

US troop deaths in Afghanistan top 2,000

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2 October 2012

The 2,000th American soldier died in Afghanistan last weekend as the result of a so-called “insider” attack, underscoring the crisis of the 11-year-old US occupation. The 2,000 mark was quickly surpassed, with another three US troops losing their lives in a suicide bombing in the eastern city of Khost that killed at least 14 others, including a translator and six Afghan policemen.

The grim milestone actually underestimates the toll of what stands as America’s longest war. It counts only those US troops killed on Afghan soil. At least another 100 have died from their wounds after exiting the country.

This is not to mention the more than 17,000 US troops who have been wounded in the Afghan war, many of them suffering loss of limbs and grievous brain injuries, nor the many more who have returned from the colonial-style war with serious psychological and emotional trauma.

More than two-thirds of the US deaths in Afghanistan have come since Barack Obama was inaugurated in 2009, after winning the election in large measure due to popular antiwar sentiment and revulsion over the militarist policies of the Bush administration.

That election demonstrated that the US political system offers no means for working people, the vast majority of the population, to express their opposition to war. Whatever their vote and whatever the candidates’ empty promises, the decisions are made by an unelected and unaccountable military-intelligence apparatus, based on the interests of a financial aristocracy determined to use militarism to extend its global grip.

The current election is no different. Both Obama and Romney are committed to continuing US operations in Afghanistan and to a bellicose policy leading to war against Iran.

Republican vice presidential candidate Paul Ryan attacked the Obama administration Monday over last month’s withdrawal of 22,000 troops from Afghanistan, the last of the so-called surge force Obama sent into the war. Some 68,000 American soldiers and Marines continue to occupy the country--twice the number that were there when Obama entered the White House--along with nearly 40,000 NATO and other foreign forces.

The Republicans support Obama’s December 2014 deadline for pulling out all US “combat troops,” a term of art used to conceal the fact that tens of thousands will remain after that date. But they have criticized him for publicly announcing the withdrawal date.

As if leaving the 22,000 troops until after the election, or keeping the end-of-2014 deadline a secret would change the debacle confronting US imperialism in Afghanistan!

The depth of this morass was made clear by the cause of the 2,000th US military death in Afghanistan. The soldier was killed at a checkpoint in Wardak Province, west of Kabul, in a confrontation between American troops and soldiers of the Afghan National Army (ANA). Also killed in the clash were three Afghan troops and an American civilian contractor, who was a trainer for Afghan security forces.

This brings to at least 53 the number of US-NATO troops killed by their ostensible Afghan allies so far this year. These “green on blue” attacks now make up 20 percent of the casualties among the US-led occupation forces.

The US command has taken a series of measures, from ordering US troops to keep loaded weapons at hand at all times on bases shared with Afghan forces to the fielding of so-called guardian angel teams, whose job it is to guard other American soldiers against their supposed Afghan

allies. Afghan counter-intelligence agents have been sent into the ranks to try to root out insurgent sympathizers.

The latest killing came as the Pentagon ended a suspension of joint operations with Afghan forces that was imposed after a series of such attacks and in the face of global outrage over the virulent anti-Muslim film produced in the US.

Nothing has seemed to stem the attacks, which reflect the deep-seated popular hatred of US and other foreign forces after more than a decade of occupation. This repeated killing of American troops by puppet forces they are assigned to train is unprecedented in modern warfare. It did not happen in either Korea or Vietnam. The effect is demoralizing and leads to ever escalating suspicions and hostilities between US and Afghan puppet troops.

In an interview on the CBS News program “60 Minutes” Sunday night, the top US commander in Afghanistan, Marine Gen. John Allen, called these so-called “insider” killings “the signature attack” of the Afghanistan war. Expressing deep frustration, General Allen, who is soon to be replaced as the Afghanistan commander, declared: “Well, I’m mad as hell about them, to be honest with you ... It reverberates everywhere across the United States ... We’re willing to sacrifice a lot for this campaign, but we’re not willing to be murdered for it.”

Attempting to put a positive spin on the increasingly desperate situation, NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen admitted that the insider attacks had “undermined trust and confidence” between foreign occupation troops and their ANA counterparts, but predicted the next year would see a “seamless” transition to the “new mission” after 2014.

However, the German intelligence service, the BND, has provided a more sober assessment. In a classified document entitled “Afghanistan Until 2014--A Forecast,” which was leaked to *Der Spiegel* magazine, the spy agency warns that the attacks by members of the Afghan security forces on US and other foreign troops will only worsen between now and December 2014.

It warns that such attacks will continue and may even increase after that official “withdrawal” date, when it predicts 35,000 foreign military personnel will remain

deployed in Afghanistan, including trainers for the Afghan army, special forces troops deployed to hunt down insurgents, and combat troops assigned to protect the foreign forces.

In other words, behind the backs of the people of the US and the NATO countries, an unending military occupation and continuing dirty war are being prepared in Afghanistan, even as Washington and Israel ratchet up preparations for an even bloodier war against Iran.

The overwhelming majority of the American people oppose both these wars, but have no means of imposing their will within the existing political system dominated by two capitalist parties.

The threat of a wider war can be fought only through the independent political intervention of the working class in the US and internationally, fighting against the capitalist profit system which is the source of militarism.

The demand must be raised for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan, a halt to US aggression against Iran, and the dismantling of Washington’s military machine. This will free up hundreds of billions of dollars for reparations to the victims of US military aggression and for the creation of jobs and the raising of living standards for working people in the US and around the globe.

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