Afghanistan: A model for 21st Century neo-colonialism

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As the 2014 deadline for the end of NATO operations in Afghanistan draws closer, the Obama administration is preparing for a continued US military presence into the indefinite future. The plans, reported by the *New York Times*, underscore the predatory, neo-colonial character of the American-led occupation.

According to the *Times*, General John Allen, the top US commander in Afghanistan, has submitted three options to the Pentagon for the period after the supposed withdrawal of "combat troops" at the end of 2014. One is to maintain US troop levels at 6,000, another calls for 10,000 soldiers, and the third is based on a force of 20,000.

As explained by unnamed defence officials, central to all three proposals is the continued presence of "Special Operations commandos who would hunt down insurgents." Additional US forces would be used to bolster the Afghan security forces through air support, logistics and training.

All of this continues to be justified on the phony pretext of the "war on terror." In reality, over 12 years of relentless, bloody war, Afghanistan has served as a base of operations for the projection of American influence and military force throughout the region.

President Obama has already transformed the conflict into the "AfPak war," escalating drone strikes into neighbouring Pakistan. Afghanistan is undoubtedly a key component of the Pentagon's advanced plans for war against Iran, as well as a convenient advance post for US scheming and intrigues in the Central Asian republics.

Maintaining Afghanistan as an American semi-colony means propping up the venal regime of Afghan President Hamid Karzai. The real purpose for maintaining a large force of US Special Operations troops, which are notorious for their night raids and mass killings, is to intimidate and terrorise a population that is deeply hostile to foreign occupation. The rising number of so-called "green-on-blue" incidents—Afghan soldiers and police turning their guns on foreign troops—points to far broader anger and hostility to the continued US presence.

Allen's proposals are in preparation for meetings this week in Washington between Obama and Karzai on the terms of the US military presence after 2014. As presented in the media, the talks involve the leaders of two sovereign countries. This is an absurd and grotesque distortion of reality.

Karzai and his government are completely dependent on Washington. The country's economy is dependent on international aid. The Afghan security forces are bought and paid for by the US and its allies and rely on foreign military support. According to the latest Pentagon review, only one of the Afghan army's 23 brigades is able to function independently.

The Obama administration is insisting that American troops and personnel retain immunity from prosecution under Afghan law after 2014. The US has declared that it will not seek permanent military bases in Afghanistan. But joint facilities where American personnel will have complete freedom of action will serve the Pentagon's purposes just as well.

Afghanistan has been the testing ground for 21st Century neo-colonialism. The occupation has set the pattern for US-led operations in Iraq, Libya and now Syria, as Washington seeks to extend its economic and strategic dominance in the energy-rich regions of the Middle East and Central Asia.

The US military and spy agencies have become adept at the use of intimidation, terror and assassination against a hostile population, the buying of local mercenaries and agents, the manipulation of tribal and

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ethnic rivalries, and the installation and maintenance of suitably pliable governments. While the technology might be more modern, the techniques bear an uncanny resemblance to those of 19th Century European colonialism.

Washington's interventions in Libya and Syria have exposed the bogus character of the "war on terror," which initially provided the pretext for the US invasion of Afghanistan. To overthrow the Libyan and Syrian governments, the Pentagon and the CIA have relied heavily on the support of Sunni Islamist militias, including those with ties to Al Qaeda. In many cases, funding and arms are supplied by America's allies in the Persian Gulf: the despotic regimes in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States.

Afghanistan gives the lie to claims that the US is bringing "democracy" to the Middle East. Elections are rigged. The Afghan parliament is a cesspool of rival pro-US factions that include notorious warlords and militia leaders. If a free referendum were ever held on the foreign occupation, the result would be overwhelmingly against. All this provides the model for what is being established in Tripoli and what the US seeks to establish in Damascus.

Opposition to the Afghan occupation is not confined to Afghanistan. Opinion polls in the US and its allies have repeatedly revealed that a majority are opposed to the war. Yet that opposition finds no expression in the political or media establishment.

The so-called liberals and ex-lefts that supported the mass protests against the Iraq war rapidly shut down the protest movement once Obama came to office. These same organisations have become cheerleaders for the Obama administration's new wars for "democracy" in Libya and Syria.

The driving force for this eruption of neo-colonialism and militarism is the worsening global crisis of capitalism. Even as it wages an offensive against the working class at home, the Obama administration is engaged in a desperate bid to reassert American hegemony against Washington's European and Asian rivals, especially China, throughout the globe. The result is sharpening tensions between the major powers and the rising danger of a catastrophic global conflict.

The development of a genuine anti-war movement will take place only on the basis of a perspective that tackles the root cause of war, militarism and neo-colonialism: the profit system itself. The past decade has demonstrated the futility of appealing to capitalist governments and parties. A struggle against war must be based on the independent mobilisation of the international working class to overthrow capitalism and establish socialism.

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