

In Qatar, US-backed Afghan President Karzai makes overtures to Taliban

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US-backed Afghan President Hamid Karzai travelled to Doha on Saturday to meet with the Qatari emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, as Taliban officials are opening an office in Doha, the Qatari capital.

Karzai made open overtures to the Taliban leadership, amid reports that Taliban figures might be invited to participate in US-dominated Afghan elections scheduled for April 2014.

“We will do what we can to achieve peace in the country,” he said. “The Afghan government wants the Taliban to come home to their land—and to free themselves from foreign hands.”

Afghanistan’s High Peace Council has similarly invited the Taliban to become “responsible” partners in governing the country: “Afghans expect the Taliban and other armed opposition groups to understand their responsibilities.”

Karzai also added a blunt threat to the Taliban to join in the elections or face continued attacks from US occupation forces in Afghanistan. He said on Monday that at least 15,000 US troops will remain in country: “After 2014, they will stay; they are not leaving. They want at least five bases in different parts of Afghanistan, from the north to the western part of the country.”

Taliban officials formally denied that they had held any meetings with Karzai during his trip to Qatar, saying their office in Qatar was purely for consultations with the Qatari government.

During his visit last week, Secretary of State John Kerry repeated the US demand for the Taliban to enter into negotiations with the regime, and also indicated the United States would continue to occupy Afghanistan indefinitely.

General John Allen has submitted three scenarios for

continued US presence, using 6,000, 10,000, or 20,000 troops. US forces would also provide air and logistical support to the Karzai regime’s troops. US planners apparently calculate that such forces—along with drones, Special Operations deployments, and pro-American Afghan tribal militias—can preserve imperialist domination of the country.

Talks with the Taliban have been going on for some time. In January of 2012, the *New York Times* reported that the US had initiated “trust-building” talks with Taliban representatives in Qatar. As the Obama administration’s supposed 2014 deadline for US withdrawal approaches, Washington is stepping up efforts to identify factions of the Taliban which might be willing to enter a government.

The aim of such a maneuver would be to divide the Afghan resistance to American occupation, using a power-sharing agreement between Karzai and a section of the Taliban leadership to buttress the neo-colonial state Washington has established in Afghanistan. The forces in such a regime would have one thing in common: their commitment to the violent suppression of the working class.

While it is unclear whether the US can easily recruit forces it has been threatening with bombs and drone killings for over a decade, there are historical precedents for such a policy. The Taliban leadership already has ties to US imperialism—having enjoyed US and Pakistani support when it first tried to conquer Afghanistan in the 1990s—as well as to wealthy Persian Gulf states aligned with imperialism. The Associated Press recently cited a senior US official claiming that the Taliban is in talks with over 30 governments.

The reasoning underlying this calculation was spelled out by the Dubai-based *Khaleej Times*. The paper wrote, “it is a foregone conclusion that the

United States, Britain and many of the Western countries who were instrumental in dislodging the Taliban have now agreed to embrace the militia as the coalition forces plan to exit Afghanistan by the end of 2014.” Failure to draw the Taliban into the “political process,” in the absence of American backing for the Karzai regime, would rapidly result in the defeat of Karzai and forces loyal to his regime.

Karzai’s Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) is undermanned, demoralized, thoroughly infiltrated by the Taliban, and incapable of standing on its own. Khaama Press reported on April 1 that 5,000 Afghan troops quit the military every month. According to the same report, 3 of every 10 soldiers recruited to the Afghan forces are lost to sacking, capture or combat.

Now, as the US scales down its presence in Afghanistan, it is inviting the Taliban to help govern the country, underscoring the basic fraud upon which the “War on Terror” is based. Just as in Syria and Libya, where Al Qaeda forces have been mobilized against governments targeted by the United States, US imperialism is now proposing to rely upon the very forces it claims to be fighting.

This would enable the US to redeploy the forces currently occupying Afghanistan to new countries targeted for US wars of aggression in Central Asia, the Middle East and Africa.

As for Qatar, it is already a center of imperialist planning and conspiracies against the Middle Eastern working class. Al Udeid Airbase, a military installation West of Doha, hosts several US command components, including the US Combat Air Operations Center for the Middle East and a forward operating station of CENTCOM. Following the First Gulf War in 1991, the US concluded a Defense Cooperation Agreement with Qatar, and military collaboration has been ramped up rapidly in recent years.



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