

NO to More War in Afghanistan/Pakistan

The Obama administration has dramatically increased the number of US forces in Afghanistan, bringing the total to over 100,000 (not counting 107,000 private mercenaries and civilian contractors). Meanwhile, it has escalated military strikes in Pakistan. The US military presence in the region is having disastrous consequences for all three countries involved. The US government must begin withdrawing troops from the region and—if it's serious about preventing terrorism—replace military force with diplomacy and economic aid. Several points are central to understanding the situation in Afghanistan/Pakistan.

1. The war is bad for the US, and worse for Afghanistan and Pakistan

Escalating the war has already led to the deaths of more US soldiers—far more in 2009-10 than in any other period—while squandering hundreds of billions of dollars. Direct spending on the Afghanistan occupation has already totaled nearly \$330 billion, money that could have been spent on human needs like education and health care, and on development assistance for desperately poor countries like Afghanistan. Moreover, continued military intervention in Central Asia has *increased* the threat of terrorism against the US, not reduced it.

Increasing the number of US soldiers has only led to greater violence, consistent with the predictions of experts prior to the escalation. From 2007 to 2008, US/NATO forces were increased by 44 percent (from 36,000 to 52,000 soldiers) but the level of violence increased dramatically during that period. In 2008 civilian casualties skyrocketed by around 40 percent according to the United Nations, which also reports that civilian casualties rose 31 percent in the first half of 2010. The undeniable pattern is that increased US military activity leads to increased violence and civilian casualties. In fact, a July 2009 Gallup poll found that 59 percent of the people of Pakistan see the United States—not the Taliban or al-Qaeda—as the greatest threat to their country.

The US strategy of bombing civilian areas where suspected “insurgents” are located kills mostly women and children and is a flagrant violation of national and international law (Articles 48 and 50 of the Fourth Geneva Convention). And it fuels more violence by strengthening support for insurgents among the Afghan population.

Most important, the Afghan people overwhelmingly support a de-escalation of the war. A January 2009 poll by ABC, BBC, and ARD news agencies found the following results:

- 73 percent of Afghans are opposed to the Obama administration's escalation of the war, and 44 percent want US and NATO forces to begin withdrawing immediately
- 77 percent say that US air strikes are “unacceptable” because of the civilian deaths that inevitably result
- 51 percent want US/NATO forces gone within 1-2 years, a percentage that has risen steadily in recent years



Freshta Shagad, 9, killed along with her baby brother in the US invasion

Even more remarkable, a December 2009 poll funded by the US military in Kandahar (a key center of the conflict) found that 94 percent of residents favored peace talks with the Taliban over the continued use of military force.

2. There is no battlefield solution to terrorism

Any serious approach to fighting terrorism must be predicated on respect for national and international law, which strictly prohibit the use of violence except in self-defense. But the use of brute military force is also *ineffective* in countering terrorist groups like al-Qaeda. A 2008 study by the RAND Corporation, an organization with long ties to the US military, found that very few terrorist groups end as a result of military force. It concluded that “there is no battlefield solution to terrorism. Military force usually has the opposite effect from what is intended: It is often overused, alienates the local population by its heavy-handed nature, and provides a window of opportunity for terrorist-group recruitment.”

History also suggests that military force will not “work.” Afghanistan is far larger than Iraq, has more difficult terrain, and has a population of 30 million people. No empire in history—from Alexander the Great, to the British, to 110,000 Soviet troops in the 1980s—has been able to control it, leading to Afghanistan’s reputation as the “graveyard of empires.” Moreover, al-Qaeda operatives are scattered around the globe in a decentralized network that won’t be eliminated by conquering Afghanistan.

An effective approach must involve a fundamental reorientation of US policy, including the following:

- An immediate end to US military offensives in Afghanistan and Pakistan
- An immediate start to the complete withdrawal of US forces and bases from Central Asia, to be replaced by temporary forces responsible to the UN General Assembly and local police that will take the lead in disarming the various warring factions and in confronting al-Qaeda
- Support for a regional diplomatic initiative involving all of Afghanistan’s neighbors as well as domestic groups, including Taliban forces, to stabilize the region and isolate al-Qaeda, in accordance with the wishes of the Afghan and Pakistani populations (see below, point #3).
- US support for secular sectors of Afghan and Pakistani society and their right to participate in negotiations
- US reparations for the human and material damage it has done
- Increased humanitarian and development aid to Afghanistan and Pakistan, with mechanisms to ensure that the aid benefits the people who need it most

“There is no battlefield solution to terrorism. Military force alienates the local population by its heavy-handed nature and provides a window of opportunity for terrorist-group recruitment.”

—2008 RAND Corporation study

3. The Afghan people want peace with justice; the US is promoting neither

US government policy in Afghanistan has gone against the wishes of most Afghans. For the last three decades the US has supported fundamentalist warlords known as the Mujahideen, first as allies against the Soviet Union and

later as a counter-weight to the Taliban. Since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, the US has worked through the government of Hamid Karzai in an effort to shape the country’s political and economic destiny, and has continued to support Mujahideen warlords throughout the country, most of whom are affiliated with the group known as the Northern Alliance. Despite their atrocious crimes against Afghan civilians (especially women), many of these warlords have acquired high-level positions in government: 60 percent of the politicians in the Afghan Parliament are warlords or have close connections to warlords. As a result, these people have successfully enshrined Islamic Sharia law in the Afghan Constitution.

Although most Afghans dislike the Taliban, 74 percent favor government negotiations with Taliban leaders, and 64 percent think that “the government in Kabul should negotiate a settlement with

Afghan Taliban in which they are allowed to hold political offices if they agree to stop fighting.” At the same time, however, most Afghans insist that warlords and others guilty of human rights violations must be prosecuted, and that the rights of women must be ensured. Negotiations to end the fighting must therefore include strict stipulations ensuring the equal rights of women and legal investigations into all human rights violations.

- ***Call your Senators and Congressperson today and tell them to vote against any further war funding and to support the measures outlined above. Rep. Tim Bishop (NY-1) and NY Senators Schumer and Gillibrand can all be reached by calling the US Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121.***
- ***To get involved with local efforts to end war and militarism, contact the Stony Brook Social Justice Alliance at sbusja@gmail.com. For more info on Afghanistan/Pakistan visit www.uslaboragainstar.org and www.WhyAreWeInAfghanistan.org.***

“The US government first of all considers her own political and economic interests and has empowered and equipped the most traitorous, anti-democratic, misogynist and corrupt fundamentalist gangs in Afghanistan...RAWA from the very first days stated that no country will grant freedom and democracy to another country and today this reality is evident to all.”

—Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA.org), active since 1977