" by the armed resistance, it will confront an even deeper crisis and rising casualties.

The last year proved the deadliest in the decade-old US intervention. While the US-led occupation forces suffered 711 killed over the course of 2010, the carnage inflicted upon the Afghan population was far greater. According to figures compiled by the AFP news agency, some 10,000 Afghans, including civilians, members of the US-trained puppet security forces and those listed as "insurgents" or "militants" lost their lives in the course of the last year.

Undoubtedly, this is a significant underestimation of the real death toll. And it is certain that many of those listed as "insurgents" killed in combat—based upon the self-serving testimony of the US military command—were innocent civilians slaughtered in air raids or night raids by special forces killing squads.

A similar escalation in bloodshed has taken place across the border in Pakistan, where 929 people, the great majority of them civilians, were killed in the course of 134 drone attacks, according to figures compiled by the Conflict Monitoring Centre.

Even as the Obama administration is sending more troops into Afghanistan, there are barely concealed discussions within the White House and the Pentagon about authorizing cross-border raids by special forces units into Pakistan.

The killing spree on both sides of the border has failed to have the desired effect of diminishing the scale of the resistance.

"As much as we are hammering them in the south and east, their numbers aren't dwindling," a senior US official admitted to the *Wall Street Journal*. "They have so many young men who are disenfranchised, who have nothing better to do."

No doubt, the poverty and oppression confronting the vast majority of the Afghan population is a powerful wellspring of the armed resistance to a US-led occupation that is propping up a venal ruling elite represented by President Hamid Karzai and his cronies.

But it is also the "hammering" itself that creates countless new recruits for the insurgency. It is not a matter of young men with "nothing better to do," as the US official contemptuously put it, but rather Afghan sons, brothers and fathers who are determined to exact revenge for the murder of their relatives.

A case in point was revealed when villagers from southern Ghazni province drove to the provincial capital with the dead bodies of three Afghan civilians killed in a US special operations night raid in the Nawar District.

The villagers said that the US forces swooped in on helicopters, cordoned off the area and attacked a religious school in the village of Qala-i-Naw.

Hundreds of Afghans surrounded the bodies chanting "death to America." Ghulam Ali Akhlaqi, a resident of the village and teacher at the school which was attacked, brought with him a copy of the Quran that was riddled with bullets. "There are no Taliban or insurgents in our area," he said, "but innocent people were killed on the basis of wrong information that resulted in the desecration of our holy book."

Such raids, repeated day after day, create an inexhaustible pool of recruits for the armed resistance.

The failure of repression to produce the desired results has created a palpable sense of frustration in the US military command, reflected in a column published in *Newsweek* magazine by Bing West, a former assistant secretary of defense and Pentagon consultant. West voices the usual complaints about Taliban "sanctuaries" across the Pakistan border—an echo of the US military's attempts to blame its Vietnam debacle on National Liberation Front safe havens in Cambodia and Laos—and "Afghanistan's wretched leadership."

His main concern, however, is that the US military has not been sufficiently focused on killing Afghans, whom he compares to the Apaches of the 19th century American West. The problem, he says, is "the emphasis America's senior officers have placed on winning hearts and minds as an end in itself, rather than as a means to identifying and killing insurgents. This policy has sapped the warrior ethos and fostered risk aversion."

Such fascistic ravings make clear that what is being prepared are war crimes on an even more horrific scale than those already inflicted upon the peoples of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

American troops are killing and dying in Afghanistan not to fight terrorism—even the US military and intelligence agencies acknowledge that Al Qaeda is virtually non-existent in the country. Rather, they have been sent to secure the interests of a US financial elite that is determined to use military force to offset the decline of American capitalism by imposing US hegemony over Central Asia and its vast energy reserves.

Hundreds of billions of dollars are being spent to sustain this criminal war, along with the continuing occupation of Iraq, as working people at home face mass unemployment and the demand for ever more draconian cuts in public education, health care and essential social services.

While the majority of the American people oppose the war, the Obama administration, supported by the Republicans, is determined to continue and escalate it to secure the aims of the financial aristocracy.

Only the revival of a genuine movement against war, based upon the working class and united with a struggle to defend jobs and living standards against the attacks of big business and its government, can bring an end to the killing.

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