

Washington prepares to send up to 5,000 more troops into Afghanistan

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10 May 2017

The cabal of recently retired and active duty US generals who control virtually all of the national security posts within the Trump administration has given its approval to a plan that would deploy as many as 5,000 additional US troops to Afghanistan.

According to the *Washington Post*, which first reported the plan, it would “effectively put the United States back on a war footing with the Taliban.” The report added that the proposal followed an extensive review of US policy in Afghanistan driven by President Donald Trump’s “desire to reverse worsening security in Afghanistan and ‘start winning’ again.”

Whatever Trump’s illusions, the reality is that the nearly 16-year-old war, the longest in US history, has failed to achieve Washington’s aims of stabilizing a puppet regime in Kabul and securing for US imperialism a stable base of operations in a geo-strategically critical region, bounded by the energy-rich former Soviet Central Asian republics, Iran, China and Pakistan.

Just as in 2001, when the US invaded Afghanistan barely a month after the September 11 attacks on New York City and Washington, the pretext given for the planned escalation is the phony “war on terrorism.” In reality, after pouring an estimated \$1 trillion into the war, Washington has proven unable to quell the Taliban and other insurgent groups that now control an estimated 50 percent of the Afghan countryside, more territory than at any time since the US invasion more than 15 years ago.

US commanders, including the chief of American military operations in Afghanistan, Gen. John Nicholson, have described the situation in the country as a military “stalemate.” The real situation was described more frankly early this year by the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan

Reconstruction: “The numbers of the Afghan security forces are decreasing, while both casualties and the number of districts under insurgent control or influence are increasing.”

According to CNN, Trump will likely receive the final plans for the escalation in Afghanistan sometime this week. He is expected to issue a decision before going to the NATO summit in Brussels on May 25. Washington reportedly intends to ask the other member governments of NATO to make a corresponding increase in their own forces on the ground in Afghanistan.

At present there are at least 8,400 US troops deployed in the country, including both “trainers and advisers” as well as special forces units that carry out search and kill missions. Other NATO countries have approximately 5,000 soldiers in Afghanistan. These uniformed forces are supported by an estimated 26,000 military “contractors.”

The report of the new plans for escalating the US intervention came amid renewed fighting around the northern city of Kunduz, which the Taliban came close to capturing in October 2015. The Islamist insurgent forces have captured surrounding districts, including last week the Qala-i-Zal’s district, which borders on Tajikistan, where Afghan government troops reportedly fled without a fight.

To counter the Taliban offensive, the Pentagon is clearly planning a major escalation of the violence that has been unleashed on the Afghan people over the past decade and a half.

The proposed change in strategy in Afghanistan, according to the *Post* report, “would authorize the Pentagon, not the White House, to set troop numbers in Afghanistan and give the military far broader authority to use airstrikes to target Taliban militants. It would

also lift Obama-era restrictions that limited the mobility of US military advisers on the battlefield.”

Trump campaigned on a platform of right-wing nationalist demagoguery promoting “America First.” He incoherently criticized previous US military interventions as a waste of money, while at the same time promising a massive increase in military spending and the use of overwhelming force against ISIS. Since taking office, he has effectively ceded not only military strategy but essential elements of US foreign policy to a small group of current and former generals, including James Mattis, the recently retired Marine general who heads the Defense Department, and Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, his national security advisor.

The result has been a steady escalation of US militarism across the globe. More US troops have been sent into both Iraq and Syria, while the latter country was targeted last month with a barrage of 59 cruise missiles. The US has moved to take a more direct role in the savage Saudi-led war against Yemen that has killed some 12,000 people and brought much of the population to the brink of famine. US special forces troops, one of whom was killed last week, are fighting in Somalia.

And in Afghanistan itself, the Pentagon dropped its Massive Ordnance Air Blast (MOAB), the most destructive weapon used anywhere since the atomic bombs dropped on Japan in 1945.

The use of the so-called “mother of all bombs,” ostensibly to attack a small group of ISIS militants in eastern Afghanistan, was clearly aimed at sending a signal of intimidation against Washington’s rivals and regional advisories, including China, North Korea, Russia and Iran. The timing of the bombing, on the very eve of a conference convened in Moscow of all the major regional powers to discuss peace negotiations in Afghanistan, was hardly coincidental.

US military commanders, including Gen. Nicholson, Defense Secretary Mattis and others, have launched a steady drumbeat of charges that Russia is secretly arming the Taliban, a claim that Moscow has heatedly denied. Washington has no intention of allowing an end to the war on any other terms than its own, which include the retention of strategic bases within close striking distance to Iran, China, South Asia and Russia itself.

The use of the MOAB, however, was also a signal of

the readiness of the Pentagon to carry out a redoubled bloodbath in Afghanistan itself in order to secure US interests.

The proposal to grant the US military “far broader authority to use airstrikes” follows a report by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) that 715 Afghan civilians were killed and another 1,500 wounded during the first three months of this year, with the number of lives claimed by US airstrikes rising more than tenfold compared to the same period in 2016.

In the immediate wake of the report of the proposed escalation of the US war in Afghanistan, the Pentagon announced Tuesday that Trump has approved a plan for the US military to directly arm the Syrian Kurdish militia, the YPG, to serve as US proxy ground forces in an offensive to retake the Syrian city of Raqqa from ISIS.

The Turkish government, Washington’s NATO ally, last month carried out airstrikes against the YPG, which it regards as a “terrorist” organization and an extension of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which is outlawed in Turkey. US troops have since been deployed in northern Syria to serve as a buffer between Turkish forces and the YPG.

This latest US tactical maneuver will only set the stage for a further intensification of the bloodbath inflicted upon the Syrian people in the more than six-year-old US-orchestrated war for regime change, while threatening to ignite a broader regional and even global war.

All of these moves to escalate US military interventions across the globe are being carried out behind the backs of the American people, without even the fig leaf of a Congressional debate, much less a vote to authorize the use of military force. Both the Democrats and Republicans support the increasing turn to militarism as an instrument for reversing the relative decline of US imperialism’s global dominance and have no interest in raising the issue before a population that is overwhelmingly hostile to war.



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