

A New Turn in the Afghanistan War and Occupation

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While the anti-war movement has primarily targeted the Iraq occupation in its protests and events, opposition to the Afghanistan occupation has always been understood as a shared point of agreement among the vast majority of participants. The Afghanistan occupation has been not as prominent in the minds of protesters because of fewer lives lost and less money wasted than in Iraq. Recent developments, however, indicate that this could be changing.

On December 20, U.S. Joint Chief of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen announced the intention of sending 30,000 more U.S. troops to Afghanistan by next summer. This would be in addition to the 31,000 U.S. troops already in Afghanistan as well as 35,000 other Allied troops under NATO command. This represents a dramatic escalation of U.S. involvement in Afghanistan not only in terms of numbers, but also in the speed-up of the timeline for sending in more troops. Previously, Pentagon spokesmen had said it would be 18 months before any new military personnel were sent over in full force. Now Admiral Mullen has stated there will be a far greater number of soldiers sent to Afghanistan than mentioned before, and in as little as six months.

The reason for this escalation is because the occupation has been failing when confronted by a growing opposition that is becoming more sophisticated in combating the foreign occupying troops. 2008 has been the most violent year since the Taliban government was toppled in 2001, with a 25 percent increase in soldiers' deaths who were under NATO or the U.S. command. Recently, Taliban attacks have succeeded in disrupting the route that carries up to 75 percent of supplies to the foreign forces. For all their greater military technology, the U.S. is proving to be outmatched by a homegrown insurgency that is determined to kick the occupiers out.

Consequently, the power brokers in Washington have decided to dedicate more resources to defeat them — but at what cost to U.S. citizens? Currently, the Afghanistan occupation is costing U.S. tax payers \$2 billion a month. The increase advocated by Admiral Mullen is expected, by some, to nearly double this amount, totaling \$3.5 billion per month.

There can be little doubt that President-elect Obama was consulted about this escalation as he prepares to take over the Executive Office. Admiral Mullen has stated that the increase of soldiers in Afghanistan would be tied to a withdrawal of troops from Iraq. In what way it is tied remains unclear since the newest military plan envisions a withdrawal of no more than 8,000 troops from Iraq within the first six months of 2009. However, even if many more troops are withdrawn from Iraq, millions of U.S. citizens did not vote for Obama to jump from one quagmire to another. They wanted to see an end to U.S. involvement in all unjust, unwinnable, and colossally wasteful wars. Though Obama never made it a secret that he favored greater involvement in Afghanistan and even stated that he would be willing to authorize military strikes in Pakistan in pursuit of Afghan rebels, he was voted in as a “peace

candidate” because many wishfully believed he would reverse the war policies of Bush. The surge of troops in Afghanistan that Obama will preside over, will be the first significant challenge to this popular perception.

Bush, McCain, and Obama have all stated that the reason for the U.S. war and occupation of Afghanistan is to fight terrorism. Yet the effect of both the Iraq and Afghanistan occupations has been to embolden and strengthen the forces the U.S. has labeled as terrorists — that is, anyone who would use military means to fight for their national sovereignty. The escalation of U.S. troops in Afghanistan will likely see a corresponding strengthening of the Taliban and other militias as more Afghan civilians suffer under the occupation and are willing to support anyone that can fight against it. This will have destabilizing effects throughout the entire region.

In reality, the aim of “fighting terrorism” is only for public relations consumption. There are stronger economic and geo-political motivations at work behind the Afghanistan occupation that bear no relation to the sound bites fed to the American people. These motivations revolve around the need of U.S. big business to assert its economic and political control over Central Asia’s energy resources against all potential competitors. The number of lives lost and the devastating horrors spread as a result of the war are an unpleasant but tolerable consequence to the players of this deadly chess game who are focused on the pursuit of their own narrow self interests, namely profits.

The central reason behind the Afghanistan war and occupation is to gain control over an oil and natural gas transit route that can provide Europe with much of its energy, and to contain the influence of Russia, China, and Iran in the region. While all these powers are attempting to take advantage of the occupation by appearing to co-operate with the US, there is no more honor behind this cooperation than there is in a den of thieves planning a heist while each, behind the backs of their cohorts, tries to figure out how to snatch the lion’s share of stolen goods.

This becomes obvious when examining the economically based politics behind the proposed U.S. supply routes to Afghanistan, as is discussed in the article “All Roads Lead Out of Afghanistan” by former India ambassador Mk Bhadrakumer. Aside from the current Karachi routes that the Taliban and others have been attacking with growing success, there are three other possibilities. One starts at the port of Shanghai, and goes across China, through Tajikistan, to reach Afghanistan. Another takes a land route through Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan/Turkmenistan to reach the Afghan border. The third and shortest goes straight through Iran.

Instead of using these routes, which would strengthen the political hand of the nations they pass through, the U.S. is planning to build another from scratch. The plan is to use the Black Sea port of Poti in Georgia, and then take the cargo through Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan to the Afghan border. According to Mk Bhadrakumer:

“The project, if it materializes, will be a geopolitical coup — the biggest ever that Washington would have swung in post-Soviet Central Asia and the Caucasus. At one stroke, the U.S. will be tying up military cooperation at the bilateral level with Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Furthermore, the U.S. will be effectively drawing these countries closer into NATO’s partnership programs. Georgia, in particular, gets a privileged status as the key transit country, which will offset the current European

opposition to its induction as a NATO member country. Besides, the U.S. will have virtually dealt a blow to the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Not only will the U.S. have succeeded in keeping the CSTO and the SCO from poking their noses into the Afghan cauldron, it will also have made these organizations largely irrelevant to regional security when Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the two key players in Central Asia, simply step out of the ambit of these organizations and directly deal with the U.S. and NATO.”

The creation of this route would also establish the U.S. as a long term military presence in the South Caucasus. This will be much to the distress of Russia which would correctly view this as a threat to their own interests and, potentially, their national security. This route is the prize because it could also be easily converted into an energy corridor, as was mentioned, for supplying the European market. This would greatly harm Russia’s and Iran’s business dealings with Europe, as well as make European policy more dependent on U.S. interests.

This policy, with its lucrative prospects, is in large part behind the escalation of U.S. troops in Afghanistan. Those business-directed government officials that are pursuing this policy are so far removed from the lives that will be destroyed by the lust for profits and so consumed with defending the interests of a tiny minority of big business owners that they are blind to the larger international social impact of their strategies and the consequences this impact unleashes.

A military victory in Afghanistan is even more unlikely than it is in Iraq — which is not going so well and many believe is failing. This is partly because the Afghan population is not centered in large cities, but scattered across a mountainous landscape, ideal for guerrilla warfare. The British and the Russians learned this the hard way in their attempts to occupy this nation. The Taliban have been fighting in this terrain for decades and know it well. They also are emboldened by knowing that whenever a foreign power has tried to hold Afghanistan by force, they have always left in defeat.

The U.S. is attempting to bribe the warlords of local militias in order to win them over to fighting on the occupier’s side. While this may have some initial success, it will blow up in the U.S. government’s face. Each of these warlords are guided by their own interests, quite distinct and often opposed to each other’s, not to mention U.S. long term goals. The only way that the U.S. can succeed in Afghanistan is to set up a state that will defend U.S. interests. But this will prove to be an impossible task since any state, by definition, requires a consolidated force of armed bodies. However, combining these scattered and feuding militias into a centralized, cohesive force on the basis of defending U.S. interests is simply not feasible. More likely, the building up of these militias will create a monster like Frankenstein’s just as the U.S. training and funding of the Mujahadeen during the Russian occupation in Afghanistan helped to create Bin Laden.

The escalation of U.S. troops in Afghanistan will produce a destructive fallout across the whole Central Asian region. The occupation has already greatly contributed to destabilizing the political situation in Pakistan. Though not directly related, the recent attacks in Mumbai, India can only be understood in the context of the militancy radiating from the Afghan war. Considering the explosive situation in the region, sending more troops into Afghanistan could have the effect of pouring gasoline on a fire.

On an even more menacing scale, the growing military presence could draw the U.S. into a

war with more formidable powers such as Russia, China, or Iran. This is especially the case during a period of international economic crisis. Profits are shrinking for each nation's corporations and banks. Even with shrinking profits, each nation's government is nevertheless duty bound to make sure their ruling class' enterprises remain viable and positioned to get ahead of their competitors. They cannot do this by encouraging more production and flooding the international market with an excessive amount of goods. There are too few consumers who can afford to buy these commodities at a price that would leave the capitalists with a profit. Therefore, each government is compelled to employ policies that hurt the profit and productive capacity of their competitors in order to be on top of a declining ability to raise their domestic profits.

This is indicated by the U.S. government's attempts to circumvent the established supply routes running through Russia, China, or Iran. While using one of these established routes would be more efficient, the U.S. is more concerned with not allowing its international competitors to take advantage of the construction that has already been done since this would give them an edge against the U.S. in the region. Such a state of affairs tends to take on a gathering momentum with unforeseen consequences for the policy makers. While no U.S. official would now be in favor of a war with Russia or China, and few would support one with Iran, the logic of the Afghanistan occupation combined with the international economic crisis could propel things in this direction.

The escalation of U.S. troops in Afghanistan, the continuing war in Iraq, and all the potential effects of spreading instability and more war is beginning to hit the American public hard. They voted for Obama in hopes for a change. However, as a capitalist Democratic Party politician, he has no more ability to fundamentally reverse course than a pig has the ability to fly. As unemployment soars, pensions collapse, health care rots, and the social safety net gets hacked away, the astronomical cost of the U.S. wars and occupations will leave more people questioning the viability of the system we live under. People will begin to pointedly ask, "Why do the politicians spend so much on destruction rather than production? Why are the rich bailed out, but not the workers?" And these thoughts will be expressed by many more people. When a system can no longer provide for its people, while vast amounts of resources are spent on wasteful destructive adventures, then that system is in all likelihood doomed.

It will take a mass, working class-led movement to make any real change. In order to do this, it is necessary that the anti-war movement hits the streets in a mass united way on March 21st. Especially in light of the escalation in Afghanistan, too much is at stake to passively wish Obama will change things. We must mobilize to shout in as large a collective voice as possible, "End the War and Occupation in Iraq & Afghanistan Now!"

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