

# Obama claims “turning point” for US militarism

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President Barack Obama used a trip to Fort Dix, New Jersey Monday to deliver a speech to assembled troops proclaiming that after 13 years, America’s war in Afghanistan is being brought to a close.

Obama’s remarks received little applause from the audience of enlisted personnel, for whom the empty “support our troops” rhetoric and claims that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have been successful crusades for freedom and against terrorism are no doubt wearing thin. With polls showing that the majority of Americans think both wars were mistakes, similar attitudes are common within the military.

Among the few lines to elicit a spontaneous reaction from the uniformed audience was Obama’s statement that the recent budget bill passed in Washington includes a pay raise for the military.

It is noteworthy that Obama’s first address since official Washington has been thrown into turmoil by the release of the US Senate Intelligence Committee’s report on CIA torture was delivered to a captive military audience in which the subject was never mentioned—and there was no danger that anyone else would raise it.

The Obama White House has left it to the likes of CIA Director John Brennan and former Republican Vice President Dick Cheney to defend the “patriotism” of the American intelligence agency against the official confirmation of its responsibility for war crimes.

The thrust of the president’s remarks, that the US is “marking an important milestone” in ending the US war in Afghanistan and having Afghan forces “take full responsibility for their security,” was belied by developments on the ground and mealy-mouthed admissions in the speech itself.

Just last week, the Pentagon revealed that it is leaving 1,000 more US troops behind at the end of this month

than it had originally planned, bringing the total head count to at least 10,800. And while it was initially claimed that the mission of the remaining US forces would be confined to training and advising Afghan troops and pursuing remnants of Al Qaeda, it was announced last week that they would also take action against the Taliban, providing combat support to the Afghan military as needed.

At the same time, the Afghan security forces remain dependent upon the US military for air support, intelligence and logistics. In other words, the war will continue, albeit with a smaller number of “boots on the ground.”

To drive home this point, two more US soldiers were killed on Friday in an attack on their convoy near the Bagram Air Base, as a Taliban offensive continued throughout much of the country. Last month alone, the capital of Kabul, supposedly Afghanistan’s most secure area, suffered 12 major Taliban attacks.

“Even as our combat mission ends, our commitment to Afghanistan endures,” Obama told the troops, underlining the lies and double-talk that pervaded his speech. The “limited military presence” that would remain, he said, would “keep training and equipping the Afghan forces” and “conduct counterterrorism missions,” i.e., the kind of night raids and air strikes that have claimed civilian casualties and aroused popular opposition to the US occupation.

Regardless of the war in Afghanistan, Obama added, “... there are still challenges to our security around the world. In times of crisis, people around the world look to one nation to lead, and that is the United States of America.” Foremost among these crises, Obama continued, is the struggle “against the brutal terrorist group ISIL [ISIS] in Iraq and Syria.”

The reality is that the rise of ISIS is rooted entirely in

the previous and ongoing US imperialist interventions in the Middle East. First, there was the invasion and occupation of Iraq, which killed over a million Iraqis, shattered the country's social infrastructure, and bred bitter sectarian divisions. Then there was the war for regime-change in Syria, in which ISIS emerged as the dominant military force among the Western-backed "rebels."

Obama claimed the US was at a "turning point" in relation to its wars abroad, pointing out that while nearly 180,000 troops had been deployed at their peak in Iraq and Afghanistan, the present forces amounted to around 15,000.

"The time of deploying large ground forces with big military footprints to engage in nation-building overseas, that's coming to an end," he told his military audience.

Whatever the reality of this supposed tactical shift, Obama stressed that militarism would remain the driving force of the American state. "Going forward our military will be leaner," Obama said. "But as your commander in chief, I'm going to make sure we keep you ready for the range of missions that we ask of you. We are going to keep you the best trained, the best led, the best equipped military in the history of the world because the world will still be calling."

This supposed "calling" has led not only to a new open-ended war that encompasses Iraq and Syria, while threatening to spread throughout the Middle East, but has also placed Washington on a collision course with both Russia and China. Obama's supposed "turning point" is emerging ever more clearly as a turn toward a new world war.



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