

# The brutal face of neocolonialism in Afghanistan

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US Secretary of State John Kerry has made a series of public statements ostensibly in mourning for the 25-year-old Foreign Service officer Anne Smedinghoff—one of five Americans, including three soldiers, killed in a Taliban car bomb attack in Afghanistan’s southern province of Zabul on Saturday.

The death of someone so young is tragic, as it has been for nearly 2,200 American troops killed in 11 years of war and occupation. Yet Kerry’s remarks aim not so much at comforting grieving family members and friends, as at justifying and defending the war that cost this young woman’s life.

He said that the death presented “a stark contrast for all of the world to see between two very different sets of values.” On the one hand, he said, was “a brave American ... determined to brighten the light of learning through books written in the native tongue of the students that she had never met, but whom she felt compelled to help,” while on the other, were “cowardly terrorists determined to bring darkness and death to total strangers.”

The same day that Anne Smedinghoff lost her life, a US airstrike killed at least 18 people, including 11 children ranging from a few months to eight years old. Six women were badly wounded in the attack. Kerry uttered not a word of sympathy for the loss of these young lives, nor for the parents left to grieve them. Needless to say, the death of 11 children received not one one-hundredth of the coverage given to that of the American diplomat in the US media, which, as always, is contemptuous of Afghan lives.

It is worth recalling that the new US secretary of state and former Democratic senator from Massachusetts began his political career as a young veteran who publicly denounced the Vietnam War. Kerry, now the richest man in the Senate, dedicates himself to

promoting and whitewashing new imperialist wars of aggression and covering up the same kind of atrocities he once sought to expose.

Kerry’s rhetoric, about Americans selflessly bringing the light and “future” to Afghanistan and those resisting Washington being cowards, terrorists and the forces of darkness, is as old as colonialism itself. The French in Algeria and Indochina, the British in India, Africa and elsewhere and the other European powers that together conquered over a quarter of the earth’s surface during the closing three decades of the 19th century all used virtually identical language—proclaiming their civilizing and humanitarian principles as they pillaged these lands and slaughtered their peoples.

Afghanistan’s protracted encounter with US imperialism has now gone on for more than three decades, culminating in the last 11 years of direct American military occupation and semi-colonial control over its corrupt US-installed government. What “light” and “future” has it brought to the Afghan people?

Beginning in 1979, under the Democratic administration of President Jimmy Carter, US imperialism initiated a criminal policy, aiming to destabilize a pro-Soviet regime in Kabul and thereby provoke a Soviet military intervention. The aim was, as then US national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski explained it, “giving to the USSR its Vietnam war.” The policy proved a success, but the Afghan people were its collateral damage. Washington’s machinations unleashed a civil war that has continued to this day, costing millions of Afghan lives.

Pumping in CIA arms, advisors and money, Washington worked hand-in-glove with right-wing foreign and Afghan Islamists, including the Saudi

millionaire Osama bin Laden, whose name most Americans would learn only after September 11, 2001, as well as the founders of the Taliban and other militias that US forces are now fighting in Afghanistan.

As for the years of US occupation, Washington has poured over \$100 billion into the “reconstruction” of Afghanistan, but government auditors can account for barely 10 percent of this money. The lion’s share went to corrupt contractors, collaborators and politicians from the Karzais on down.

After more than a decade under the tutelage of Washington, conditions in Afghanistan are as desperate as ever, if not more so. Life expectancy remains at 44.5 for men and 44 for women. The maternal mortality rate is among the highest in the world (1,600 deaths for every 100,000 live births), and more than half of the children under age five are malnourished.

One out of every three Afghans lives in poverty, unable to meet the minimal requirements of daily life, and an estimated 40 percent of the population is unemployed. And surveys have indicated that 65 percent of Afghans suffer from stress disorders and other forms of mental illness as the result of unending war.

Overseeing this humanitarian catastrophe is a collection of thugs and warlords kept in power by US arms and profiting off of both foreign aid and the Afghanistan’s opium trade, which accounts for up to 90 percent of the world’s supply.

US imperialism is not in Afghanistan to fight terrorism—that pretext has been thoroughly exploded as Washington has allied itself with Al Qaeda-linked militias in wars for regime change in Libya and Syria—nor to bring “light” to the Afghan people. It intervened there, as in the Middle East and Africa, to assert Washington’s hegemony against its European and Asian rivals—particularly China—in geo-strategically vital, energy-rich regions of the world.

While the Obama administration has announced a formal deadline of the end of 2014 for the withdrawal of all US troops from Afghanistan, it is negotiating with the regime of President Hamid Karzai to keep thousands of troops and US bases in Afghanistan indefinitely. This force is to include both special operations commandos to continue hunting down and killing those who resist US domination, as well as trainers and advisors to direct Afghan puppet forces and

of course air power to continue the kind of bombing raids that killed the 11 children in Kunar province last Saturday.

Washington aims to keep Afghanistan as a base for what the Pentagon terms “power projection” into the Caspian Basin with its vast oil and gas reserves and against both Russia and China. Contained within this strategy are the seeds of a far wider and more catastrophic global conflict.

The struggle for the future of the people of Afghanistan and of working people all over the world depends upon the revival of a genuine movement against war and neocolonialism, based on the independent mobilization of the working class against their source, the capitalist profit system.



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