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## US Expands “Secret War” in Afghanistan

By Thomas Gaist

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*The Obama administration is considering new proposals from the Pentagon to delay troop withdrawals from Afghanistan and increase the number of US forces to be stationed in the country on a permanent basis, US Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter announced this weekend during a joint conference with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani.*

Carter and Ghani indicated that formal arrangements for a larger long-term US troop presence, maintenance of US bases previously planned to close, and stepped up “counterterrorism” operations by US forces in Afghanistan may be finalized as early as the beginning of March.

“President Obama is considering a number of options to reinforce our support for President Ghani’s security strategy, including possible changes to the timeline for our drawdown of US troops,” Carter said.

President Ghani stressed “the comprehensive nature of the partnership” being worked out between his government and the Obama administration, adding that he was personally grateful for Obama’s executive decree in December 2014 ordering an additional 1,000 US troops to remain in the country on an indefinite basis.

More than 10,000 US troops remain in Afghanistan, and an array of US Special Forces and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) paramilitary units are continuing to carry out combat missions against alleged insurgents throughout the country.

Despite the proclamation of an official end to US combat operations in Afghanistan beginning December 31, 2014, recent weeks have seen a “significant increase in night raids” and a “tempo of operations unprecedented for this time of year,” the *New York Times* reported in mid-February.

“The official war for the Americans—the part of the war that you could go see—that’s over. It’s only the secret war that’s still going. But it’s going hard,” said an Afghan security official cited by the *Times*.

The US forces are leading the missions and directly engaging targets, “not simply going along as advisors,” the *Times* noted.

Assassination teams are regularly dispatched against “a broad cross section of Islamist militants,” the *Times* reported. The US-led death squads include elite soldiers under the command of Afghanistan’s National Directorate of Security, as well as CIA paramilitary groups, US Army Rangers and Navy SEALs.

The raids represent a continuation and intensification of the counterinsurgency strategy implemented by the US during the official occupation, which sought to stabilize the US puppet government in Kabul by murdering anyone suspected of supporting armed opposition to the Karzai regime.

As early as 2005, a top US military general declared that this strategy was leading to the total defeat of the Taliban. When the Obama administration ordered the US military to add 30,000 additional troops to its overall occupation force in 2009, General Stanley McChrystal vowed that the insurgency would be defeated by 2011.

Similar assessments were made by US leaders during the occupation of and then the “surge” of troops into Iraq, along with enthusiasm about the readiness of the Iraqi national army, which has subsequently been shattered by the seizure of large sections of the country by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

Unflagging optimism of US commanders and politicians notwithstanding, the US targeted murder programs in Afghanistan have also clearly failed. Taliban forces have regained control over large portions of the country during the past year, inflicting casualties against government and US-led International Security Assistance Force coalition troops, as well as the civilian population, at the highest rate since the US occupation began in October 2001.

In the absence of substantial support from the US military, the Afghan government stands little chance of defeating the resurgent Taliban, according to experts cited by *Stars and Stripes*.

“The overly positive assessments are repeated so often that the leaders in the military and civilian world start to believe it,” director of the Kabul-based Afghanistan Analysts Network told the Department of Defense-based newspaper.

The Pentagon’s claims that violence is down in Afghanistan is “borderline insane,” International Crisis Group’s lead Afghanistan analyst Graeme Smith told *Stars and Stripes*.

“You’re saying that the war is getting smaller, and its not; its getting a lot bigger. Policy needs to adjust to deal with the fact that the inferno is growing,” Smith said.

More than 5,000 Afghan security forces, who received their paychecks from the US government, were killed during 2014 in fighting with Taliban and other anti-government militants, according to statistics provided by Kabul.

Civilian fatalities have reached their highest levels since 2009, according to a UN report released last week, which confirmed the deaths of at least 3,600 noncombatants and wounding of another 6,800 in 2014.

Amidst the ongoing catastrophe that is a result of the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, US policy makers and generals are clearly determined to intensify operations against its population for years to come.

With reports of growing Chinese political influence in Afghanistan, including the cultivation of ties with sections of the government as well as with the Taliban, Washington is determined to maintain its military grip on the country and Central Asia as a whole, which remain important linchpins in its drive to control the Eurasian landmass.