

Record opposition to Afghanistan war as killings mount

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28 March 2012

An opinion poll released Monday shows nearly seven out of 10 Americans opposing the war in Afghanistan, a record level of antiwar sentiment since the US invaded the country over a decade ago.

This new indication of rising hostility to the war came as the US-led occupation forces faced a new string of attacks by Afghan government security forces that have called into serious question Washington's strategy for a sustained military presence in the country.

Conducted by the *New York Times* and CBS News, the poll reflected the growth in popular revulsion toward the war in the wake of the horrific March 11 massacre of 17 Afghan civilians, most of them women and children, in Kandahar province. The Pentagon has claimed that this slaughter was the work of one "rogue" soldier, Staff Sgt. Robert Bales. Afghan villagers, however, have insisted that a number of US troops were involved in what they saw as a particularly brutal special forces "night raid" of the kind carried out across Afghanistan.

Sixty-nine percent of those responding to the poll said that US troops should not be in Afghanistan, with only 23 percent agreeing that the US government is doing the right thing by continuing the fighting there. That is the lowest level of support for the war ever recorded and is down from 36 percent last November.

These numbers indicate that public opposition to the war in Afghanistan is now higher than opposition to the Iraq war at the height of hostility to the Bush administration's policies there.

The poll showed that a plurality of 47 percent supported the speeding up of the withdrawal of all US troops from Afghanistan. President Barack Obama has said that by next September he will complete the pullout of the 33,000 troops that he ordered into the

country in December 2009 in a "surge" aimed at quelling the growth of armed resistance to foreign occupation. Under a NATO agreement, all of the US-led combat forces are supposed to be out of the country by the end of 2014.

The Pentagon has provided no timetable for the drawdown of forces between September 2012 and December 2014. Meanwhile, US officials are attempting to negotiate a "strategic partnership" agreement with the regime of President Hamid Karzai, providing for permanent US bases in the country and the continued presence of US troops in the guise of "trainers" and "advisors".

That strategy is predicated on the US and its NATO allies being able to train and deploy Afghan National Army and Afghan police forces, with US special operations troops embedded within their units, to control the country.

The viability of this plan has been called increasingly into question by the escalation in what the Pentagon and NATO refer to as "green on blue" violence, i.e., attacks by members of the Afghan security forces on the US and other NATO troops who are supposedly acting as their mentors and trainers.

Three more Western troops were killed in such attacks on Monday, and on Tuesday a suicide bombing plot aimed at the Afghan Defense Ministry and involving a number of Afghan soldiers was reported.

In the first of Monday's attacks, an Afghan National Army lieutenant shot and killed two British troops and severely wounded a third before being shot dead himself at the heavily fortified base in Lashkar Gah in Helmand province. The dead British soldier and Royal Marine were reportedly completing the last week of their deployment in Afghanistan.

In the second incident, at least one Afghan policeman

manning a checkpoint in eastern Afghanistan opened fire on US soldiers, killing one of them. Conflicting reports from Afghan authorities in Paktika province listed one Afghan policeman shot dead and another wounded in retaliatory gunfire and, alternatively, both policemen were said to have been wounded.

And on Tuesday, the Afghan Ministry of Defense was placed on a two-hour lockdown amid reports that 11 suicide bomb vests had been discovered inside the ministry and a similar number of Afghan soldiers had been arrested as suspects in what appeared to be a major “insider” bombing plot with the potential of inflicting massive casualties.

The Afghan government dismissed reports on the bombing plot, which apparently originated with the regime’s own intelligence officers, as “rumors.” The BBC’s correspondent in Kabul reported “officially the Afghan authorities want to play down a major security lapse that is highly embarrassing for the government.”

Nearly 75 US and NATO troops have been killed in these kind of attacks by ostensible Afghan “allies” since 2007, with 70 percent of these killings taking place in the last two years.

Gen. John Allen, the top US commander in Afghanistan addressed these attacks at a Pentagon press conference Monday. Indicating that more of them were to be expected, he described the attacks as “a characteristic of counterinsurgencies that we’ve experienced before.”

Allen insisted that many of the attacks “are not a direct result” of infiltration of the Afghan security forces by the Taliban. This claim provides cold comfort to US and NATO troops, however, as it indicates that apparently loyal members of these forces, such as the lieutenant who shot the two British troops on Monday, are reflecting the overwhelming hostility of the Afghan population to foreign occupation and are acting on their own accord. This makes such attacks all the more difficult to predict or prevent.

Such “insider” killings are devastating to troop morale. In a war where American and other foreign troops have come to view the entire population as the enemy, they now have to fear being killed by their supposed allies. “Although the attacks are relatively few in number, the effect they have is severe,” NATO’s senior civilian representative in Afghanistan, Sir Simon Gass, acknowledged in an interview with the

BBC.

In the Obama administration’s first official response to the new poll on Afghanistan, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta waved aside the staggering level of opposition. “We cannot fight wars by polls. If we do that we’re in deep trouble,” he told a press conference in Ottawa, Canada Tuesday after a meeting with the Canadian and Mexican defense ministers. Dismissing the views of the American people, Panetta said, “We have to operate based on what we believe is the best strategy to achieve the mission that we are embarked on.”

Panetta’s contempt for public opinion reflects the fact that mass opposition to the war in Afghanistan finds no expression whatsoever within the existing political setup and the two major political parties. As US troops continue to kill and die in a decade-old war, it is not even an issue in the 2012 election campaign.

Moreover, public protests against the crimes of US imperialism have virtually ceased. This is largely the result of the official “antiwar” movement, dominated by the politics of upper-middle-class liberals and ex-lefts, having integrated itself into the Democratic Party and dedicated its efforts to providing alibis for Obama’s expanding military aggression.

Nonetheless, opposition to the war is growing among American working people in combination with mounting anger over the unending attacks on jobs, living standards and social conditions. These mass political sentiments can find expression only through the independent mobilization of the working class against the Obama administration and the capitalist system, which is the source of war.



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