

All US troops out of Afghanistan now!

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Obama's Wednesday night speech on "the way forward in Afghanistan" offered only years more of a dirty colonial war that both the American and the Afghan people overwhelmingly oppose.

The empty rhetorical claims that "the tide of war is receding" and "the light of a secure peace can be seen in the distance" are belied by the undeniable facts of Obama's so-called withdrawal plan.

In December 2009, when he launched his surge of 33,000 additional troops into Afghanistan, Obama told the American people that it was designed as a temporary measure, which would allow Washington to begin pulling out of Afghanistan within 18 months, that is, by July of this year.

But the plan announced from the White House will, by the end of this year, keep in Afghanistan nine out of ten of the American troops presently deployed there. By September of next year, the only forces to be withdrawn will be the 33,000 sent into the country in December 2009 on the pretext that their efforts would allow the rest of the US force to come home.

This entire withdrawal plan put forward by Obama will leave 68,000 US troops inside the impoverished, war-torn country into 2013—roughly double the number of US soldiers and Marines who were deployed there when the Democratic president took office at the beginning of 2009.

Following that, there is the vague pledge that by 2014 a "process of transition" would put Afghan puppet forces in charge of suppressing the popular resistance to the US-led occupation.

In reality, Washington is engaged in frantic negotiations with the regime of President Hamid Karzai aimed at securing a strategic partnership agreement that would grant the US access to permanent bases in Afghanistan and could well leave tens of thousands of American military personnel deployed there indefinitely.

The plan announced by Obama will spell an escalation rather than a reduction in the bloodshed in Afghanistan. The aim is to carry out a military offensive over this summer and the next in an attempt to militarily crush the popular opposition to US occupation. To the extent that the withdrawal affects firepower available to US commanders, it will inevitably lead to the use of more air strikes and drone missile attacks and, as a result, an even greater number of civilian casualties.

Among Obama's most cynical claims is that the limited withdrawal from Afghanistan will spell greater investment in jobs and a "focus on nation building here at home."

There is no question that the military decisions being taken in Afghanistan are driven in large part by the increasingly desperate crisis of US capitalism. The spending of \$1.3 trillion or more on the two wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, combined with the trillions more lavished upon the US military and intelligence complex, has played no small role in leading America into an economic shambles.

But the strategy of the US ruling elite, for whom Obama speaks, has not suddenly been transformed into peace abroad and social reforms at home. On the contrary, Washington has now launched new wars and military interventions in Libya and Yemen, and no doubt has plans for troop deployments elsewhere.

The explosive spread of militarism abroad is driven by the economic crisis. Having lost its position of unchallenged preeminence in the affairs of world capitalism, US imperialism leans ever more heavily on its residual military might to pursue its global interests and counter its capitalist rivals. This means in the first instance asserting hegemony in the energy-rich regions of Central Asia and the Persian Gulf.

At home, the financial oligarchy that rules America seeks to off-load the crisis of the profit system onto the

backs of the working class, pursuing a ruthless offensive against jobs, living standards, social benefits and basic democratic rights.

War abroad and the assault on the working class within the US itself are two sides of the same class policy that finds its expression in Obama's speech, which promises neither peace nor, for that matter, any peace dividend.

Within the existing political establishment and the two-party system the seething hostility to war felt by the majority of working people finds no genuine expression.

A central role in facilitating the expansion of US militarism is played by the official "antiwar" movement, dominated by a layer of the affluent middle class that supports the Democratic Party and has undergone a protracted shift to the right. Tailoring its activities to the electoral interests of the Democrats, it managed to smother the mass antiwar outpouring that was seen in 2003 on the eve of the Iraq invasion, when millions took to the streets in the US and around the world.

With the election of Barack Obama in 2008, this layer has integrated itself ever more closely into the Democratic Party's orbit.

Their outlook finds expression in the response to Obama's speech drafted for the *Nation* magazine by Tom Hayden, the former Vietnam War protester and longtime Democratic state legislator in California.

Entitled "Obama quickens Afghan withdrawal in face of pressure for peace," Hayden's article argues that Obama is "responding to massive public pressure for rapid troop withdrawals," adding that "Peace advocates should feel a sense of gratification."

He further insists that there will be a "strategic opportunity ... to demand more withdrawals during the key period of Democratic and Republican conventions next year and during the presidential campaign itself."

Once again, the aim of this layer is to subordinate opposition to the war to the Democratic Party. At the same time, Hayden provides Obama with an alibi for protracted war, writing, "There will be stages involved, because getting out of a military mess of your own making is one of the most difficult challenges."

In addition, Hayden writes that the "peace movement" should fight to "check Obama's executive ambitions towards Libya," a twisted formulation that

rejects opposition to the war on Libya itself, but only objects to the refusal of the White House to seek congressional authorization. In the US-NATO war on Libya, a whole layer of these ex-lefts has found its way to the open embrace of imperialism, based on the cynical slogan of "human rights".

The popular hostility against war that has been politically suffocated by the Democrats and their ex-left defenders can find genuine expression only through the mobilization of a mass independent political movement of the working class against the Obama administration, the two-party system and capitalism, which is the root cause of militarism.

The struggle against war must be joined with the struggle for jobs and the defense of living standards and vital social services against the onslaught that has been unleashed by the profit system. This can be achieved only on the basis of the socialist and internationalist program fought for by the Socialist Equality Party.

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