

# A troop surge can only magnify the crime against Afghanistan

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After months of waiting, President Obama is about to announce the new US strategy for Afghanistan. His speech may be long awaited, but few are expecting any surprise: it seems clear he will herald a major escalation of the war. In doing so he will be making something worse than a mistake. It is a continuation of a war crime against the suffering people of my country.

I have said before that by installing warlords and drug traffickers in power in Kabul, the US and Nato have pushed us from the frying pan to the fire. Now Obama is pouring fuel on these flames, and this week's announcement of upwards of 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan will have tragic consequences.

Already this year we have seen the impact of an increase in troops occupying Afghanistan: more violence, and more civilian deaths. My people, the poor of Afghanistan who have known only war and the domination of fundamentalism, are today squashed between two enemies: the US/Nato occupation forces on one hand and warlords and the Taliban on the other.

While we want the withdrawal of one enemy, we don't believe it is a matter of choosing between two evils. There is an alternative: the democratic-minded parties and intellectuals are our hope for the future of Afghanistan.

It will not be easy, but if we have a little bit of peace we will be better able to fight our own internal enemies - Afghans know what to do with our destiny. We are not a backward people, and we are capable of fighting for democracy, human and women's rights in Afghanistan. In fact the only way these values will be achieved is if we struggle for them and win them ourselves.

After eight years of war, the situation is as bad as ever for ordinary Afghans, and women in particular. The reality is that only the drug traffickers and warlords have been helped under this corrupt and illegitimate Karzai government. Karzai's promises of reform are laughable. His own vice-president is the notorious warlord Fahim, whom Brad Adams of Human Rights Watch describes as "one of the most notorious warlords in the country, with the blood of many Afghans on his hands".

Transparency International reports that this regime is the second most corrupt in the world. The UN Development Programme reports Afghanistan is second last - 181st out of 182 countries - in terms of human development. That is why we no longer want this kind of "help" from the west.

Like many around the world, I am wondering what kind of “peace” prize can be awarded to a leader who continues the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, and starts a new war in Pakistan, all while supporting Israel?

Throughout my recent tour of the US, I had the chance to meet many military families and veterans who are working to put an end to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. They understand that it is not a case of a “bad war” and a “good war” – there is no difference, war is war.

Members of Iraq Veterans Against War even accompanied me to meet members of Congress in Washington DC. Together we tried to explain the terrible human cost of this war, in terms of Afghan, US and Nato lives. Unfortunately, only a few representatives really offered their support to our struggle for peace.

While the government was not responsive, the people of the US did offer me their support. And polls confirm that the US public wants peace, not an escalated war. Many also want Obama to hold Bush and his administration to account for war crimes. Everywhere I spoke, people responded strongly when I said that if Obama really wanted peace he would first of all try to prosecute Bush and have him tried before the international criminal court. Replacing Bush’s man in the Pentagon, Robert Gates, would have been a good start – but Obama chose not to.

Unfortunately, the UK government shamefully follows the path of the US in Afghanistan. Even though opinion polls show that more than 70% of the population is against the war, Gordon Brown has announced the deployment of more UK troops. It is sad that more taxpayers’ money will be wasted on this war, while Britain’s poor continue to suffer from a lack of basic services.

The UK government has also tried to silence dissent, for instance by arresting Joe Glenton, a British soldier who has refused to return to Afghanistan. I had a chance to meet Glenton when I was in London last summer, and together we spoke out against the war. My message to him is that, in times of great injustice, it is sometimes better to go to jail than be part of committing war crimes.

Facing a difficult choice, Glenton made a courageous decision, while Obama and Brown have chosen to follow the Bush administration. Instead of hope and change, in foreign policy Obama is delivering more of the same. But I still have hope because, as our history teaches, the people of Afghanistan will never accept occupation.

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