

The US war in Afghanistan: A historic crime

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US President Joe Biden announced on Wednesday that the American military intervention in Afghanistan will be brought to an end by September 11, 2021, and the last American soldier will leave that country several weeks before the 20th anniversary of the American invasion and conquest of the Central Asian country on October 7, 2001.

Biden is the third American president to promise to end the war in Afghanistan. Even if the last 3,500 or so American soldiers leave the country, there will still remain thousands of CIA operatives, mercenaries and paratroopers propping up the puppet government of President Ashraf Ghani. And the Pentagon will continue to drop bombs and fire missiles more or less at will at whatever the US claims are “terrorist” targets. A renewed deployment of combat troops, as in Iraq, is entirely possible.

But Biden’s announcement provides an occasion for drawing a balance sheet of the longest war in the history of the United States, one which has produced incalculable suffering for the people of Afghanistan, squandered vast resources and brutalized American society.

By official figures, more than 100,000 Afghans have been killed in the war, no doubt a vast underestimation. The US waged this war through the methods of “counterinsurgency,” that is, through terror: bombing wedding parties and hospitals, drone assassination, abductions and torture. In one of the crowning atrocities of the war, in 2015, US aircraft carried out a half-hour long attack on a Doctors Without Borders hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan, killing 42 people.

Biden’s brief remarks announcing the military withdrawal made no reference to the dire conditions in the country, for which American imperialism bears the principal responsibility.

The war, based on the deliberate misrepresentation of the US’s real aims, was sold to the American population as a response to the events of September 11, 2001, which have never been the subject of a serious investigation. It was, in reality, an illegal war of aggression, aimed at dominating and subjugating a historically oppressed population in pursuit of the predatory interests of US imperialism.

No one has been held accountable for the crimes

perpetrated by the US military in Afghanistan, including the officials in the Bush administration, who launched it, and the Obama administration, who perpetuated it. George W. Bush is (lately) praised as a statesman because he is less openly crude and dictatorial than Donald Trump.

Barack Obama is treated by the media as a celebrity although he is the only American president to have waged war every day he was in office. Top aides, from Donald Rumsfeld to Hillary Clinton, enjoy millionaire retirements. Obama’s vice president now occupies the White House. This criminal war was supported by every section of the US political establishment, Republican and Democrat, including Senator Bernie Sanders, who voted for it.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has an unparalleled record of opposition to the American imperialist intervention in Afghanistan, going back to the initial invasion in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. In its first statement on the US invasion, published on October 9, 2001, the WSWs editorial board explained “Why we oppose the war in Afghanistan.” We wrote:

The nature of this or any war, its progressive or reactionary character, is determined not by the immediate events that preceded it, but rather by the class structures, economic foundations and international roles of the states that are involved. From this decisive standpoint, the present action by the United States is an imperialist war.

The US government initiated the war in pursuit of far-reaching international interests of the American ruling elite. What is the main purpose of the war? The collapse of the Soviet Union a decade ago created a political vacuum in Central Asia, which is home to the second largest deposit of proven reserves of petroleum and natural gas in the world.

The Caspian Sea region, to which Afghanistan provides strategic access, harbors approximately 270 billion barrels of oil, some 20 percent of the world’s proven reserves. It also contains 665 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, approximately one-eighth of the

planet's gas reserves.

The American intervention in Afghanistan began, not in 2001, but in July 1979, when the Carter administration decided to aid forces fighting the Soviet-backed government, with the goal, as National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski put it, of “giving the USSR its Vietnam War.” Following the Soviet invasion of December 1979, the CIA worked with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to recruit Islamic fundamentalists to go to Afghanistan and engage in guerrilla warfare, an operation that brought Osama bin Laden to Afghanistan and created Al Qaeda.

The Taliban was likewise the product of Pakistani weaponry and training, Saudi financing and American political backing. Although the fundamentalist group emerged out of the refugee camps in Pakistan as a kind of “clerical fascism,” the byproduct of decades of war and oppression, the Clinton administration endorsed its takeover in 1995-96 as the best prospect for restoring “stability.”

From 1996 to 2001, US relations with Afghanistan revolved around proposed pipelines to bring oil and gas from the Caspian basin on a route that would bypass Russia, Iran and China. Both Zalmay Khalilzad, the perpetual US envoy to the region, and Hamid Karzai, the first US-backed president of Afghanistan, worked for the oil giant Unocal.

The Bush administration threatened military action against the Taliban at several points in 2001. The 9/11 terrorist attacks, far from being events that “changed everything,” set into motion a long-planned attack. And there is considerable evidence that US intelligence agencies permitted the 9/11 attacks to go forward to supply the necessary pretext.

The WSWS analyzed the rapid conquest of Afghanistan and the collapse of the Taliban regime as an event that revealed the criminal ferocity of American imperialism, as thousands were killed in US bombing raids, and thousands more were slaughtered by US-backed militia forces. The regime established in Kabul was an unstable alliance of former Taliban officials like Hamid Karzai, head of a Pashtun tribe, and the Northern Alliance, based in the Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara minorities.

The US invasion had a no less destabilizing effect on geopolitics, as all the neighboring states, including Iran, Russia, China and Pakistan, regarded the huge American expeditionary force, which grew to 100,000 troops at various times under the Bush and Obama administrations, as a permanent threat just across their borders. The Bush administration would go on to carry out an even bloodier act of imperialist barbarism, with the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which created the conditions for the wider destabilization of the whole Middle East, now consumed by civil wars and

imperialist interventions in Syria, Libya and Yemen.

The Bush and Obama administrations combined record military budgets with police-state measures at home, the buildup of the surveillance state and economic austerity—budget cuts, wage cuts and worsening living standards for the majority of working people.

The WSWS explained that the war in Afghanistan was part of an eruption of US imperialism, beginning with the Gulf War of 1991, aimed at offsetting the economic decline of the United States through military means. As David North wrote in the preface to *A Quarter Century of War* in 2016: “The last quarter century of US-instigated wars must be studied as a chain of interconnected events. The strategic logic of the US drive for global hegemony extends beyond the neocolonial operations in the Middle East and Africa. The ongoing regional wars are component elements of the rapidly escalating confrontation of the United States with Russia and China.”

This prognosis has been confirmed. A principal consideration behind Biden's plans for withdrawing US military forces from Afghanistan is to concentrate the resources of the US military on the escalating conflict with Russia and, above all, China. In recent weeks, Biden has overseen a series of increasingly provocative actions in the East Asia, and the US military has inscribed in its official doctrine the necessity for preparing for “great power conflict.”

A real accounting for two decades of bloody crimes in Afghanistan, and the development of a movement against imperialist barbarism, requires the building of an international socialist movement in the working class. This is the task which the WSWS and the International Committee have taken up.



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