

Imperial Decline: Multi-Billion-Dollar Terrorists and the Disappearing Middle Class

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Global Research, July 10, 2011

10 July 2011

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#), [US NATO War](#)

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The US government (White House and Congress) spends \$10 billion dollars a month, or \$120 billion a year, to fight an estimated “50 -75 ‘Al Qaeda types’ in Afghanistan ”, according to the CIA and quoted in the Financial Times of London (6/25 -26/11, p. 5). During the past 30 months of the Obama presidency, Washington has spent \$300 billion dollars in Afghanistan , which adds up to \$4 billion dollars for each alleged ‘Al Qaeda type’. If we multiply this by the two dozen or so sites and countries where the White House claims ‘Al Qaeda’ terrorists have been spotted, we begin to understand why the US budget deficit has grown astronomically to over \$1.6 trillion for the current fiscal year.

During Obama’s Presidency, Social Security’s cost-of-living adjustment has been frozen, resulting in a net decrease of over 8 percent, which is exactly the amount spent chasing just 5 dozen ‘Al Qaeda terrorists’ in the mountains bordering Pakistan .

It is absurd to believe that the Pentagon and White House would spend \$10 billion a month just to hunt down a handful of terrorists ensconced in the mountains of Afghanistan . So what is the war in Afghanistan about? The answer one most frequently reads and hears is that the war is really against the Taliban, a mass-based Islamic nationalist guerrilla movement with tens of thousands of activists. The Taliban, however, have never engaged in any terrorist act against the territorial United States or its overseas presence. The Taliban have always maintained their fight was for the expulsion of foreign forces occupying Afghanistan . Hence the Taliban is not part of any “international terrorist network”. If the US war in Afghanistan is not about defeating terrorism, then why the massive expenditure of funds and manpower for over a decade?

Several hypotheses come to mind:

The first is the geopolitics of Afghanistan : The US is actively establishing forward military bases, surrounding and bordering on China .

Secondly, US bases in Afghanistan serve as launching pads to foment “dissident separatist” armed ethnic conflicts and apply the tactics of ‘divide and conquer’ against Iran , China , Russia and Central Asian republics.

Thirdly, Washington’s launch of the Afghan war (2001) and the easy initial conquest encouraged the Pentagon to believe that a low cost, easy military victory was at hand, one that could enhance the image of the US as an invincible power, capable of imposing its rule anywhere in the world, unlike the disastrous experience of the USSR.

Fourthly, the early success of the Afghan war was seen as a prelude to the launching of

a sequence of successful wars, first against Iraq and to be followed by Iran , Syria and beyond. These would serve the triple purpose of enhancing Israeli regional power, controlling strategic oil resources and enlarging the arc of US military bases from South and Central Asia, through the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean .

The strategic policies, formulated by the militarists and Zionists in the Bush and Obama Administrations, assumed that guns, money, force and bribes could build stable satellite states firmly within the orbit of the post-Soviet US empire. Afghanistan was seen as an easy first conquest the initial step to sequential wars. Each victory, it was assumed would undermine domestic and allied (European) opposition. The initial costs of imperial war, the Neo-Cons claimed, would be paid for by wealth extracted from the conquered countries, especially from the oil producing regions.

The rapid US defeat of the Taliban government confirmed the belief of the military strategists that “backward”, lightly armed Islamic peoples were no match up for the US powerhouse and its astute leaders.

Wrong Assumptions, Mistaken Strategies: The Trillion Dollar Disaster

Every assumption, formulated by these civilian strategists and their military counterparts, has been proven wrong. Al Qaeda was and is a marginal adversary; the real force capable of sustaining a prolonged peoples wars against an imperial occupier, inflicting heavy casualties, undermining any local puppet regime and accumulating mass support is the Taliban and related nationalist resistance movements. Israeli-influenced US think-tanks, experts and advisers who portrayed the Islamic adversaries as inept, ineffective and cowardly, totally misread the Afghan resistance. Blinded by ideological antipathy, these high-ranking advisers and White House/Pentagon civilian-office holders failed to recognize the tactical and strategic, political and military acumen of the top and middle-level Islamist nationalist leaders and their tremendous reserve of mass support in neighboring Pakistan and beyond.

The Obama White House, heavily dependent on Islamophobic pro-Israel experts, further isolated the US troops and alienated the Afghan population by tripling the number of troops, further establishing the credentials of the Taliban as the authentic alternative to a foreign occupation.

As for the neo-conservative pipe dreams of successful sequential wars, cooked up by the likes of Paul Wolfowitz, Feith, Abrams, Libby et al, to eliminate Israel’s adversaries and turn the Persian Gulf into a Hebrew lake, the prolonged wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan has, in fact, strengthened Iran’s regional influence, turned the entire Pakistani people against the US and strengthened mass movements against US clients throughout the Middle East.

Sequential imperial defeats have resulted in a massive hemorrhage of the US treasury, rather than the promised flood of oil wealth from tributary clients. According to a recent scholarly study, the military cost of the wars in Iraq , Afghanistan and Pakistan have exceeded \$3.2 trillion dollars (“The Costs of War Since 2001”, Eisenhower Study Group, June 2011) and is growing at over ten billion a month. Meanwhile the Taliban “tightens (its) psychological grip” on Afghanistan (FT6/30/2011, p. 8). According to the latest reports even

the most guarded 5-star hotel in the center of Kabul, the Intercontinental, was vulnerable to a sustained assault and take over by militants, because “high security Afghan forces” are infiltrated and the Taliban operate everywhere, having established “shadow” governments in most cities, towns and villages (FT 6/30/11 p.8).

Imperial Decline, Empty Treasury and the Specter of a Smash-Up

The crumbling empire has depleted the US treasury. As the Congress and White House fight over raising the debt ceiling, the cost of war aggressively erodes any possibility of maintaining stable living standards for the American middle and working classes and heightens growing inequalities between the top 1% and the rest of the American people. Imperial wars are based on the pillage of the US treasury. The imperial state has, via extraordinary tax exemptions, concentrated wealth in the hands of the super-rich while the middle and working classes have been pushed downward, as only low paid jobs are available.

In 1974, the top 1% of US individuals accounted for 8% of total national income but as of 2008 they earned 18% of national income. And most of this 18% is concentrated in the hands of a tiny super-rich 1% of that 1%, or 0.01% of the American population, (FT 6/28/11, p. 4 and 6/30/11, p. 6). While the super-rich plunder the treasury and intensify the exploitation of labor, the number of middle income jobs is plunging: From 1993 to 2006, over 7% of middle income jobs disappeared (FT 6/30/11, p. 4). While inequalities may be rising throughout the world, the US now has the greatest inequalities among all the leading capitalist countries.

The burden of sustaining a declining empire, with its the monstrous growth in military spending, has fallen disproportionately on middle and working class taxpayers and wage earners. The military and financial elites’ pillage of the economy and treasury has set in motion a steep decline in living standards, income and job opportunities. Between 1970 -2009, while gross domestic product more than doubled, US median pay stagnated in real terms (FT 7/28/11, p. 4). If we factor in the added fixed costs of pensions, health and education, real income for wage and salaried workers, especially since the 1990’s, has been declining sharply.

Even greater blows are to come in the second half 2011: As the Obama White House expands its imperial interventions in Pakistan, Libya and Yemen, increasing military and police-state spending, Obama is set to reach budgetary agreements with the far right Republicans, which will savage government health care programs, like MEDICARE and MEDICAID, as well as Social Security, the national retirement program. Prolonged wars have pushed the budget to the breaking point, while the deficit undermines any capacity to revive the economy as it heads toward a ‘repeat recession’.

The entire political establishment is bizarrely oblivious to the fact that their multi-hundred-billion-dollar pursuit of an estimated 50-75 phantom Al Qaeda terrorists in Afghanistan has hastened the disappearance of middle income jobs in the US .

The entire political spectrum has turned decisively to the Right and the Far-Right. The debate between Democrats and Republicans is over whether to slash four trillion or more from the last remnants of our country’s social programs.

The Democrats and the Far-Right are united as they pursue multiple wars while currying

favor and funds from upper 0.01% super-rich, financial and real estate moguls whose wealth has grown so dramatically during the crisis!

Conclusion

But there is a deep and quiet discomfort within the leading circles of the Obama regime: The “best and brightest” among his top officials are scampering to jump ship before the coming deluge: the Economic Guru Larry Summers, Rahm Emmanuel, Stuart Levey, Peter Orzag, Bob Gates, Tim Geithner and others, responsible for the disastrous wars, economic catastrophes, the gross concentration of wealth and the savaging of our living standards, have walked out or have announced their ‘retirement’, leaving it to the smiling con-men – President Obama and Vice-President ‘Joe’ Biden – and their ‘last and clueless loyalists’ to take the blame when the economy tanks and our social programs are wiped out. How else can we explain their less-than-courageous departures (to ‘spend more time with the family’) in the face of such a deepening crisis? The hasty retreat of these top officials is motivated by their desire to avoid political responsibility and to escape history’s indictment for their role in the impending economic debacle. They are eager to hide from a future judgment over which policy makers and leaders and what policies led to the destruction of the American middle and working classes with their good jobs, stable pensions, Social Security, decent health care and respected place in the world.

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