

# Obama prepares protracted Afghanistan occupation

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With the US presidential election little more than two weeks away, the Obama administration is quietly preparing to keep tens of thousands of troops in Afghanistan.

These preparations, little noted in the corporate media, are unfolding even as Obama and his running mate, Vice President Joseph Biden, tell voters that the 11-year-old war is to end in 2014.

There was one mention of Afghanistan in last Wednesday's debate, with Obama declaring: "I said we'd transition out of Afghanistan and start making sure that Afghans are responsible for their own security. That's what I'm doing."

In the vice presidential debate the week before, Biden was somewhat more categorical: "We are leaving Afghanistan in 2014, period. There are no ifs, ands or buts."

In reality, US and NATO officials are feverishly engaged in working out the fine print of a Strategic Partnership Agreement signed in Kabul by Obama and Washington's puppet, President Hamid Karzai, on May 1. The agreement envisions tens of thousands of US soldiers remaining in Afghanistan for a full decade after 2014.

Unnamed American military sources have been quoted in the US media as estimating that some 25,000 US soldiers and Marines would continue occupying Afghanistan at least until 2024. A report issued by German intelligence, cited by *Der Spiegel* this week, predicted that a total of 35,000 troops would stay on, including a smaller contingent from other NATO countries.

A large portion of this force would be composed of Green Berets and other special operations troops, who would continue carrying out counterinsurgency operations, i.e., the hunting down and killing of leaders

and members of armed groups opposed to the foreign occupation and its corrupt Afghan stooges.

For all the official declarations about Afghanistan "standing on its own feet" and rosy projections of the Karzai regime's puppet security forces, 350,000 strong, taking over security operations, the reality is that NATO does not consider a single unit within the Afghan National Army capable of operating on its own. The Afghan army is facing an attrition rate of one-third of its troops every year, and the mounting number of so-called "green on blue" killings—over 50 this year—has called into serious question the entire US-NATO strategy of relying more heavily on Afghan puppet forces.

In another indication that Washington is digging in for a protracted and potentially even wider war in South Asia, even as it prepares new militarist adventures elsewhere, the *Washington Post* reported Friday that the Central Intelligence Agency is seeking approval for a major expansion of its fleet of armed drones, adding another 10 of the pilotless aircraft to some 35 that the agency now deploys.

"The proposal by CIA Director David H. Petraeus would bolster the agency's ability to sustain its campaigns of lethal strikes in Pakistan and Yemen and enable it, if directed, to shift aircraft to emerging al-Qaeda threats in North Africa or other trouble spots," the *Post* reported, citing unnamed US officials. It added that the move would significantly advance the agency's transformation into a paramilitary arm of the US government dedicated to assassinating Washington's enemies.

Pakistani Interior Minister Rehman Malik on Wednesday stated that there have been 336 US drone attacks against Pakistan, the vast majority of them launched since Obama came to office. Of the 2,300

victims counted by the Pakistani government, he said, fully 80 percent were innocent civilians—men, women and children. Now similar crimes are being carried out in Yemen and being prepared across Africa and elsewhere.

Under these conditions, the sole issue in US foreign policy to rise to the level of a controversy in the current election campaign is at what moment President Obama should have publicly defined the September 11 assault on the US consulate in Benghazi Libya as a terrorist attack.

Of course, neither candidate can utter a word as to the roots of this attack, which lay in Washington's backing of Islamist forces, including those linked to Al Qaeda, in last year's US-NATO war to topple Col. Muammar Gaddafi, followed by its attempt to brush aside these armed militias and install trusted stooges in power in Tripoli. The reaction, the assassination of Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans, was a case of the chickens coming home to roost.

Both parties are committed to a continuation and escalation of the strategy that has developed over the last two decades of employing military power as a means of offsetting the crisis and decline of American capitalism, particularly by asserting US hegemony over the energy-rich regions of the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Basin.

This essential policy of America's financial oligarchy cannot be shifted by voting for one or the other of the two capitalist parties, as the 2008 election of the "antiwar" candidate, Obama, has proven.

In poll after poll, between two-thirds and three-quarters of the American public has declared its opposition to the continuation of the war in Afghanistan, while hostility to plans for new and wider wars, including one against Iran, is equally intense. Yet this popular opposition to militarism can find no expression in the capitalist two-party system. The middle-class pseudo-left groups that led protests against the US wars under Bush, meanwhile, have accommodated themselves fully to the interests of imperialism under Obama.

A genuine struggle to end the war in Afghanistan and prevent the launching of new wars that have the potential of dragging mankind into another world conflagration can be waged only under the leadership of the working class, fighting as an independent

political force against the Obama administration and the capitalist system.

The demands must be raised for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US troops from Afghanistan and for holding accountable those responsible for launching and continuing wars of aggression. The immense US military and intelligence apparatus must be dismantled and the trillions of dollars spent on death and destruction utilized to provide jobs and decent living standards for the working class in the US and internationally.

This is the program fought for only by the Socialist Equality Party and its candidates, Jerry White for president and Phyllis Scherrer for vice president. The building of a socialist movement to oppose war and the attacks on social conditions and democratic rights will be discussed at regional conferences being held by the SEP later this month and in early November. All those who see the need for a working class alternative to the two parties of war, mass unemployment and repression should make plans to attend.

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