

The Continuation and Escalation of the American War: Yeswecanistan

"The Taliban as an implacable and monolithic "enemy" which must be militarily defeated"

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Global Research, December 09, 2009

[The Anti-Empire Report](#) 9 December 2009

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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All the crying from the left about how Obama "the peace candidate" has now become "a war president" ... Whatever are they talking about? Here's what I wrote in this report in August 2008, during the election campaign:

We find Obama threatening, several times, to attack Iran if they don't do what the United States wants them to do nuclear-wise; threatening more than once to attack Pakistan if their anti-terrorist policies are not tough enough or if there would be a regime change in the nuclear-armed country not to his liking; calling for a large increase in US troops and tougher policies for Afghanistan; wholly and unequivocally embracing Israel as if it were the 51st state.

Why should anyone be surprised at Obama's foreign policy in the White House? He has not even banned torture, contrary to what his supporters would fervently have us believe. If further evidence were needed, we have the November 28 report in the *Washington Post*: "Two Afghan teenagers held in U.S. detention north of Kabul this year said they were beaten by American guards, photographed naked, deprived of sleep and held in solitary confinement in concrete cells for at least two weeks while undergoing daily interrogation about their alleged links to the Taliban." This is but the latest example of the continuance of torture under the new administration.

But the shortcomings of Barack Obama and the naiveté of his fans is not the important issue. The important issue is the continuation and escalation of the American war in Afghanistan, based on the myth that the individuals we label "Taliban" are indistinguishable from those who attacked the United States on September 11, 2001, whom we usually label "al Qaeda". "I am convinced," the president said in his speech at the United States Military Academy (West Point) on December 1, "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 that we were attacked on 9/11, and it is from here that new attacks are being plotted as I speak."

Obama used one form or another of the word "extremist" eleven times in his half-hour talk. Young, impressionable minds must be carefully taught; a future generation of military leaders who will command America's never-ending wars must have no doubts that the bad guys are "extremists", that "extremists" are by definition bad guys, that "extremists" are beyond the pale and do not act from human, rational motivation like we do, that we — quintessential non-extremists, peace-loving moderates — are the good guys, forced into one

war after another against our will. Sending robotic death machines flying over Afghanistan and Pakistan to drop powerful bombs on the top of wedding parties, funerals, and homes is of course not extremist behavior for human beings.

And the bad guys attacked the US “from here”, Afghanistan. That’s why the United States is “there”, Afghanistan. But in fact the 9-11 attack was planned in Germany, Spain and the United States as much as in Afghanistan. It could have been planned in a single small room in Panama City, Taiwan, or Bucharest. What is needed to plot to buy airline tickets and take flying lessons in the United States? And the attack was carried out entirely in the United States. But Barack Obama has to maintain the fiction that Afghanistan was, and is, vital and indispensable to any attack on the United States, past or future. That gives him the right to occupy the country and kill the citizens as he sees fit. Robert Baer, former CIA officer with long involvement in that part of the world has noted: “The people that want their country liberated from the West have nothing to do with Al Qaeda. They simply want us gone because we’re foreigners, and they’re rallying behind the Taliban because the Taliban are experienced, effective fighters.” [1]

The pretenses extend further. US leaders have fed the public a certain image of the insurgents (all labeled together under the name “Taliban”) and of the conflict to cover the true imperialistic motivation behind the war. The predominant image at the headlines/TV news level and beyond is that of the Taliban as an implacable and monolithic “enemy” which must be militarily defeated at all costs for America’s security, with a negotiated settlement or compromise not being an option. However, consider the following which have been reported at various times during the past two years about the actual behavior of the United States and its allies in Afghanistan vis-à-vis the Taliban, which can raise questions about Obama’s latest escalation: [2]

The US military in Afghanistan has long been considering paying Taliban fighters who renounce violence against the government in Kabul, as the United States has done with Iraqi insurgents.

President Obama has floated the idea of negotiating with moderate elements of the Taliban. [3]

US envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, said last month that the United States would support any role Saudi Arabia chose to pursue in trying to engage Taliban officials. [4]

Canadian troops are reaching out to the Taliban in various ways.

A top European Union official and a United Nations staff member were ordered by the Kabul government to leave the country after allegations that they had met Taliban insurgents without the administration’s knowledge. And two senior diplomats for the United Nations were expelled from the country, accused by the Afghan government of unauthorized dealings with insurgents. However, the Afghanistan government itself has had a series of secret talks with “moderate Taliban” since 2003 and President Hamid Karzai has called for peace talks with Taliban leader Mohammed Omar.

Organizations like the International Committee of the Red Cross as well as the United Nations have become increasingly open about their contacts with the Taliban leadership and other insurgent groups.

Gestures of openness are common practice among some of Washington's allies in Afghanistan, notably the Dutch, who make negotiating with the Taliban an explicit part of their military policy.

The German government is officially against negotiations, but some members of the governing coalition have suggested Berlin host talks with the Taliban.

MI-6, Britain's external security service, has held secret talks with the Taliban up to half a dozen times. At the local level, the British cut a deal, appointing a former Taliban leader as a district chief in Helmand province in exchange for security guarantees.

Senior British officers involved with the Afghan mission have confirmed that direct contact with the Taliban has led to insurgents changing sides as well as rivals in the Taliban movement providing intelligence which has led to leaders being killed or captured.

British authorities hold that there are distinct differences between different "tiers" of the Taliban and that it is essential to try to separate the doctrinaire extremists from others who are fighting for money or because they resent the presence of foreign forces in their country.

British contacts with the Taliban have occurred despite British Prime Minister Gordon Brown publicly ruling out such talks; on one occasion he told the House of Commons: "We will not enter into any negotiations with these people."

For months there have been repeated reports of "good Taliban" forces being airlifted by Western helicopters from one part of Afghanistan to another to protect them from Afghan or Pakistani military forces. At an October 11 news conference in Kabul, President Hamid Karzai himself claimed that "some unidentified helicopters dropped armed men in the northern provinces at night." [5]

On November 2, *IslamOnline.net* (Qatar) reported: "The emboldened Taliban movement in Afghanistan turned down an American offer of power-sharing in exchange for accepting the presence of foreign troops, Afghan government sources confirmed. 'US negotiators had offered the Taliban leadership through Mullah Wakil Ahmed Mutawakkil (former Taliban foreign minister) that if they accept the presence of NATO troops in Afghanistan, they would be given the governorship of six provinces in the south and northeast ... America wants eight army and air force bases in different parts of Afghanistan in order to tackle the possible regrouping of [the] Al-Qaeda network,' a senior Afghan Foreign Ministry official told *IslamOnline.net*." [6]

There has been no confirmation of this from American officials, but the *New York Times* on October 28 listed six provinces that were being considered to receive priority protection from the US military, five which are amongst the eight mentioned in the *IslamOnline* report as being planned for US military bases, although no mention is made in the Times of the above-mentioned offer. The next day, *Asia Times* reported: "The United States has withdrawn its troops from its four key bases in Nuristan [or Nooristan], on the border with Pakistan, leaving the northeastern province as a safe haven for the Taliban-led insurgency to orchestrate its regional battles." Nuristan, where earlier in the month eight US soldiers were killed and three Apache helicopters hit by hostile fire, is one of the six provinces offered to the Taliban as reported in the *IslamOnline.net* story.

The part about al-Qaeda is ambiguous and questionable, not only because the term has long been loosely used as a catch-all for any group or individual in opposition to US foreign policy in this part of the world, but also because the president's own national security adviser, former Marine Gen. James Jones, stated in early October: "I don't foresee the return of the Taliban. Afghanistan is not in imminent danger of falling. The al-Qaeda presence is very diminished. The maximum estimate is less than 100 operating in the country, no bases, no ability to launch attacks on either us or our allies." [7]

Shortly after Jones's remarks, we could read in the *Wall Street Journal*: "Hunted by U.S. drones, beset by money problems and finding it tougher to lure young Arabs to the bleak mountains of Pakistan, al-Qaida is seeing its role shrink there and in Afghanistan, according to intelligence reports and Pakistan and U.S. officials. ... For Arab youths who are al-Qaida's primary recruits, 'it's not romantic to be cold and hungry and hiding,' said a senior U.S. official in South Asia." [8]

From all of the above is it not reasonable to conclude that the United States is willing and able to live with the Taliban, as repulsive as their social philosophy is? Perhaps even a Taliban state which would go across the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, which has been talked about in some quarters. What then is Washington fighting for? What moves the president of the United States to sacrifice so much American blood and treasure? In past years, US leaders have spoken of bringing democracy to Afghanistan, liberating Afghan women, or modernizing a backward country. President Obama made no mention of any of these previous supposed *vital goals* in his December 1 speech. He spoke only of the attacks of September 11, al Qaeda, the Taliban, terrorists, extremists, and such, symbols guaranteed to fire up an American audience. Yet, the president himself declared at one point: "Al Qaeda has not reemerged in Afghanistan in the same numbers as before 9/11, but they retain their safe havens along the border." Ah yes, the terrorist danger ... always, everywhere, forever, particularly when it seems the weakest.

How many of the West Point cadets, how many Americans, give thought to the fact that Afghanistan is surrounded by the immense oil reserves of the Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea regions? Or that Afghanistan is ideally situated for oil and gas pipelines to serve much of Europe and south Asia, lines that can deliberately bypass non-allies of the empire, Iran and Russia? If only the Taliban will not attack the lines. "One of our goals is to stabilize Afghanistan, so it can become a conduit and a hub between South and Central Asia so that energy can flow to the south ...", said Richard Boucher, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs in 2007. [9]

Afghanistan would also serve as the home of American military bases, the better to watch and pressure next-door Iran and the rest of Eurasia. And NATO ... struggling to find a *raison d'être* since the end of the Cold War. If the alliance is forced to pull out of Afghanistan without clear accomplishments after eight years will its future be even more in doubt?

So, for the present at least, the American War on Terror in Afghanistan continues and regularly and routinely creates new anti-American terrorists, as it has done in Iraq. This is not in dispute even at the Pentagon or the CIA. God Bless America.

Although the "surge" failed as policy, it succeeded as propaganda.

They don't always use the word "surge", but that's what they mean. Our admirable leaders

and our mainstream media that love to interview them would like us to believe that escalation of the war in Afghanistan is in effect a “surge”, like the one in Iraq which, they believe, has proven so successful. But the reality of the surge in Iraq was nothing like its promotional campaign. To the extent that there has been a reduction in violence in Iraq (now down to a level that virtually any other society in the world would find horrible and intolerable, including Iraqi society before the US invasion and occupation), we must keep in mind the following summary of how and why it “succeeded”:

- Thanks to America’s lovely little war, there are many millions Iraqis either dead, wounded, crippled, homebound or otherwise physically limited, internally displaced, in foreign exile, or in bursting American and Iraqi prisons. Many others have been so traumatized that they are concerned simply for their own survival. Thus, a huge number of potential victims and killers has been markedly reduced.
- Extensive ethnic cleansing has taken place: Sunnis and Shiites are now living much more than before in their own special enclaves, with entire neighborhoods surrounded by high concrete walls and strict security checkpoints; violence of the sectarian type has accordingly gone down.
- In the face of numerous “improvised explosive devices” on the roads, US soldiers venture out a lot less, so the violence against them has been sharply down. It should be kept in mind that insurgent attacks on American forces following the invasion of 2003 is how the Iraqi violence all began in the first place.
- For a long period, the US military was paying insurgents (or “former insurgents”) to not attack occupation forces.
- The powerful Shiite leader Muqtada al-Sadr declared a unilateral cease-fire for his militia, including attacks against US troops, that was in effect for an extended period; this was totally unconnected to the surge.

We should never forget that Iraqi society has been destroyed. The people of that unhappy land have lost everything — their homes, their schools, their neighborhoods, their mosques, their jobs, their careers, their professionals, their health care, their legal system, their women’s rights, their religious tolerance, their security, their friends, their families, their past, their present, their future, their lives. But they do have their surge.

The War against Everything and Everyone, Endlessly

Nidal Malik Hasan, the US Army psychiatrist who killed 13 and wounded some 30 at Fort Hood, Texas in November reportedly regards the US War on Terror as a war aimed at Muslims. He told colleagues that “the US was battling not against security threats in Iraq and Afghanistan, but Islam itself.” [10] Hasan had long been in close contact with Anwar al-Awlaki, a US-born cleric and al Qaeda sympathizer now living in Yemen, who also called the US War on Terror a “war against Muslims”. Many, probably most, Muslims all over the world hold a similar view about American foreign policy.

I believe they’re mistaken. For many years, going back to at least the Korean war, it’s been fairly common for accusations to be made by activists opposed to US policies, in the United States and abroad, as well as by Muslims, that the United States chooses as its bombing targets only people of color, those of the Third World, or Muslims. But it must be remembered that in 1999 one of the most sustained and ferocious American bombing campaigns ever — 78 days in a row — was carried out against the Serbs of the former Yugoslavia: white, European, Christians. Indeed, we were told that the bombing was to rescue the people of Kosovo, who are largely Muslim. Earlier, the United States had come to

the aid of the Muslims of Bosnia in their struggle against the Serbs. The United States is in fact an equal-opportunity bomber. The only qualifications for a country to become an American bombing target appear to be: (a) It poses a sufficient obstacle — real, imagined, or, as with Serbia, ideological — to the desires of the empire; (b) It is virtually defenseless against aerial attack.

Notes

1. [Video on Information Clearinghouse](#)
2. For the news items which follow if not otherwise sourced, see:
 - *The Independent* (London), December 14, 2007
 - *Daily Telegraph* (UK) December 26, 2007
 - *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto) May 1, 2008
 - *BBC News*, October 28, 2009
3. *New York Times*, March 11, 2009
4. *Kuwait News Agency*, November 24, 2009
5. *Pakistan Observer* (Islamabad daily), October 19, 2009; The Jamestown Foundation (conservative Washington, DC think tank), “Karzai claims mystery helicopters ferrying Taliban to north Afghanistan”, November 6, 2009; Institute for War and Peace Reporting (London), “Helicopter rumour refuses to die”, October 26, 2009
6. *IslamOnline*, “[US Offers Taliban 6 Provinces for 8 Bases](#)”, November 2, 2009
7. *Washington Times*, October 5, 2009, from a CNN interview
8. *Wall Street Journal*, October 13, 2009
9. Talk at the Paul H. Nitze School for Advanced International Studies, Washington, DC, September 20, 2007.
10. *Christian Science Monitor*, November 17, 2009

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