The Kabul airport killings: What are US troops dying for?

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Wednesday's execution-style slaying of eight US troops and a civilian contractor at a supposedly secure military facility at Kabul airport underscores the crisis of the nearly decade-old US war in Afghanistan.

It was the seventh—and deadliest—such attack this year on American or other foreign occupation troops by a member of the US-trained Afghan security forces or someone dressed in their uniform.

The Americans killed in the attack were airmen assigned to train the fledgling Afghan air force, which consists of less than 50 aircraft—helicopters and transport planes—largely confined to routine transport missions.

This, under conditions in which the Pentagon is waging a massive air war in Afghanistan, with US Air Force and Navy warplanes flying nearly 35,000 close air support sorties last year alone. Bombing and strafing runs set new records every month, with 387 such attacks in January, compared to 157 during the same month in 2010.

The assailant was identified as Ahmad Gul, a 48-year-old veteran pilot, who had first been trained 20 years ago in an Afghan air force created under Soviet tutelage. He was shot to death in an exchange of gunfire after having "disarmed…and methodically killed" the nine Americans, according to ABC News.

The Taliban said that it was responsible for the attack, but Afghan officials dismissed the claim.

The alternative explanation is significantly worse. After nearly 10 years of occupation, broad sections of the Afghan population who have no connection to the Taliban are seething with hatred for US and other foreign troops, and this is finding deadly expression in attacks by members of the security forces who are supposedly Washington's allies.

There have been 20 such incidents of men in Afghan security force uniforms turning their weapons on US and other foreign troops since March 2009, four of them taking place this month.

Wednesday's incident was the most deadly in terms of US troops, but follows a similarly horrific attack on April 16 at a base in eastern Laghman province, where an Afghan soldier strapped on an explosive vest and blew himself up, killing six US soldiers, four Afghan troops and an interpreter.

These attacks have a devastating effect on the morale of American forces in Afghanistan and call sharply into question the purported strategy of the Pentagon and the Obama administration of preparing a US withdrawal by training Afghan security forces to take the place of the foreign occupation.

These Afghan troops are drawn from a population that has seen its conditions of life worsen, despite billions of dollars in foreign aid, not to mention the hundreds of billions in military expenditures, that have been poured into the country since October 2001. Last year, on average, eight Afghan civilians were killed every single day, this according to the exceedingly conservative estimate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

Recent atrocities have included the slaughter from the air last month of nine children, ages seven to 13, as they collected firewood. A similar incident was reported in southeastern Paktia province on Wednesday, with three youth searching on a mountain for a lost cow killed in an air strike. According to the counterinsurgency calculus of Gen. David Petraeus, the US Afghanistan commander and soon-to-be CIA director, each such death recruits 10 new fighters for the armed resistance.

Meanwhile, the US occupation force is inevitably identified with the puppet regime that it props up,

headed by Hamid Karzai, which is infamous for its corruption, incompetence and gross abuse of the population.

Young American soldiers, Marines and airmen are paying a terrible price in this colonial-style war. Since the war began, 1,562 American troops have lost their lives in Afghanistan, together with another 874 British, Canadian and other foreign troops. More than half of that toll has taken place over the last two years, since Barack Obama took office and organized his military "surge."

Many thousands more have suffered catastrophic wounds. In 2010, 171 of all the casualties brought to the Landstuhl US military hospital in Germany underwent amputations—11 percent of the total—while 61 of those wounded soldiers lost more than one limb. This is triple the rate of multiple amputations suffered by troops the previous year.

Among the recent casualties in Afghanistan is Capt. Joshua McClimans, who was killed last Friday when Afghan resistance forces fired on a forward operating base in Khost province, where he worked as part of the medical team. A native of western Pennsylvania, he left behind a wife, a young son and a step-daughter.

Among the comments posted on his death in the local newspaper was one from his uncle, who wrote that his nephew "only did the tour to better himself and his son, but instead it cost him his life." He added, "I just wish that this government would get their s--- together and stop all of this stupid fighting for other countries. There are people in our country that could use our help with all of the money we are spending…. Josh did not deserve this and neither does our family."

These are sentiments felt by masses of American working people, who know that they are being lied to by the Obama administration, just as they were under George W. Bush, about the real reasons for this unbearable human sacrifice.

After 10 years, the claim that American soldiers are killing and dying in Afghanistan as part of a "war on terrorism" stands exposed as a bloody fraud. According to the US military's own assessment, there are barely a handful of Al Qaeda operatives in Afghanistan, and none of the armed Afghan groups resisting the occupation have been linked to overseas acts of terror.

The war's real aim has nothing to do with protecting the American people, or bettering the lot of the Afghans. Rather it is being waged against the interests of both, to further the geo-strategic and profit aims of a ruling financial elite by asserting American hegemony over the energy reserves of the Caspian Basin and the pipeline routes to funnel them to the West.

Working people are forced to bear the cost of this imperialist adventure, both in terms of the young American troops, their sons and daughters, who are killed there, and in the hundreds of billions spent on this war, even as politicians of both major parties incessantly claim that there is no money for jobs, social services, education or health care.

The entire US political establishment is guilty of perpetuating this criminal war. So-called liberals who postured as opponents of war under the Bush administration have embraced imperialism under Obama, backing militarist interventions in Afghanistan and Libya as "good wars."

For its part, the media treats the continuous bloodshed in Afghanistan as virtually a non-event. Mass killings of American troops, like the one that took place at Kabul airport Wednesday, barely make the news.

A genuine fight against war can be organized today only through the independent political mobilization of the working class against the two big business parties and the profit system, which is the source of militarism. The struggle for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US troops from Afghanistan and Iraq and an end to US-led attacks on Libya must be linked to the fight to defend jobs and living standards against the relentless attacks of the banks, the corporations and their government.

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