

Imperialism in the dock - Troops out of Afghanistan

Marcus Halaby Thu, 11/10/2012 - 08:15

Marcus Halaby

In late August the number of American troops killed in the war in Afghanistan reached a total of 2,000. This includes those killed in Pakistan and other countries where US forces are involved.

Of particular concern to the US-led occupation forces has been the sharp rise in 'green-on-blue' attacks by Afghan army and police on coalition troops, which now account for about one-quarter of NATO casualties, one of the latest of which killed six at a checkpoint near Nahr-e Saraj in Helmand province on 15 September.

As a result, NATO has suspended joint operations with the very same Afghan forces that it has been training to take over the country as its forces withdraw, throwing into doubt UK Defence Secretary Philip Hammond's talk of an early withdrawal of British troops ahead of planned withdrawal date of 2014.

US soldiers now have to arrange for armed guards during their meetings with Afghan forces, in a clear sign that they no longer trust their Afghan allies. The same weekend, fifteen Taliban fighters infiltrated Camp Bastion, supposedly the safest place for the occupation's troops, killing two marines, wounding nine and destroying aircraft worth £123 million.

However, the cost of the war to the Afghan people has been much higher, with around 15,000 Afghan civilians killed in the ten years from the US-led invasion to 2011. The same weekend as the Nahr-e Saraj and Camp Bastion incidents, a NATO air strike killed at least eight women and young girls collecting firewood in Alingar in Afghanistan's eastern Laghman province.

This war without clearly defined enemies began when the US President George W Bush led a coalition that invaded Afghanistan after the 11 September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. It allowed Bush to survive domestic resentment at a flat economy and a stolen election and to unite the American people on the back of a wave of jingoism.

Declaring a global 'War On Terror' that the United States and its allies were entitled to wage anywhere in the world, George Bush and UK Prime Minister Tony Blair told us that it would bring democracy, stability and women's rights to an Afghan people that had suffered under the rule of the ultra-fundamentalist Taliban.

In fact, Afghanistan remains as violent and unstable now as it has ever been since the Soviet Union's invasion in 1979 and the civil war that followed it. In that war, the US and its allies armed and funded the Muslim fundamentalist 'Mujahideen' fighters out of which the Taliban emerged. It was the chaos that followed the collapse of the pro-Soviet Najibullah regime in 1992 that allowed the Taliban to take power in 1996.

The weak and corrupt government of President Hamid Karzai can in no sense be considered democratic. Installed in power by a foreign occupation, Karzai blatantly rigged the presidential elections in 2009, forcing his main opponent Abdullah Abdullah to abandon a run-off poll and allow Karzai to claim an unearned victory.

His brother Mahmud Karzai and the rest of his family are mired in corruption, looting the billions in reconstruction aid provided by the occupying powers, while his half-brother Ahmed Wali Karzai, assassinated last July, was known to dominate the country's vast and illegal opium trade.

As for women's rights, Karzai's government approved a law that legalises rape within marriage for members of the country's Shi'a minority in 2009, while sexual violence and the brutal treatment of women continues unabated in the rural regions of the country controlled by pro-government warlords. Women can be jailed for complicity in adultery if they are raped by men to whom they are not married, while the Taliban, once considered a by-word for the quasi-medieval confinement of Afghan women, now enjoy an increased popularity and hold sway over much of the southern part of the country as a result of their resistance to an occupation that was meant to overthrow them.

In fact, the real motivation for war was Afghanistan's strategic geographic location. Sensing the re-emergence of Russia a decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the concurrent rise of China, India and Brazil, the neoconservative faction of the US ruling class around George W Bush saw the invasion of Afghanistan and later of Iraq as an unmissable opportunity to offset the decline of US power by controlling their global rivals' access to strategic resources.

A secondary issue is Afghanistan's untapped mineral and energy resources, estimated to be worth at least \$1 trillion. And this struggle one waged by our ruling classes for the right to plunder the rest of the world is one that the working class in the democratic West has no interest in supporting.

In fact, the reverse is true. The soldiers sent to fight and die in this predatory war, who often return home either brutalised or traumatised by the experience of holding down another people by force with all the death and destruction that involves come overwhelmingly from working-class communities, often suffering from high levels of unemployment, who have joined the army to escape boredom and poverty. It is these communities and not the politicians and journalists who continue to cheerlead an unpopular war that will suffer the human cost of this war at home.

Worse still, by violating the Afghan people's democratic right to determine their own national future, and thereby fanning the flames of resentment, this war has exposed ordinary people in the West to a greater risk of terrorism than previously.

It is for all of these reasons that socialists opposed the invasion of Afghanistan, oppose its continued occupation, and support the right of the Afghan people to eject the foreign occupying forces from their country.

Source URL: <https://fifthinternational.org/content/imperialism-dock-troops-out-afghanistan>