

Obama's War Speech: The Questions It Raises... And The Answer That Must Be Given

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On Tuesday, December 1, at the U.S. Military Academy in West Point, President Barack Obama announced that he would send 30,000 additional troops to Afghanistan. He also called for 10,000 more NATO troops, which pushes the total U.S.-led forces to nearly 150,000, and he announced plans to step up the war on a number of fronts including (without being specific) in Pakistan. Obama has now tripled the number of U.S. forces in Afghanistan since he took office.

These military forces will not be going to Afghanistan to set up vaccination programs or conduct literacy classes for Afghan girls. They are going there as part of the most destructive military machine on the planet, to wreak violence. The military machine that has bombed wedding parties, that has held thousands of young Afghan men in Bagram prison without charges, that kicks down doors in the middle of the night—this machine is being strengthened and further unleashed.

The West Point speech is being called the “defining moment” of Obama’s presidency. Thus far into his term, at least, that is true. So it is important to look deeply at the questions Obama posed and the answers he gave—and in doing so to get into the real underlying causes of the military escalation now being put into effect.

Why is the U.S. Army in Afghanistan?

Obama began his speech this way: “It is important to recall why America and our allies were compelled to fight a war in Afghanistan in the first place. We did not ask for this fight. On September 11, 2001, nineteen men hijacked four airplanes and used them to murder nearly 3,000 people. They struck at our military and economic nerve centers.... As we know, these men belonged to al Qaeda.... Al Qaeda’s base of operations was in Afghanistan, where they were harbored by the Taliban—a ruthless, repressive and radical movement that seized control of that country after it was ravaged by years of Soviet occupation and civil war, and after the attention of America and our friends had turned elsewhere.”

Obama later returned to his explanation of why the Taliban and al Qaeda had taken root in Afghanistan: “Now, the people of Afghanistan have endured violence for decades. They’ve been confronted with occupation by the Soviet Union, and then by foreign al Qaeda fighters who used Afghan land for their own purposes.”

Obama implies that the U.S. had nothing to do with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and that it bears no responsibility for the growth of the Taliban and al Qaeda there, or the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in the region. According to Obama, the U.S. itself

therefore played no role in the events that lead to the attacks of 9/11.

The facts are different. The U.S. actually helped prompt the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In July 1979, some five months before the Soviet invasion, the U.S. had initiated a covert campaign to destabilize Afghanistan's pro-Soviet government by arming and funding the Islamist opposition. The goal, according to Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Jimmy Carter's National Security Adviser, was "to induce a Soviet military intervention." When the Soviets did intervene in December, Brzezinski wrote Carter: "We now have the opportunity of giving to the USSR its Vietnam War."

The Carter administration undertook this operation because at the time the U.S. was locked in a bitter struggle for global supremacy with what was then the Soviet Union.* After helping trigger the Afghanistan invasion, the U.S. worked behind the scenes with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia throughout the 1980s to make the war much longer, more violent, and more destructive. These forces organized, funded, and armed the Mujahideen ("warriors for Islam"). While many other Afghans took up arms against the Soviet invaders, the U.S. and its partners worked to build up the reactionary Islamic fundamentalist fighters. Over the next decade, the U.S. government funneled more than \$3 billion in arms and aid to these fundamentalist forces, and in so doing helped fuel a global Islamist movement. This is where Osama bin Laden got his start. This is where the seeds of al Qaeda and the Taliban were first sown. (Also see endnotes below.)

During the 1980s there were some Afghans fighting against the Soviet occupation who opposed religious fundamentalism and both U.S. and Soviet imperialism. They stood for an entirely different future—a future free of imperialist domination, free of capitalist exploitation, and free of the backward, traditional feudal social relations and ideology that keep most of the Afghan people in shackles—especially women. These forces were led by Afghanistan's revolutionary Maoists. Yet these forces were targeted—viciously and murderously—by all the reactionary forces involved in the Afghan conflict—the U.S. imperialists, the Soviet imperialists, the Islamic Mujahideen, and the U.S.-backed warlords.

When the Soviets finally pulled out of Afghanistan in 1989, more than a million Afghans (along with 15,000 Soviet soldiers) had been killed and one-third of the population—that's over 7 million people—driven into refugee camps. Just two years later, the Soviet Union collapsed. Its defeat in Afghanistan had played a major role.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan was left in a state of civil war between the existing pro-Soviet regime and different groups of Islamist religious fanatics and reactionary warlords who fought each other while repressing the people. Yet the U.S. rulers considered their Afghan gambit a tremendous success. When asked by the French newspaper *Le Nouvel Observateur* in 1998 (January 15) whether he regretted inducing the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and "having supported the Islamic [fighters], having given arms and advice to future terrorists," Brzezinski replied: "Regret what?... What is most important to the history of the world? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? Some stirred-up Moslems or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the cold war?"

It is easy, of course, to start the movie on September 11, 2001. But if you press the rewind button you find out that the U.S. government had not been innocently minding its business all these years only to find itself the victim of an utterly unprovoked attack. There is a whole

history here of arming and utilizing Islamic fundamentalists, and of being party to destroying a million lives. Indeed, it is hard to overstate the level of horror and needless suffering that was visited on the Afghan people through this superpower dance of death. All of this was done in the interests of preserving and defending U.S. imperial domination. None of that justifies what was done on 9/11—but if we are to understand the actual causes of what is going on, we had best understand the full dimensions of the story.

Is Obama's "Attention Deficit Disorder" Diagnosis True?

Obama said that after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, "the attention of America and our friends had turned elsewhere."

So where was U.S. attention focused in the 1990s in this part of the world? Beginning with the first Bush administration (George H.W. Bush) and continuing through the Clinton administration, the U.S. moved on a number of fronts to consolidate the tremendous advantage it derived from the fall of the Soviet Union. It aimed in particular to deepen and extend its domination of the Middle East and Central Asia. This included the 1991 invasion and destruction of Iraq, which caused what a U.S. Census Bureau international analyst—Beth Osborne Daponte—estimated to be over 200,000 deaths (another 500,000 at least were killed by UN sanctions during the 1990s), and the basing of massive U.S. military forces in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States. It also included new overtures to, and increased working through, predominantly Hindu India, which aggravated the rivalry between India and Pakistan—a rivalry which the U.S. has attempted to manipulate and play for its own advantage. All this, along with the continued U.S. support for Israel in the face of the massive rebellion of the Palestinian people in the late '80s and early '90s, involved tremendous and often horrific levels of violence against Arab and Central Asian peoples and the assertion of open U.S. domination.

At the same time, deeper American economic and social penetration of the region modernized certain aspects of the societies there, while undercutting traditional relations. Taken together, all this led to the beginning of open conflict between the U.S. and Islamist forces. The same so-called "holy warriors" whom the U.S. had initially supported and often pulled together on the basis of reactionary opposition to "modernization" now began to oppose the U.S. and to carry out guerrilla operations against it in that region. Meanwhile, by 1996, the Pakistani government had helped install the Taliban in Afghanistan to both stabilize the country under extremely repressive Islamic rule, and to use it as a counterweight to Indian ambitions in Afghanistan and the region. All these developments led the U.S., by the late 1990s, to once again intensify its attention to Afghanistan, in the context of the region as a whole. During this period a consensus emerged (which was solidified by 9/11) among what would become the dominant political forces in the U.S. that Islamic fundamentalism was becoming a prime obstacle to U.S. objectives, that it would need to be defeated, and that a radical restructuring of the whole region was needed to undercut these forces and secure U.S. hegemony.

Much of this history is well-known—certainly to anyone in public office or in the mainstream press. Yet following Obama's speech there was no comment on his "omission" from either.

What Was the U.S. Trying to Accomplish By Invading Afghanistan in 2001?

Obama defends the decision to invade Afghanistan and says it brought good results. He notes that Congress "authorized the use of force against al Qaeda and those who harbored

them, an authorization that continues to this day”—98-0 in the Senate, 420-1 in the House of Representatives—and that NATO supported the U.S. and that the UN Security Council “endorsed the use of all necessary steps to respond to the 9/11 attacks. America, our allies, and the world were acting as one to destroy al Qaeda’s terrorist network and to protect our common security.”

“Under the banner of this domestic unity and international legitimacy—and only after the Taliban refused to turn over Osama bin Laden—we sent our troops into Afghanistan.” (Obama Speech, December 1, 2009)

Here we must go deeper into exactly what was done under “this banner of domestic unity and international legitimacy” and why.

The Bush regime had a number of objectives in invading Afghanistan in October 2001. First, to quickly and massively attack and conquer Afghanistan in order to demonstrate to the world that America’s will had not been shaken by the September 11 attacks and that it was still willing and able to crush with overwhelming force any who dared challenge it. This is not just macho posturing, but essential to maintaining global “credibility”—i.e., fear—and dominance. (Also see endnotes below.)

Second, the U.S. wanted to quickly overthrow the Taliban regime and install a loyal client state in Afghanistan as part of an overarching effort to deepen its military control of Central Asia (Afghanistan abuts two of the U.S.’s main potential rivals—Russia and China) and to gain greater access to and control of the region’s energy. (During the 1990s the U.S. was attempting to build a pipeline across Afghanistan that would avoid going through Russia or Iran. The U.S. oil giant UNOCAL was the prime contractor—one of its consultants was Hamid Karzai, later installed by the U.S. as President of Afghanistan.) Doing so was also part of an effort to defeat anti-U.S. Islamist forces across the region.

Simply capturing or killing Osama bin Laden was never the central objective. (Obama’s claim that the U.S. invaded Afghanistan “only after the Taliban refused to turn over Osama bin Laden” is at least open to serious question. According to the Guardian UK (10/14/01), “President George Bush rejected as ‘non-negotiable’ an offer by the Taliban to discuss turning over Osama bin Laden if the United States ended the bombing in Afghanistan.”)

Obama praises the results of the U.S. invasion: “Within a matter of months, al Qaeda was scattered and many of its operatives were killed. The Taliban was driven from power and pushed back on its heels. A place that had known decades of fear now had reason to hope,” and points to the formation of a U.S.-created regime with Karzai at the head as a positive development “to help bring a lasting peace to a war-torn country.” (Ibid)

It was nothing of the kind. The Karzai regime was a regime of U.S. lackeys, warlords, drug-dealers and war criminals—many as hated as the Taliban they replaced. Warlord Gen. Abdul Dostom, who has served as Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief of the Afghan National Army under Karzai, is responsible for the 2001 Dasht-e-Leili massacre when some 2,000 prisoners of war were forced into boxcars, suffocated to death, and dumped in the desert. And, among other viciously anti-woman policies and laws, the US-installed Afghan government passed a law in February, 2009, which applies to Afghanistan’s Shia population (10-15 percent of the Afghan people) that explicitly legalizes rape in marriage by banning women from refusing to have sex with their husbands. That law also prevents women from

working, going to school, getting access to health care or other services, or even leaving her home without husband's permission. This replacement of one set of oppressors with another—not surprisingly—did nothing to end oppression there. Rather it reinforced the sources of oppression in Afghanistan—foreign domination, capitalism and feudalism, religious fundamentalism, and patriarchy.

(It is also important to briefly take note of what else was done under “the banner of domestic unity and international legitimacy.” In the days directly after 9/11, the Bush Administration introduced the USA-PATRIOT Act, which tremendously heightened the reach and scope of the repressive apparatus in the U.S. Immigrants were rounded up and held for months without charges and often deported in the dead of night. Massive surveillance programs were begun, beyond even what had been authorized by the PATRIOT Act and without the knowledge of most of Congress. “State secrets” was made an excuse to deny all kinds of information that showed the U.S. in a bad light, even when this meant preventing people who had been detained and tortured “by mistake” from having their day in court. The U.S. arrogated to itself the right to kill and capture people anywhere in the world, without trial, if the U.S. suspected these people of being “terrorists.” Most dramatically, it instituted a widespread regimen of torture—beginning at Guantánamo (where people were detained indefinitely, in violation of international law and of the U.S. Constitution) and then spreading throughout the military, into Iraq and Afghanistan; and over 100 people were killed as a result of this torture. None of this was even mentioned in Obama's speech—in large part because he has actually continued the great majority of these repressive measures!)

Why is the Taliban Resurgent and the U.S. Occupation in Trouble?

How did things get to the current point—with the Taliban resurgent and the U.S. occupiers in trouble and losing ground?

Obama claims that after starting out well things started going badly (i.e., for the U.S. occupiers) in Afghanistan for two reasons. First, “in early 2003, the decision was made to wage a second war in Iraq... for the next six years, the Iraq war drew the dominant share of our troops, our resources, our diplomacy, and our national attention...” Second, while the Karzai regime is “a legitimate government ... elected by the Afghan people,” according to Obama, “it's been hampered by corruption, the drug trade, an under-developed economy, and insufficient security forces.”

What about this explanation? Yes, resources were diverted to the war in Iraq. But without getting into a full analysis of the trajectory of the Afghanistan war, it's important to note that this isn't the essential reason for the Taliban's resurgence and its ability to “control additional swaths of territory in Afghanistan” as Obama put it. There are deeper reasons which have to do with what U.S. capitalism-imperialism brings to the world and countries like Afghanistan.

The first is the brutality of the U.S. occupation. U.S. forces—hailed as heroes by Obama—have committed countless atrocities in Afghanistan—from bombing wedding parties, to murdering civilians, to humiliating Afghans with house-to-house searches, to locking people up in U.S.-controlled dungeons, where torture, illegal detention, and rendition have been in effect.

Here's one example. On August 22, 2008, the people in Azizabad, a small village in western Afghanistan, were asleep when U.S. forces attacked—first with guns, then air strikes. By the next morning, according to UN investigators, over 90 people had been massacred, including 60 children and 15 women. There have been many such massacres during the course of the war—most recently on September 9 of this year when 100-200 were killed in one attack in Kunduz province. While there are no precise figures for the number of Afghan casualties (in part because the U.S. military refuses to release – and perhaps doesn't even count – them), studies have been done that give a glimpse of the scope of the carnage. Prof. Marc Herold documented 3,000-3,400 civilian deaths, mainly as a result of U.S. bombing, during the first six months of the war alone. The Guardian UK (11/19/09) estimates that 6,584 civilians were killed (by both the U.S. coalition and the Taliban) between 2006-Oct. 2009. Womens' rights activist and former member of the Afghan Parliament Malalai Joya states that 8,000 civilians have been killed in the war. (Democracy Now!, 10/28/2009)

These crimes have strengthened the Taliban. The Taliban for its part has used a combination of strong-arming people combined with playing upon the nationalist sentiments of the masses (particularly the Pashtun nationality in Afghanistan), as well as the appeal of "traditional Islam" in a society that has been deeply shattered, to take advantage of this.

Second, the warlords, landlords, tribal chiefs and pro-U.S. power brokers in Afghanistan are widely hated for preying on, exploiting and brutalizing the Afghan people. A prime example is Karzai's own brother—Ahmad Wali Karzai, who was put in charge of Kandahar, Afghanistan's second largest city. He's a major warlord and drug trafficker—and also on the CIA payroll.

It was not until 2005 that the Taliban began to mount an offensive against the occupation in earnest; the U.S. occupation forces and their hand-picked lackeys had years to show they could improve life for the Afghan people. But they didn't do it. Why? Because the U.S. imperialists were not in Afghanistan to liberate the people or develop the country; they were in Afghanistan to achieve their global objectives: to defeat al Qaeda and to create a pro-U.S. regime that would not destabilize neighboring countries and would be amenable to U.S. regional objectives.

And there is a deeper reason here. You cannot "improve life" for the Afghan people without uprooting the traditional social relations, and the class forces that benefit from those relations, which have held the masses in subjugation and darkness for centuries. Imperialism introduces great instability into oppressed nations, driving peasants off land and into the cities, and often introducing education to a broader section of masses (in order to modernize some sectors of the society). This is a byproduct of, and a necessity for, the implantation of capitalist relations in predominantly feudal societies. In doing this, imperialism relies on the former ruling forces and new elites to keep a lid on the upheaval ("to manage the transition," in their words)—that is, to prevent masses from raising their heads and rebelling against the exploitation, the dispossession, and the backward relations and ideas that still hold the society and its people in their grip. Imperialism relies on, and must rely on, the very forces, in other words, that benefit from either the old traditional forms of oppression or the new "market-based" ones—and sometimes both.

The kind of revolution that would decisively move to uproot those relations—the kind of revolution that would rely on and unleash the masses to take destiny into their own hands — would necessarily directly oppose structures of foreign (including U.S.) domination. That's why the U.S. must rely on and further entrench and reinforce very oppressive forces, which

do in fact stand in the way of a better life for the people, as a bulwark against any such revolution. A force like the Taliban—which does not actually pose the possibility for a real rupture with those relations of domination and dependence and which represents, often very directly, some of the most backward feudal forces in the country—can “gain traction” in that situation; at least to the point where they win a following among a section of people, and can intimidate the rest into acquiescence.

Third, Obama mentioned that al Qaeda and the Taliban had been able to establish havens in Pakistan. What he did not mention is that the Pakistani state, long backed and funded by the U.S., has actively promoted Islamic fundamentalism as a pillar of its legitimacy, and funded, supported and probably helps direct Jihadist fighters in Afghanistan and in Kashmir as part of its rivalry with India. This has included tolerating, even supporting, the Taliban and al Qaeda. And many in Pakistan are turning to the fundamentalists out of hatred for the dictatorial rule of the military, and the domination of Pakistan by U.S. imperialism, in league with big landlords and capitalists—a domination that has left the vast majority of the population in deep poverty and deprivation.

(While Obama did not spell out his precise plans for Pakistan, a subject we’ll be covering in future issues of Revolution, there are widespread reports that he will be escalating the war there too, including through stepped up attacks by drone or unmanned aircraft. The stability of the Pakistani state is of major concern to the imperialists and one of their main reasons for escalating in Afghanistan.)

Again, these are the kinds of relations and regimes the U.S. promotes around the world. And Obama is not breaking from this practice—he’s escalating it, as we’ll discuss below.

How Can Obama Label One Million Deaths a “Success”?

While Obama spoke out against the war in Iraq in 2002, and rode to the White House based in large part on the credibility among the disaffected with which that endowed him, at West Point he hailed this war as a success and job well done: “Today, after extraordinary costs, we are bringing the Iraq war to a responsible end ... we have given Iraqis a chance to shape their future, and we are successfully leaving Iraq to its people.” And his “surge” in Afghanistan is being justified by, and modeled in important ways on, Bush’s “successful” surge in Iraq.

Let’s take a closer look at what Obama calls “success.” The war in Iraq—a war based on lies—cost the lives of between 500,000 and 1,000,000 Iraqis; over 4 million have been driven from their homes; the Sunni population—some 20 percent of Iraq’s population—has been decimated by the U.S. occupation and a sectarian war of ethnic cleansing unleashed by the reactionary Shi’a forces the U.S. helped empower—an ethnic cleansing with tacit U.S. support. That slaughter, along with cash payments to the defeated Sunni fighters, is at the heart of the “successful” surge in Iraq. Yet Obama did not utter a word about the Iraqi victims of this U.S. aggression. Apparently the only civilians worth talking about in his view are the 3,000 killed on September 11.

Obama’s treatment of Iraq is typical of his approach throughout his speech. He repeatedly refers to Americans who have lost their lives, but not to those America has killed in its “war on terror,” whether in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, or other countries. By doing this, he is rendering totally invisible the enormous toll of people killed by the U.S. In sheer numbers, the U.S. has so far killed something like 200 to 300 people for every American killed in the

attacks of 9/11! By rendering these victims invisible and not even worth mentioning, he is training people in this country to see the world as if only American lives count. He is training them, in other words, in the mindset of imperialism.

And what of this new Iraq? The U.S. has brought to power an alliance of reactionary, pro-U.S. Kurdish warlords with reactionary Shi'ite religious parties. Iraq's military and police are dominated by sectarian death squads. Religious fundamentalism has been strengthened and the abuse and subjugation of women—including enforced veiling and legal discrimination — has intensified and is actually worse than it was under Saddam Hussein. Meanwhile, Iraq is being gradually opened up to foreign exploitation— including its vast oil sector. And Iraq's ethnic and religious faultlines have not been healed—and remain volatile and potentially explosive.

Whose Interests—and What “Way of Life”—Are Really Served by Obama's New Strategy?

The strategy Obama laid out at West Point is not less violent or imperial, nor is it more truthful or humane than Bush's strategy.

The core of Obama's argument for why people should support an escalating and ongoing war in Afghanistan is the same as Bush's: I'm doing it to protect you and your loved ones:

“If I did not think that the security of the United States and the safety of the American people were at stake in Afghanistan, I would gladly order every single one of our troops home tomorrow.... I am convinced that our security is at stake in Afghanistan and Pakistan. This is the epicenter of violent extremism practiced by al Qaeda. It is from here we were attacked on 9/11 and it is from here that new attacks are being plotted as I speak.”

“This is no idle danger, no hypothetical threat. In the last few months alone, we have apprehended extremists within our borders who were sent here from the border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan to commit new acts of terror. And this danger will only grow if the region slides backwards and al Qaeda can operate with impunity.” (Obama speech, op cit)

Here's the truth. The system Barack Obama is leading cares nothing for human life—whether those living within its borders or those living outside. It has demonstrated this for the 200-plus years of its existence by its actions in every corner of the globe. Its workings have savaged millions upon millions of lives, whether through outright killing or condemning people to lives of exploitation and destitution. The rulers care about people's safety only to the degree that it impacts on their power, legitimacy, and grip on the population.

“Our security” and “way of life” is based on global exploitation and plunder in the interests of a relative handful of imperialists. Crumbs from this plunder are used to pacify and/or retain the loyalty of a large section of the “home” population. The privileges accorded to a large section of Americans are based on the parasitical exploitation of billions. And this parasitical exploitation, in turn, rests on highly repressive, and widely hated, political structures in oppressed or Third World countries—like the Karzai regime in Afghanistan—imposed by the U.S. to enforce its strategic interests and meet the needs of global capital.

Our “security” and “way of life” also rests on the grinding exploitation of tens of millions of

people within the U.S. itself, with millions of immigrants denied any rights whatsoever and declared outlaws and millions of others living in desperate circumstances, seeking jobs and a way to live and often consigned to a life of crime and punishment. This too is reinforced by both raw force carried out by the repressive institutions of the police, prisons and army—the instruments of dictatorship, to be scientific—and by the ideas promoted through the schools, media, religious institutions, etc. So Obama’s talk of “we”—as if everyone living within the borders of the U.S. shares common interests and a common cause, as if “we’re all in this together”—covers over the real divisions in the world and within the U.S. It’s a framework and way of looking at the world that hides the most fundamental facts about society and how it operates, and instead aims to win people to go against their own most basic interests—which actually consist of a world without one nation dominating another, a world without exploitation, and a world without all the relations and poisonous ideas that flow out of and reinforce those relations— in short, a communist world.

This “we-have-to-protect-our-way-of-life” outlook is poison—and promoting this outlook among both the most oppressed and more enlightened sectors of society—is Obama’s special role, and special talent, for the rulers. If this speech does nothing else, it must serve as a way for those who do know better to break those who should know better out of this outlook.

So people shouldn’t join the imperialists in “threat assessments” to their system, much less rally to its defense. But even if you take this selfish and ultimately complicitous standard—the “safety of the American people”—as your own, Obama’s strategy—which will greatly increase the violence brought to bear against the people of Afghanistan—will further stoke hatred of the U.S. and support for Islamic fundamentalism.

How Is U.S. Imperial Domination Different From All Other Imperial Domination?

Toward the end of his speech, summing things up, Obama said: “We do not seek to occupy other nations. We will not claim another nation’s resources or target other peoples because their faith or ethnicity is different from ours.” This is double-talk aimed at obscuring how the system operates. First of all, when it suits their needs and interests, the imperialists will massively occupy countries for years, even decades—as they’re doing right now with 100,000 troops in Iraq and perhaps even more in Afghanistan! At the same time, modern empires have many other tools for shaping the destinies of countries and entire regions without direct occupations.

And though the U.S. doesn’t try to “claim resources” due to differences in “faith and ethnicity”—it does seek to control key resources (and indeed whole economies!) to further its strategic contention with other rivals and to maintain the functioning of U.S. capitalism—no matter the faith or ethnicity of its victims. And imperialism does enforce national oppression—against oppressed peoples (what Obama refers to as “ethnic” groups) right within its borders, and overall by forcibly perpetuating the national oppression and subordination of most countries in the world to imperialism. The history of the U.S. empire—from its genocide against the native peoples, the use of Africa as a hunting ground for the slaves who built its wealth, the theft of huge sections of Mexico, and its numerous invasions of other countries, clearly illustrates this—and clearly contradicts Obama’s assertion. And a key element of the entire “war on terror” has been to seize greater access to crucial energy resources: in Afghanistan to further U.S. contention with Russia in particular over oil and gas pipelines; in Iraq to open up the country’s vast oil resources to international capital.

Do We Need 9/11-Style “Unity” Again?

Obama ended his speech with a stark assessment of the difficulties confronting the empire, and a call for the kind of support the rulers had following 9/11:

“[W]e as a country cannot sustain our leadership nor navigate the momentous challenges of our time if we allow ourselves to be split asunder by the same rancor and cynicism and partisanship that has in recent times poisoned our national discourse. It’s easy to forget that, when this war began, we were united, bound together by the fresh memory of a horrific attack and by the determination to defend our homeland and the values we hold dear. I refuse to accept the notion that we cannot summon that unity again.” (Ibid)

Unity like we had after 9/11? If you recall, that was a time of a lynch-mob atmosphere of chauvinist hysteria, fear-mongering, and the suppression of any critical thinking about why the 9/11 attacks happened and what should be done about them, and any critical resistance to the crimes the U.S. empire was preparing before our eyes. Wars were launched on the basis of lies. Basic freedoms were severely truncated, and in some cases eliminated. Now, eight years later, after the horrors of what that “unity” and support for America brought to the world—over a million dead in Iraq, legalized torture, and the devastation of Afghanistan—why would anyone with a shred of concern for humanity want to repeat THAT chapter in U.S. history?

But that’s precisely what Obama has called on people to do—to blindly get behind the empire as it violently forges ahead in Afghanistan and globally. Obama’s course is a criminal course; to fall blindly behind this, or to merely express trepidation or opposition and then impotently shrug your shoulders... especially for those who knew better when Bush did the same... is nothing less than complicity.

The Answer That Must Be Given

People need to do just the opposite. We have pointed to the fundamentally antagonistic interests, worldwide and within this country, concealed and obscured by talk of “we the people,” and by the chauvinist notion that American lives are more valuable than those of other people. The imperialists are pursuing their interests, and we’ve had eight years to see where that all leads—whoever the President is. It is time and past time to see that these interests are directly opposed to those of humanity as a whole ... and to take up and fight for those larger interests.

Obama spoke the truth when he said America was “passing through a time of great trial,” and in the midst of “storms.” These storms are due to the workings of imperialism and the whole cauldron of contradictions the U.S. “war on terror” has set roiling in the Middle East and Central Asia in particular, as well as to the most profound financial crisis since the 1930s.

If anything positive for humanity is going to come out of this “time of trial” it will happen because millions of people refuse to heed Obama’s call and refuse to choose between supporting either imperialism or Islamic fundamentalism. It will happen—and it will only happen—if people instead can be led to break out of the entire framework set by this current clash. Humanity does need another way, in the interests of the people. This means revolution and it requires the broadest and most determined possible resistance to this

criminal escalation.

With the whole world watching, Obama and the U.S. rulers have been openly debating just how much force and violence they should bring to bear against the people of Afghanistan. Now the whole world is going to be watching what the people in the U.S. do when it's decided to escalate and continue this war of conquest and empire. Will they resist? Or will they passively go along? Will they shed their delusions about Obama—or will they face reality and judge him by what he's actually doing, not his false narratives, his empty promises, and his double-talk?

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Annex

Excerpts from Oil, Power & Empire: Iraq and the U.S. Global Agenda, by Larry Everest

On the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan

Chapter 4: Double-Dealing Death in the Gulf, pp. 88, 89-90

The Soviet invasion, in turn, was motivated by a combination of Moscow's own imperial ambitions and its concern over stepped-up U.S. covert operations in Afghanistan and possible military action in Iran. In his book *Iran Under the Ayatollahs*, author Dilip Hiro argues that Moscow feared that following the embassy seizure, Washington was preparing a military assault on Iran, which in turn would "have encouraged President Hafizollah Amin of Afghanistan to loosen his ties with Moscow. Forestalling such a move was one of the main considerations which led Soviet officials to order their troops into Afghanistan."3.....

The Soviet invasion came in the wake of stepped up "competition for influence with the United States throughout the Middle East, Indian Ocean, Horn of Africa, Arabian Peninsula and Southwest Asia regions," as the former Reagan NSC staffer Howard Teicher and his wife put it in their book on U.S. policy in the Gulf.⁵ Taking over Afghanistan rescued a pro-Soviet government in Kabul, gave Moscow control of a key buffer state between Iran and Pakistan, and put its forces closer to the Persian Gulf. For the U.S., the fertile crescent had become, as Brzezinski labeled it, an "arc of crisis" stretching from Afghanistan through Iran to Saudi Arabia—a label that is once again being applied to this region in the wake of the U.S. wars on Afghanistan and Iraq.

The Empire Strikes Back

Intervention in the Iran-Iraq War was one facet of a multi-dimensional and aggressive U.S. response to the shocking turn of events in 1979. Washington's overarching goals were protecting the Gulf's pro-U.S. oil sheikdoms while preventing the Soviet Union from turning regional turmoil into geopolitical gain.

In July 1979, some five months before the Soviet invasion, the U.S. had initiated a covert campaign to destabilize Afghanistan's pro-Soviet government by arming and funding the Islamist opposition. The goal, according to Brzezinski, was "to induce a Soviet military intervention." When the Soviets did intervene in December, Brzezinski wrote Carter: "We

now have the opportunity of giving to the USSR its Vietnam War.”⁶

Over the next decade, the U.S. government funneled more than \$3 billion in arms and aid to the Islamic Mujahideen, helping create a global network of Islamist fighters, some of whom would form the core of Osama bin Laden’s al Qaeda. When the Soviets finally pulled out of Afghanistan in 1989, more than a million Afghans (along with 15,000 Soviet soldiers) had been killed and one-third of the population driven into refugee camps.

3 Hiro, *Iran Under the Ayatollahs*, 284

5 Teicher and Teicher, 27

6 “How Jimmy Carter and I Started the Mujahadeen,” *Le Nouvel Observateur* (France), January 15-21, 1998, 76, cited in Blum, *Rogue State*, 4-5

On U.S. National Security Strategy

Chapter 1: “Go Massive, Sweep It All Up”, pp. 19-21

One World, One Empire

Neither mystical links with al Qaeda, invisible weapons of mass destruction, reflexive posturing, electoral politicking, nor diverting attention from corporate scandals and a weak economy explained why the U.S. government was hell-bent on attacking Iraq. But the sweep and enormity of its global agenda did.

“They have ambitions of essentially reshuffling the whole deck, reordering the whole situation—beginning with the strategic areas of Central and South Asia and the Middle East that are more immediately involved now—but, even beyond that, on a world scale,” Bob Avakian of the Revolutionary Communist Party USA wrote shortly after Sept. 11. “They’ve set themselves a very far-reaching agenda with gigantic implications.”⁷⁵

This momentous shift in U.S. global strategy was crystalized in a new National Security Strategy (NSS) published on September 20, 2002. This new NSS echoed and codified previous strategy papers, including the 1992 Pentagon Defense Guidance and the Project for a New American Century’s 2000 paper, “Rebuilding America’s Defenses,” discussed above. Then it went further.

Taking off from the hegemonic vision developed by Reagan and Bush I officials during the 1990s, the NSS argued that the 1991 Soviet collapse had left the U.S. the world’s only superpower—with “unparalleled military strength and great economic and political influence”—and that U.S. policy should be to “work to translate this moment of influence into decades of peace, prosperity, and liberty.”⁷⁶

What does this really mean? The document’s mantra is creating “a balance of power that favors freedom.” Like terrorism, “freedom” hasn’t been defined by the Bush regime, but the substance of the NSS, as well as the voluminous writings of the imperial strategists who have shaped it, make clear that it means the freedom of America’s dominant corporate-political elite to impose its values, interests, and economic system on all others. As the NSS baldly put it, “These values of freedom are right and true for every person, in every society.”

The new National Security Strategy claims that the U.S. will not seek “unilateral advantage,” yet it is a doctrine for just that—militarily, politically and economically. It amounts to an

audacious declaration that the U.S. aims to remain the world's sole superpower for decades to come. The practical implementation of this new Bush doctrine will no doubt be shaped by internal debates and external events, including the growing unrest and resistance in now-occupied Iraq. Nonetheless, its implications are clearly enormous.

A core thesis, which has been a central theme in neo-conservative theorizing for over a decade, is preventing the rise of rival powers which could challenge the U.S. regionally or globally. The NSS envisions accomplishing this objective by first maintaining overwhelming military superiority over all other countries and combinations of countries, and second by no longer containing possible opponents, but eliminating them before they can emerge: "Our forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States." Defense Secretary Rumsfeld elaborates that the U.S. would deter "potential adversaries not only from using existing weapons but also from building dangerous new ones in the first place," and the U.S. would no longer judge states by their actions or intentions, but by their potential "capabilities."⁷⁷

To achieve this staggering goal, the U.S. power structure envisions staggering methods, including disarming various countries, toppling defiant regimes, occupying strategic regions, and waging counter-insurgency wars against a variety of political forces standing in the way of U.S. control.

Marine General Peter Pace, the Joint Chiefs vice chairman, has stated that "the scope for potential anti-terrorist action included—at a minimum—Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Sudan, Lebanon, Syria, Libya, Georgia, Colombia, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and North Korea."⁷⁸ Pace knew of what he spoke: The New York Times reported that by January 2003, the Pentagon had drafted a "National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism" which called for 20 to 30 years of war on a variety of states and anti-U.S. groups.⁷⁹

Notes

75 Bob Avakian, "The New Situation and the Great Challenges," Revolutionary Worker, March 17, 2002. See also, Fatima Resolucao, "Dangers and Opportunities: America's Global Rampage and the People's Resistance," A World To Win, No. 28, 2002 (www.awtw.org/back_issues/28_Global_Rampage.htm)

76 The White House, "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America," September 2002

77 Donald Rumsfeld, "Transforming the Military," Foreign Affairs, May/June 2002, 27, 29

78 James Webb, "Heading for Trouble: Do we really want to occupy Iraq for the next 30 years?" Washington Post, September 4, 2002, A21

79 Eric Schmitt, "Pentagon Draws Up a 20-to-30-Year Anti-Terror Plan," New York Times, January 17, 2003

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