



US OUT OF AFGHANISTAN! The Invasion, Eight Years Later...

October 2,
2009

On **October 7, 2001**, less than a month after the events of 9/11, the **US bombarded the nation of Afghanistan** for harboring the people who allegedly plotted the attacks on New York and Washington, DC. Since then, **American ground forces have occupied the nation** and the US has propped up the government of Hamid Karzai, despite the fact that he has very little control over the country and is seen as corrupt by many Afghans (see "Letter from Kabul: after the election" by Portland professor Zaher Wahab, *Oregonian*, September 12).

Meanwhile, **President Obama has expanded President Bush's tactics of crossing the border into nearby Pakistan**, where US drone planes drop bombs nearly weekly, killing civilians along with suspected "terrorists."

And, **despite promises to end the occupation of Iraq, the current plans involve leaving 50,000 American troops there** to guard the US embassy (the world's largest, about the size of the Vatican) and to "advise" the Iraqi military and police ("No change in US drawdown despite Iraq bombings: Pentagon," Agence France Presse [AFP], August 19).

AFGHANISTAN: OPPOSITION GROWS AS CASUALTIES RISE

In the first several years after the initial US invasion of Afghanistan (2001-2004), only 161 US soldiers were killed. Beginning in 2005 those numbers rose to about 100 per year, then rose to 155 in 2008 and **so far in 2009, at least 226 Americans have died in Afghanistan** (icasualties.org). President Obama ordered 17,000 more Americans to Afghanistan earlier this year, bringing the total US presence to over 57,000 in that country, in addition to about 50,000 NATO troops. In September, General McChrystal requested even more troops.

Polls taken in late August show that **a majority of Americans oppose the ongoing military action in Afghanistan**. An August poll by CNN/Opinion Research Corp showed 54 % opposed to the war in Afghanistan, with only 41 % in favor, down from 50 % support in May. The *Washington Post* (August 20) found 51 % "say the war is not worth fighting, up ... 10 (percent) since March." A CNN poll in early September showed opposition as high as 57%.

There are no accurate counts as to how many Afghan civilians, military or fighters have been killed. In September, the UN estimated at least 2118 civilians had died in 2008, and 1500 so far in 2009, 1/4 due to

"coalition airstrikes" (Associated Press, Sept. 26). One problem with a "war" that is really an occupation is that the US is not technically at war with Afghanistan (or Iraq), so there is no "other side" keeping count of deaths caused by military action. The people and the government of Afghanistan have repeatedly protested the US for attacks on civilians. A US bomb in May 2009 killed as many as 140 civilians, and NATO planes deliberately bombed oil tankers in early September, killing nearly 100 ("*Rift with Karzai worsens as 95 perish in Nato air strike*," *Independent*, September 5).

QUESTIONS ABOUT AFGHAN ELECTIONS

Many questions have been raised about the legitimacy of the August Afghan elections, which led to UN observers calling for recounts. But one story speaks volumes about the US presence. On August 26, Reuters reported that an American helicopter "dumped some of the [ballots] somewhere over the rugged mountains of Nuristan." Only 15 of the 25 dropped boxes were recovered. This raises questions not only about the contents of the missing ballots, but about why any sovereign nation would allow another country to transport its ballots!

(over)



U.S. presence in Iraq and Afghanistan helps surround Iran militarily; the U.S. has also been using bombs and sending weapons to Somalia over the last several years, and sending drone planes to bomb Pakistan.



An Afghan family who lost relatives in August, 2008 gestures to a Reuters photographer. The UN found that 60 people died in the US airstrike on Shindand.

IF AFGHANISTAN IS THE NEW VIETNAM, PAKISTAN IS THE NEW LAOS & CAMBODIA (DRONING ON)

There are many who compare the previous and proposed increases of troops to Afghanistan to the escalation of the US military action in Vietnam in the 1960s. Indeed, that was a war against an indigenous population that the US was not well equipped to fight and which dragged on long after public support was lost. But what's not often noted is how the US expanded that war over the borders into the neighboring countries of Laos and Cambodia, without the approval of Congress, allegedly to attack Vietnamese troops and supply routes in those countries.

Today, we have US drone warplanes, piloted by remote control from thousands of miles away, dropping bombs in Pakistan. Three such attacks in three weeks from mid-August to early September killed at least 26 people, and it is unknown how many were civilians (Associated Press, August 21).

Congress broadly authorized the "War on Terror" in 2001 with an Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) allowing the President to attack any country he suspects aided in the events of 9/11. However, there has been no specific Congressional debate or authorization for bombing of Pakistan, and many believe that the 2001 AUMF was drawn too broadly.

Interestingly, the Obama Administration has stopped referring to the "War on Terror" and instead talks about being "at war with al Qaeda... [and] its violent extremist allies who seek to carry on al Qaeda's murderous agenda" (*Washington Times*, August 6). While it is refreshing to no longer be at war against a tactic (terrorism), it is still unclear how a country can be at war with an organization.

DEPLETED URANIUM AND LAND MINES USED BY THE US

In addition to the human carnage, war also takes a toll on the environment.

From the article "*Radioactive wreckage, landmines blight Iraq*" (AFP, August 24):

—"Radioactive wreckage and tens of millions of landmines still blight Iraq after decades of war and the deadly violence that engulfed the nation after the 2003 invasion."



An Iraqi woman holds a child deformed by Depleted Uranium. (image found at merryabla64.wordpress.com).

—"Depleted Uranium, a radioactive metal present in armour piercing bullets used by US-led forces during the 1991 Gulf War and the 2003 invasion, and which is twice as dense as lead, has been blamed for health problems from cancer to birth defects."

—"The environment ministry's limited budget [is] around \$US100 million (\$120 million) compared to the "billions" that are judged necessary to tackle the country's myriad environmental challenges..."

—In addition, Environment Minister Narmin Othman Hasan says: "We have 25 million mines in Iraq - one quarter of the world's mines." (Note: The article does not mention that many of those mines were dropped from US planes, though many others were laid during the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1989.)

Depleted Uranium was also widely used in the war on Afghanistan, and was used by the US in the war on Serbia in 1999. White phosphorous, a chemical which burns on contact, was used by the US in Iraq (BBC, November 16, 2005) and more recently by US ally Israel in Gaza (*Guardian*, January 21). Like the horrific Vietnam-era chemicals Agent Orange and Napalm, these toxic weapons should no longer be used.

Also, the US and its allies have repeatedly threatened to use military force against Iran—in particular, its nuclear facilities. Not only would such military action lead to immediate death and destruction (and likely retaliation), but the results of releasing radioactive material could last for generations.

MONEY FOR HUMAN NEEDS, NOT WAR

The occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan have already cost over one trillion dollars (\$1,000,000,000,000). The US has also spent billions on military action in Somalia (including supplying weapons to the fragile government there--AFP, August 6) and Pakistan, and is now expanding its military bases in Colombia, ostensibly to "track drug-runners" (AFP, August 15).

Despite these two occupations, which were likely conducted to secure access to oil—how many countries without oil supplies or pipeline routes are run by despots while the US does nothing?—America's dependency on oil continues to grow. The environmental damage from our carbon-based economy is contributing to irreversible climate change.

Meanwhile, the debate rages about how to extend health care to the 40 million Americans who have none (including a plan to force people to buy insurance from for-profit corporations), while the ranks of unemployed and homeless people continue to swell. How can we pay for health care, housing and jobs for all Americans?

BRING THE TROOPS HOME NOW! END THE OCCUPATIONS OF IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN!

.... for starters!

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