

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA IS MAKING WAR ON THE MIDDLE EAST – WITH TROOPS FROM THE "NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION!" HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

On Friday 27 March President Obama announced the result of his administration's review of more than seven years of war in Afghanistan, which many people thought would result in a winding-down of the war, or even a withdrawal from the country the US attacked in 2001. (The US government said then that it was going after Osama bin Laden, but it's real motive was the long-standing US policy of colonial control of the region: when the Afghan government offered to negotiate the surrender of Osama bin Laden, the US government refused -- and bombed the country instead, as it had planned.) Obama had been elected as a "peace candidate," hadn't he?

But Obama announced war, not peace, for Afghanistan. Making the truly amazing (and quite false) claim that "THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA DID NOT CHOOSE TO FIGHT A WAR IN AFGHANISTAN" -- both he and his predecessor had done exactly that -- Obama promised a wider war. With another contestable assertion -- "THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA STANDS FOR PEACE AND SECURITY" (families of the civilians killed by US Predator rockets in Afghanistan and Pakistan might reasonably doubt that) -- he vowed to "USE ALL ELEMENTS OF OUR NATIONAL POWER TO DEFEAT AL-QAEDA" -- although al-Qaeda constitutes a small fraction of the resistance to domination by foreign troops in Afghanistan.

On Friday 3 April President Obama went to France and Germany to meet with the leaders of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization -- the source of the almost half of the US-directed foreign troops in Afghanistan. He was also confronted with demonstrations in both countries against his expanded war (as he had been in Britain), as he insisted that NATO countries send more troops and aid -- because, he said, they can't expect the US to "bear the military burden alone" -- the burden, that is, of securing America's control of the Middle East.

But Obama justifies the US war against Afghanistan only by referring to 9/11. The strongest armies in the world are "fighting terrorism" by killing people in villages in Afghanistan and Pakistan, he says. In fact, the US is using NATO troops to continue its generation-long policy of colonial domination of the world's energy resources.

Since World War II the US government has regarded the Mideast is the "most strategically important area of the world," and "a stupendous source of strategic power, and one of the greatest material prizes in world history." Oil companies and their associates have reaped profits beyond the dreams of avarice, but even more importantly to the US, control over two-thirds of the world's estimated hydrocarbon reserves -- uniquely cheap and easy to exploit -- provides what Obama's foreign policy advisers called "critical leverage" over European and Asian rivals, what the US State Department many years earlier had called "veto power" over them.

"Note that the critical issue is control, not access. US policies towards the Middle East were the same when it was a net exporter of oil, and remain the same today when US intelligence projects that the US itself will rely on more stable Atlantic Basin resources. Policies would be likely to be about the same if the US were to switch to renewable energy. The need to control the 'stupendous source of strategic power' and to gain 'profits beyond the dreams of avarice' would remain. Jockeying over Central Asia and pipeline routes reflects similar concerns" -- and that means principally Afghanistan. (Noam Chomsky)

Afghanistan is the keystone in the arch of US colonial control of the Mideast, from the Mediterranean to Pakistan, from the Caspian Sea to the Horn of Africa -- what the US calls "The Area of Responsibility of Central Command" -- presided over by US proconsul Gen. David Petraeus. Obama plans to send tens of thousands of troops into Afghanistan in the coming months -- and 10,000 more may follow in 2010 -- going from about 38,000 troops in Afghanistan to 68,000 by this autumn. Gen. David McKiernan, the top US and NATO commander in Afghanistan, has asked for about 10,000 troops on top of that for 2010.

About 78,000 US troops in Afghanistan in 2010 would represent a quadrupling of the force in four years. The size of NATO's International Security Assistance Force has grown from about 19,000 in January 2007 to 32,000. In fact, Petraeus acknowledged Wednesday that even the planned increases to US and Afghan forces would leave them well short of the ratio of troops to population recommended in the US Army and Marine Corps counterinsurgency manual (which was written under his direction in 2006).

There's a report now that Petraeus' civilian opposite number, Richard Holbrooke, is working to destroy the attempts by the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan to make peace with the insurgents in both those countries. It's the US that needs the war, to justify its military control of the region. Peace would reasonably lead to the withdrawal of foreign troops -- notably American.

Obama is now in Europe to take part in a celebration marking the sixtieth anniversary of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. But why does this organization still exist? It's almost twenty years since the Berlin Wall fell, signaling the eventual end of the Soviet Union. NATO was constructed on the excuse that it was going to defend Western Europe from Soviet assault – a prospect that was wildly overstated by the US, for propagandist purposes. In fact, a large part of the purpose of NATO was to prevent Europe from pursuing an independent course, to ensure that Europe would stay under US control.

But NATO has moved far from the North Atlantic and become an international intervention force under US command – notably when the Clinton administration used it to attack Serbia, where now a major American base (Camp Bondsteel) supports US operations in the Middle East. The disappearance of the Soviet Union made no difference: the US government insisted it had to have a huge military establishment and military budget, not to protect against the Russians, but to keep forces aimed at the Middle East, the main target of intervention. And it had to maintain the "Defense Industrial Base" -- high-technology industry. Everything remains the same; only the pretexts change.

Afghanistan requires a regional solution in which the neighboring countries -- Iran, India, Russia, China, work out a settlement and Afghans work something out among themselves. The regional countries are not happy about having a NATO military center based in Afghanistan. And there is a significant peace movement in Afghanistan. The Washington Post recently pointed out that when the new American troops come, they're going to face two enemies: the Taliban and public opinion, meaning the peace movement. Western-run polls show that about 75 percent of Afghans are in favor of negotiations among Afghans – including the Taliban. Afghans themselves should make the decision about when and how the US and NATO – who have no right to be there – should leave.

But the war will continue until enough Americans speak up loudly and reject it. If you are appalled that our government is conducting an unjustified war in the Middle East – and misrepresenting the reason for it – call your Congressional representatives and demand an end to it. Congressman Tim Johnson, Senator Roland Burris, and Senator Dick Durbin can be reached through the capitol switchboard at 202.224.3121. Tell them that the US has no business killing people in the Middle East who resist our invasion and occupation, regardless of whether it's done with US or NATO troops.

You can also join a local peace group that is working to end the war in Afghanistan. In Champaign-Urbana, one local peace group is **AWARE, the Anti-War Anti-Racism Effort** <www.anti-war.net>, members and friends of which produced this leaflet for the 4 April 2009 "Main Event" – our monthly peace demonstration in downtown Champaign. We meet every Sunday 5-6:30pm in the Wahlfeldt Room in the basement of the old post office in Urbana. Visitors and new members are welcome.

And "AWARE on the Air" is presented each Tuesday at 10pm on Urbana Public Television, cable channel 6, by members and friends of AWARE. Each week we bring you comments on the war and the opposition to it, both locally and nationally, by Americans who oppose our government's betrayal of our democratic principles.

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