

Pact Provides for Permanent US Occupation of Afghanistan

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A draft agreement reached late Wednesday night between Washington and the puppet regime of President Hamid Karzai calls for as many as 15,000 foreign troops, the vast majority of them American, to continue occupying Afghanistan through 2024 and beyond.

The deal would also leave the Pentagon in control of nine major bases spread across eight provinces. While these bases are to be formally ceded to Afghanistan next year, they would effectively remain in US hands.

They include Bagram Airbase, north of the capital, the largest US facility, Kandahar and Shorab airbase in the south, Shindand Airbase in Herat province near the western border with Iran, the Jalalabad and Gardez airbases near the eastern border with Pakistan, as well as facilities at Kabul International Airport, Herat International Airport and Mazar-i-Sharif Airport in the north near the former Soviet republics of Central Asia.

While the ostensible purpose of the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) is to leave behind a “residual” US-led force to train, advise and provide logistical support to the Afghan security forces, as well as conduct counterterrorism operations, the deal would consolidate Washington’s longstanding strategic aim of establishing a permanent military foothold in a strategic region that borders China, Iran and the oil-rich Caspian Basin. This was what the Afghan war—prepared well in advance of the September 11, 2001 attacks—has been about from its onset.

While on the eve of the 2012 US election, President Barack Obama insisted that his administration was “bringing our troops home from Afghanistan,” and was committed to a timetable that would “have them all out of there by 2014,” this new agreement essentially commits Washington to unending military intervention in the impoverished country.

A UN mandate allowing the deployment of US and allied troops in Afghanistan expires at the end of 2014. The new deal, which would take effect on January 1, 2014, calls for continuing the US military presence to “2024 and beyond.”

Karzai made a public appeal to support the agreement to the nearly 3,000 Afghan clan leaders and dignitaries assembled in a Loya Jirga (Pashto for grand assembly) he had convened in Kabul. He urged acceptance of the pact on the grounds that it would bring stability to Afghanistan.

The Afghan president said that the deal would keep between 10,000 and 15,000 occupation troops in Afghanistan, while committing the US government “to seek funds on a yearly basis to support the training, equipping, advising and sustaining” of hundreds of thousands of

Afghan troops and police.

At the same time, Karzai sought to strike a nationalist pose, stating at one point, “I don’t trust the US, and the US doesn’t trust me.”

In discussions with US officials, Karzai had demanded that Obama issue a statement acknowledging and apologizing for “mistakes” over the past decade that had led to the deaths of Afghan civilians.

A letter from Obama released in Kabul on Thursday—and brandished by Karzai before the Loya Jirga—failed to do either. Instead, it praised US troops for their “enormous sacrifices” and vowed that in future US forces would not enter Afghan homes “except under extraordinary circumstances involving urgent risk to life and limb of US nationals.”

While the Karzai regime had called for an outright ban on US troops engaging in any of the “night raids” against Afghan homes that have provoked intense popular anger, Obama’s letter essentially affirms that they will continue the practice as the Pentagon sees fit.

Similarly, the text of the draft agreement, which was dated “November 2013,” states that “unless mutually agreed, United States forces shall not conduct combat operations in Afghanistan,” which means that US troops will continue fighting in Afghanistan after 2014.

The letter went on to say that the Pentagon would “continue to make every effort to respect the sanctity and dignity of Afghans in their homes and in their daily lives.”

This “respect” has found expression in bombings and drone missile attacks on civilian targets, massacres and the disappearance and murder of suspected insurgents over the past dozen years. The war has seen a 23 percent increase in civilian casualties during the first six months of 2013 compared to the same period a year ago. The proposed agreement ensures that this carnage will continue.

The other clause within the deal that is widely opposed in Afghanistan grants US troops full immunity for any crimes carried out on Afghan soil, preventing either Afghan courts or international war crime tribunals from exercising jurisdiction. The failure of the Iraqi government to accept similar terms led to the scrapping of plans to keep thousands of US troops in that country.

Karzai told the Loya Jirga that he had opposed both the continued right of US troops to enter Afghan homes and detain Afghans as well as their blanket immunity, but that insisting on either condition would have meant the agreement’s abrogation.

“I said to the US that issue is out of the government’s authority and that the Afghan people have the authority” to accept or reject these provisions, through the Loya Jirga, he said.

Karzai’s speech provoked consternation in Washington, because of his vow to put off formal signing of any agreement until after an April 5 election that is to choose his successor. The US had called for a swift ratification of the deal in order to facilitate military planning and to prevent the agreement from becoming an issue in the Afghan election.

The White House responded swiftly to Karzai’s remarks, issuing a statement Thursday afternoon calling for the agreement to be signed before the end of the year.

White House spokesman Josh Earnest warned that a delay in finalizing the deal until April “would prevent the United States and our allies from being able to plan for a post-2014 presence.”

Karzai’s nationalist posturing notwithstanding, there is little prospect that his regime would survive without the continued presence of foreign troops and the \$6 billion in annual aid promised to Kabul.

If such support “dries up, then they can’t survive,” General Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told a meeting of top US CEOs in Washington Tuesday. While the regime could continue without the “ubiquitous presence of US military forces,” he added, “they can’t live without any.”

The Loya Jirga, which is being held under a security lockdown in Kabul, is to meet for another three days before arriving at a consensus. Karzai has claimed that this body, which he has hand picked, has the ultimate decision on the bilateral agreement in order to distance himself from the move to indefinitely extend a foreign occupation that is deeply unpopular among the Afghan people.

In Washington, Secretary of State John Kerry gave credence to this pretense, however. At the State Department he declined to discuss the contents of draft agreement, on the grounds that it was now in the hands of the Loya Jirga. “So I think it’s inappropriate for me to comment at all on any of the details,” he said. “It’s up to the people of Afghanistan.”

As fraudulent as the sovereignty of the Loya Jirga is, the Obama administration is not even going through the pretense of obtaining a popular mandate in the United States for continuing a 12-year-old war and occupation for another decade and beyond. It intends to implement the bilateral deal without any debate or vote in Congress, much less approval by the American people, who are in their overwhelming majority opposed to the continued military intervention in Afghanistan.

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