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Panetta: US Will Battle Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan for Years to Come

By John Glaser

November 29, 2012

Despite more than a decade of war and at least four years of the current administration's strategies in Afghanistan, al-Qaeda militants continue to make in-roads in the war-torn country, according to Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta.

“Although we clearly have had an impact on [al-Qaeda's] presence in Afghanistan, the fact is that they continue to show up,” Panetta told reporters at the Pentagon.

In response to this admitted failure of US military policy, the US is aiming to continue implementing all of the failed policies that have so far led to the disastrous quagmire in Afghanistan.

Despite claims from the Obama administration that the US would be ending the war and withdrawing in 2014, the State Department is now in talks with Kabul to set an agreement that will govern the presence of at least 10,000 US troops in Afghanistan beyond 2014, perhaps until 2024.

Fighting a core group of al-Qaeda militants is “going to be the fundamental thrust of the (counter-terrorism) effort” beyond 2014, Panetta said, in order to prevent them from re-establishing a safe haven in Afghanistan.

But Afghanistan was always useless to al-Qaeda, except insofar as it drew America into a long and costly war, in an attempt to repeat the defeat of the Soviets. Geographical safe-havens are less and less useful for non-state actors to actually carry out attacks.

A US defense official, speaking on condition of anonymity to Reuters, estimated there were still only about 100 al Qaeda militants in Afghanistan. Why 100 al-Qaeda militants requires an ongoing occupation and nation-building project with over 10,000 troops is baffling to most.

So long as US troops remain in Afghanistan, a costly insurgency will continue to be waged by militant groups. Pulling out of the failed war, as well as the many other countries the US empire currently occupies, will do more to eliminate the relatively puny terrorist threat than any reduction in troops presence.