

Afghanistan: troops out now!

Marucs Halaby Tue, 01/12/2009 - 18:50

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As casualties continue to soar, Gordon Brown has pledged an extra 500 troops for Afghanistan and President Obama is to send 30,000 more soldiers to the country. Marcus Halaby criticises the campaign by the media and generals to promote support and better equipment for the troops in Afghanistan, and discusses the bankruptcy of the puppet regime installed by the imperialists

The Afghanistan election in August differed little from that held in Zimbabwe last year ? except in the reaction it produced. In both cases, the main opposition candidate pulled out of the second round in protest at blatant voter intimidation, ballot stuffing, violence and bribery by the incumbent president.

But, while Robert Mugabe?s fraudulent ?re-election? brought howls of protest from the G8 leaders, and increased sanctions on an already impoverished country, Hamid Karzai?s produced merely mild disappointment from US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Karzai, it seems, should have arranged a deal in time with his main opponent, Abdullah Abdullah.

In fact, Karzai is a puppet president. He would be nothing without the 70,000 foreign troops occupying his country. His government?s authority barely exists outside the capital, Kabul. In the warlord-ridden provinces beyond, he depends on those troops ? and on the vast sums of money sent supposedly to fund ?reconstruction?.

Small wonder, then, that two cabinet ministers and 15 other former ministers are being investigated for corruption. Even US officials acknowledge that Karzai?s brother is a leading drug baron in Afghanistan?s lucrative opium trade.

This conflict was sold to the public as a ?War on Terror? to spread democracy and protect women?s rights. Instead, it has produced a corrupt dictatorship with the thinnest veneer of democratic legitimacy. Its warlord allies in the north of the country impose conditions on women even worse than under the Taliban, using the weapon of rape to reward loyalty and punish opposition.

Growing opposition

Opinion polls show that the war is becoming increasingly unpopular. In an Independent on Sunday poll in November, 71 per cent supported withdrawal of forces within a year. Almost half agreed that the war has increased the threat of terrorist attacks in the UK. In July, polls showed only 47 per cent opposed to the war.

The decline in support no doubt reflects the fact that this has been the worst year for casualties in the British armed forces since the Falklands war in 1982, with the number of dead nearing a hundred. This represents almost half of the 230-odd killed in total since 2001.

In response, the government and media have stepped up their efforts to win public support for the war. They have encouraged local councils to mount home-coming parades for returning troops and given maximum publicity to displays of public grief for those killed in action.

Stab in the back

More sinister has been the campaign, spearheaded by the generals and enthusiastically taken up by both

tabloid and 'serious' broadsheet papers, to blame the government for the increasing death toll among British forces.

Like the German generals who promoted the legend of a 'stab in the back' at the end of the First World War - blaming the German Social Democrats for not supporting the war hard enough - they are playing a dangerous game. The more they raise the question, 'why are they dying?', the more the public will start to wonder, 'why are they fighting?'

To detract from this, the generals argue that troops are dying primarily because they are not being given enough equipment. They want more and better flak jackets, helicopters and armoured personnel carriers, so that 'our boys' can get on with making the world safe from Islamist terrorism, by killing Afghan civilians in hi-tech air strikes without comeback.

It does not occur to them that, if soldiers from some of the world's most advanced armies, with access to the most sophisticated weaponry on earth, are dying in a war in one of the world's most backward countries, with an enemy that relies on home-made bombs, then it might just be because the Afghan people as a whole do not want them there. It is telling that they cannot even rely on the loyalty of their paid collaborators - as shown by the Afghan policeman who killed five British soldiers and wounded eight at the beginning of November.

It is also a measure of their racist hypocrisy that, while British casualties are humanised - with names, faces, ages, hometowns and images of distraught friends and families - neither the government nor the pundits mention the vastly higher numbers of Afghan dead. Estimates of Afghan deaths since 2001 range between 9,000 and Oxfam's estimate of 32,000, with up to 235,000 displaced from their homes. The UN believes that about 2,000 Afghans were killed in the first 10 months of 2009, about 200 of them in air strikes from unmanned drone aircraft.

Conscripted by poverty

Of course, British troop deaths are a tragedy for their families and their communities. It is obscene to see working-class soldiers - conscripted by poverty, boredom and unemployment - dying, while well-dressed and well-spoken newspaper columnists, politicians and officers squabble over who is responsible.

But the fact remains that they are there to fight a war to hold down the Afghan people. It is not those of us, who oppose the war and demand they be brought home, that have put them in harm's way.

It is certainly not our war, but part of a war for the bankers and billionaires to keep the region - and the world - safe for their system of exploitation. The longer they stay, the more people they kill, the more it will fuel the fire of Afghan resistance.

This unwinnable war is costing billions while public services are slashed, causing poverty and misery. The anti-war movement, linking itself to the massive discontent of the unemployed, the youth, and the workers threatened with redundancy and insecurity, should step up its campaign and demand:

TROOPS OUT NOW!

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