

US Out of Syria and Afghanistan!

September
25, 2020

Astonishingly, October 7 marks the 19th year since the US began its war in Afghanistan, often called “the longest war in US history.”* Also, September 23 marks six years since the US entered into the civil war in Syria, a move they made without a Congressional vote, a UN mandate, nor the invitation of the Syrian government.

In February, 2020, the US signed an agreement with the Taliban to end the Afghan war, leaving the Afghan government out of the talks. To date, the Afghans have taken actions to support that agreement, including releasing hundreds of Taliban prisoners, most recently in early September (Radio Free Afghanistan, September 1). This set the stage for talks between the Afghan government and Taliban beginning in mid-September in Qatar. President Trump’s words indicate he wants to end America’s “endless wars” and bring the troops home, but so far the US has only drawn down from 14,000 troops to about 8,600, with plans to leave 4,500 in Afghanistan after the next drawdown (CNN, September 11).

In early 2019, Trump initially called to remove US troops from Syria, but faced backlash from Congress and the military. Since then, the President has supported the current mission in which US troops on the ground are guarding oil fields in northeastern Syria. An American company is planning to sell oil from that area to fund US-backed Kurdish rebels, a move Syria’s foreign ministry correctly calls “stealing” Syria’s oil (Army Times, August 10). There are currently “less than 1000” US troops in Syria (CNN, August 17), but a deployment of 100 more was announced in September (NBC, September 18).

Locally, the continued unlawful war in Afghanistan impacts Oregon directly. Six of the thirteen Chinook helicopters that could have been used by the Oregon National Guard to fight this year’s wildfires are currently in Afghanistan (Newsweek, September 10).

BY THE NUMBERS

The wars launched by the US since 2001 have taken the lives of over 7000 Americans: 2451 in Afghanistan and 4586 in Iraq (icasualties.org), not to mention tens of thousands of wounded. The number of people killed in the 9/11 attacks was 2973. At least 43,000 of the estimated 157,000 people killed in Afghanistan since 2001 have been civilians (Watson Institute at Brown University, January 2020). The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights says that as of March 14, at least 14,024 Syrians have been killed by US-led “coalition forces.” Over 185,000 civilians have died in Iraq (IraqBodyCount.org).

Just in 2020, the US has conducted at least 1012 airstrikes/drone attacks in Afghanistan (TheBureauInvestigates.com). The number of strikes in Syria are harder to track as the US has stopped publishing data, but there were at least six in August (The Hill, September 16) including a US helicopter strike at a Syrian checkpoint that injured one soldier (Reuters, August 17).

The estimated costs of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are over \$6 trillion (Watson Institute, January, 2020). While the US military claims they remain in Afghanistan to train local forces and maintain stability, the reasons are most likely the \$1 trillion of minerals estimated to be in Afghanistan (Bloomberg News, August 20).

WARS OLD ENOUGH TO VOTE BUT NOT DRINK

Because it has been 19 years since September 11, 2001, anyone born after the Afghan war started is now eligible to serve in a war that is older than they are. The War in Iraq will enter its 18th year in March 2021. The US involvement in the wars in Afghanistan and Syria— as well as its military activity in Yemen [2002], Pakistan [2004], Libya [2011], and Somalia [2011]— traces back to the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) passed by Congress just days after 9/11. The US has troops on the ground in Yemen and Somalia.

Beginning with the “Gulf War” in January 1991, continuing through the invasion in 2003, the war against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) which began in August 2014, and the assassination of Iranian General Soleimani in 2020, the US has never really stopped its attacks in Iraq. In 2002, Congress approved a separate AUMF designed to remove Saddam Hussein from power. Although that goal was accomplished, the 2002 AUMF remains in effect today.

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Afghan Officials: US Airstrike Killed at Least 10 Civilians in Herat



People walk inside a Shiite mosque after a bombing attack in western Herat, Afghanistan

23 Jan 2020 The Associated Press | By Rahim Faiez Associated Press, 1/13/20

KABUL, Afghanistan — A drone attack carried out by U.S. forces earlier this month in western Afghanistan that apparently targeted a splinter Taliban group also killed at least 10 civilians, including three women and three children, an Afghan rights official and a council member said Wednesday.

* But the Korean War ended with an armistice, not a peace treaty, in 1953, so that war continues; the war on Iraq began in January 1991 and has never really ended.

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Meanwhile, the US has conducted at least 776 strikes in Libya after the US acted to overthrow its government in 2011 (The Intercept, May 22). Under President Trump, the US has ramped up airstrikes in Somalia (which began in 2007), with a total of 63 in 2019 and at least 42 in 2020 (Newsweek, August 14). Though no drone strikes have been reported in Pakistan since July, 2018 (Airwars, August 2020), American drones have been used to attack so-called Islamic militants in Yemen since 2002, with at least 374 recorded airstrikes (NewAmerica.org). The US continues to support Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in their war on Yemen, in part because Trump has used three of the eight vetoes of his entire administration to block Congressional limits on that war.

Trump used another veto to overturn limits on starting a war with Iran. While a possible outcome of the US pulling out of the “nuclear deal” there, it seems the global appetite for such a war is weakening. In August, the US was resoundingly defeated when trying to extend an arms embargo on Iran—a 2-2 UN Security Council vote with 11 abstentions (The Hill, August 14)—and when trying to invoke a “snapback” of sanctions under the nuclear deal despite no longer being party to it. The Indonesian ambassador leading the Security Council rejected the US’ efforts without allowing a vote (The Hill, August 25). One reason the US is withdrawing from many bases in Iraq is a parliamentary vote there demanding the US to leave after the assassination of General Soleimani.

The US is also stoking the flames of a war against China, sending planes, warships and submarines to the area around contested islands in the South China Sea. America is even seeking to create a NATO-like military alliance against China (Economic Times, September 1).

The US also continues to ratchet up tensions with Venezuela—a country with the world’s largest known oil reserves—by using naval blockades to stop imported gasoline and repair parts from arriving, mostly from Iran (Associated Press, August 13). There are also increased tensions with Russia and North Korea.

OTHER HARMFUL US POLICIES

Here at home, the government continues to engage in spying and unlawful detentions, including 40 men still held in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Lawmakers seem unable to rein in the police institutions in this country, which like the military, enforce state policy through violence. Despite a national awakening around racist and violent policing, no meaningful national laws have been passed in the months since George Floyd was killed in Minneapolis.

Other than entire nations, the US military is the world’s #1 user of fossil fuels, a huge contributor to climate change.

Despite the fact that President Trump has been nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize for getting the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain to recognize Israel (The Hill, September 10), those deals include attacks on international norms. The UAE has agreed to open an embassy in Jerusalem, even though the UN recognizes Tel Aviv as the Israeli capital to avoid rewarding Israel’s occupation of the West Bank. The deals with these countries are seen as a betrayal of the Palestinians’ demand to be recognized and granted their own country, after over 50 years of Israeli occupation.

America also has refused to recognize the authority of the International Criminal Court, which has launched an investigation into possible US war crimes in Afghanistan. In response, the Trump administration put sanctions on an ICC prosecutor and one of her aides, drawing condemnation (Al Jazeera, September 3).

CONCLUSION

The US has no right to be in Syria. The failure of nearly two decades of war in Afghanistan indicates it is time to bring all the troops home. Congress passed a military budget of \$740 billion while the nation is struggling with a pandemic and the economic fallout from that health crisis. It is criminal to keep spending money on war instead of human needs.

The “War on Terror” has made life more difficult for many Arabs, Muslims and immigrants in the US with lines between law enforcement and immigration blurring, and has fueled the rise of hate groups. Americans must call for an end to state-sanctioned murder and agree to support international law, human rights, and civil liberties.

US sends Bradley Fighting Vehicles to Syria to boost security for troops following Russian encounter

The deployment follows a tense encounter with Russian troops in August

By Luis Martinez September 18, 2020, 3:47 PM • 6 min read

ABC News, 9/18/20



In a show of force, the U.S. military has sent armored fighting vehicles to eastern Syria to help protect the hundreds of American troops stationed there following a tense encounter with Russian forces last month that left seven American troops injured, said U.S. Central Command.

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