

Cameron visits Afghanistan as UK prepares further interventions in region

Julie Hyland
23 December 2011

A strict media blackout was in force for Prime Minister David Cameron's pre-Christmas visit to British troops in Afghanistan Tuesday.

The ostensible reason for Cameron's trip was to underscore his commitment to Britain's ceasing combat operations in Afghanistan by the end of 2014—the date when Afghan security forces are due to take over.

Currently, some 9,500 British troops are stationed in the Central Asian country, of whom only 500 are to be stood down next year. Cameron has indicated that he is in favour of a staggered withdrawal, but, like Washington, London has yet to set a timetable for further reductions past 2012.

The prime minister's trip coincided with remarks by the senior US commander in Afghanistan, General John Allen, to the *New York Times* that American forces could remain in the country beyond 2014. Allen has previously briefed against reducing US troops before the end of 2014, arguing that the force of 68,000 must remain at full strength until the formal transfer of power.

Any potential reduction in the number of troops in Afghanistan, as in Iraq, has nothing to do with an end to imperialist intervention in the Middle East and Central Asia.

The retention of thousands of "trainers" and "advisers" would enable London and Washington to maintain a strategic base in Afghanistan, while freeing up their military forces for a continuation and expansion of war throughout the region, and beyond.

This was underscored by the remarks made by Sir David Richards, chief of the defence staff, to the Royal United Service Institute think tank in London last week.

Fundamental shifts in the world's economic and military balance were in play, he said. Richards argued

that the security challenges now facing the UK included Iran and Syria, as well as the potential emergence of China as the world's dominant economic power.

Would China and the so-called BRIC countries [Brazil, Russia, India, China] be the UK's "natural allies or hostile competitors?" he asked.

Referring to the aggressive alliance struck between the US and Australia against China in recent weeks, Richards noted that "for the first time the Pentagon has specified that its main effort will be South East Asia."

US military focus on the Pacific meant "less emphasis on Europe and her problems". While the US would not "turn its back on Europe and NATO...countries this side of the pond need to think through what this means to us."

For that reason, Britain's defence policy had to be based on "carefully chosen alliances", Richards said. New allies would be required, "not only established ones like our NATO partners but also non-traditional countries which will challenge our interoperability but offer opportunity and reach."

This was the lesson from Afghanistan, Richards asserted, which had been put into operation in the military assault on Libya.

The "key" to the success of this intervention was "integrating the Qataris, Emiratis and Jordanians into the operation", he said. In addition to the Western-backed Transitional National Council—comprising US puppets and former members of the Gaddafi regime—these countries had made up the "land element" of the war.

London and Washington hope to implement a similar policy in Afghanistan. Cameron declared he had "some confidence [that] a level of reconciliation" is underway between the Taliban and President Hamid Karzai's regime.

As he spoke, US vice president Joe Biden told *Newsweek* that the Taliban were not an enemy of the US and should not be labelled as such. “There is not a single statement that the president has ever made in any of our policy assertions that the Taliban is our enemy because it threatens US interests.”

Of course this is a fraud. The Western powers justified their military intervention in Afghanistan by claiming that the Taliban constituted a specific threat to democracy, human rights and “Western values”. More recently, Obama specifically justified his “surge” of 30,000 additional troops in 2009 by claiming that it was to prevent “a Taliban take-over of the country.”

Tens of thousands of Afghan civilians and insurgents have died as a result of this intervention. As of the end of November, 2,744 coalition troops have been killed—391 of them British—and thousands more wounded and maimed.

Now London and Washington hope to cut a deal with sections of the Taliban, as a means of both disguising and consolidating their neo-colonial stranglehold over the country, and the region more generally.

US officials have reportedly held six meetings with Taliban representatives in Germany and Doha over the last months, although this has been denied by one senior Taliban commander.

“Reconciliation” plans are said to include opening a Taliban representative office in Afghanistan, Qatar or Saudi Arabia, and transferring Taliban prisoners from Guantanamo Bay to Afghanistan. In return, the Taliban is to take its part in government.

However, the plans have run into opposition from Karzai. Former Afghan president Burhanuddin Rabbani was killed in September in what was blamed on pro-Taliban forces based in Pakistan. Only last week, Afghanistan’s ambassador to Qatar was recalled in retaliation for reports that the latter was preparing to open a Taliban office. The Afghan government complained it had not been informed.

In the meantime, Western forces are maintaining aggressive operations in Afghanistan, particularly along its border with Pakistan, aimed at further weakening the Taliban, and the insurgency more generally. A NATO airstrike on November 26 killed 28 Pakistani soldiers. Pakistan condemned the attack as an invasion of its territory and boycotted the NATO conference in Bonn.

The CIA has launched more than 300 drone strikes

since 2004 on Pakistani territory, killing more than 2,300 people. Now evidence is emerging that Britain is complicit in these assaults, in which its citizens have been killed.

Malik Daud Khan died in a drone attack March 17 in North Waziristan, Pakistan, that killed 50 people. Lawyers acting for Khan’s son, Noor Khan, have requested Foreign Secretary William Hague to explain whether Britain handed over intelligence to the CIA to enable the assault.

Their letter cites reports that the UK has provided the US with “locational intelligence” derived from electronic interception, which is used to direct drone attacks in Pakistan.

It asks Hague “whether you accept that the attack on our client’s family and drone attacks in Pakistan generally are contrary to international law and, if not, why not?”

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has explained, the imperialist powers are determined to maintain bases in Afghanistan as a strategic beachhead in energy-rich Central Asia and as a potential launching pad for wars against Iran or China (See “US generals balk at Obama’s Afghanistan withdrawal plan”.)



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact