

US death toll in Afghanistan tops 1,000

19 May 2010

The massive suicide bombing that ripped through a NATO convoy in Kabul Tuesday claimed the lives of five more US soldiers, a Canadian officer and a dozen Afghan civilians.

The attack demonstrated the failure of more than eight years of US-led occupation, not to mention that of the puppet government of President Hamid Karzai, to secure even the center of the Afghan capital. It also marked a grim milestone for American forces, bringing the total number killed in action in “Operation Enduring Freedom” to the 1,000 mark.

There is little doubt that the Obama administration, like the Bush White House before it, will seek to gloss over the significance of this casualty figure. A White House spokesman issued a brief statement Tuesday praising American military forces for their “extraordinary sacrifice”, but made no mention of the number of American dead in this war having risen to 1,000.

Such numbers, however, do have an immense significance and demand serious reflection. Behind them lie devastated family members and loved ones, not to mention the tens of thousands more US troops who have seen their lives shattered by horrendous physical wounds as well as the immense psychological toll of repeated tours of duty fighting a hostile population as part of an army of occupation.

In 2009, 17,538 military personnel were hospitalized for mental problems, compared to 11,156 for injuries and battle wounds. “War is difficult. It takes a toll,” commented the Army’s surgeon general, Lt. Gen. Eric Schoomaker.

No doubt, the same can be said for any war. But when soldiers are sent to kill and die in a war based upon lies, a war whose human costs are covered up by the government and a servile media and a war that is waged to suppress popular resistance to foreign occupation, this psychological toll is sharply intensified.

For what have 1,000 US American soldiers died? What has justified the shattered bodies and minds of many thousands more? And what can excuse the slaying and maiming of tens of thousands of Afghans over the course of the last 103 months in this, the second longest war in history?

The Obama administration’s claims—echoing the lies of Bush and Cheney—that US imperialism is fighting in Afghanistan to prevent another terrorist attack on US soil have been discredited by the military commanders themselves, who estimate that no more than 100 Al Qaeda members are operating inside the country, and acknowledge that their counterinsurgency efforts are directed against indigenous resistance.

It is, in short, a filthy colonial-style war consisting of the kind of pacification operations that US forces waged against Native Americans in the 19th century or against Filipinos and Haitians in the early 20th. It involves criminal practices familiar to the armies of France, Portugal and Britain, in their attempts to crush anti-colonial movements in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

US soldiers are dying to prop up the venal puppet regime of Hamid Karzai, which represents a group of brutal warlords and heroin traffickers on the CIA payroll, but, according to the US military’s own surveys, enjoys no significant base of popular support in any part of the country.

And, in the final analysis, they are dying in pursuit of a strategy of aggression—elaborated well before 9/11—that is aimed at establishing US military hegemony over energy supplies and oil pipeline routes that are of immense importance to the countries neighboring Afghanistan—in particular, China, Russia, Iran, Pakistan and India.

This strategy is designed to benefit a tiny ruling financial elite at the expense of working people not only in Afghanistan, but in the US as well. Under conditions in which working people are being told that there is “no money” to deal with unemployment, poverty and deteriorating social conditions, the Democratic controlled Congress is preparing this week to pass another \$59 billion “emergency” supplemental bill to finance the Afghan war and its escalation.

By this summer, as a result of the Obama administration’s “surge,” the number of US troops occupying Afghanistan will

be triple what it was when George W. Bush left office. Far from securing the country, the increased US military presence has only led to a steady escalation of violence and death.

According to a report released by the US Government Accountability Office, US-led occupation forces were subjected to an average of more than 40 attacks each day in March, double the rate for the same month in 2009.

Meanwhile, even according to the Pentagon's absurdly low estimates, the number of unarmed civilians, the majority of them women and children, killed by US-led occupation forces in night raids, bombings, checkpoint shootings and drive-by killings by US convoys also doubled during the first quarter of this year, compared to the number recorded for the same period last year.

The level of bloodletting is set to escalate sharply, with the resistance launching its own summer offensive and US forces preparing for a siege of Kandahar, a city roughly the size of Detroit, which has been a stronghold of the Taliban. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's statement last week that the US military did not intend to "destroy Kandahar in the effort to save Kandahar" was hardly reassuring.

The broad popular hostility in the US to this war, as well as to the continued occupation of Iraq, both launched under the Bush administration and continued under Obama, has not disappeared. But it can find no expression whatsoever within the two big business parties or in the mass media, which largely echoes the official line that the US is fighting a "good war" in Afghanistan.

There is no doubt a broad sense that nothing can be done within the existing political setup, particularly after repeated elections in which masses of people have gone to the polls to express their opposition to these wars and, in 2008, elected as president, Barack Obama, who had appealed to these sentiments, only to take office and dramatically escalate US military aggression in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The experience of 15 months of the Obama administration has also exposed the bankrupt perspective of the middle class antiwar protest organizations that had maintained war could be opposed by supporting the Democrats against Bush. The Bush administration is gone, the Democrats control both houses of Congress and the war crimes continue. For their part, the protest organizations have become largely inactive, having adapted themselves to Obama's "progressive" agenda.

A genuine struggle against war can be waged only through the development of an independent socialist movement of the working class against the capitalist profit system, which is the source of militarism.

This movement must demand the immediate withdrawal of all US and other foreign troops from the Middle East and Central Asia. It must also fight for the dismantlement of the US war machine and the redirection of the trillions of dollars in military spending to pay for reparations to the populations ravaged by American wars of aggression and to deal with the deepening social crisis confronting working people in the US itself.

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