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Crisis deepens for US occupation in Afghanistan

Eight US-NATO troops killed in one day

By Patrick Martin

6 May 2013

Seven US soldiers and an eighth from a European NATO member state lost their lives Saturday. Five American soldiers were killed by a roadside bomb, two were shot to death by an Afghan soldier who turned his gun on his nominal “allies,” and the NATO soldier was killed in an attack by insurgents in northern Afghanistan.

The death toll of seven Americans matched the worst previous days so far this year for the US occupation regime—March 12 and April 6—and demonstrated that despite President Obama’s claims that the “tide of war” is receding, American imperialism and its European allies remain bogged down in a quagmire of their own making in Central Asia.

The roadside bombing took place in the Maiwand district of Kandahar province, in southern Afghanistan, the heartland of the Taliban. Two more Americans were killed by a soldier in the Afghan National Army in western Afghanistan, the latest in a long series of attacks by Afghan security forces against US or NATO troops.

Both the US-NATO occupation and the stooge regime of President Hamid Karzai are widely hated by the Afghan population. Resistance to foreign intervention and occupation is at the heart

of the guerrilla warfare that more than a decade of relentless military offensives, air strikes and assassinations have been unable to suppress.

Karzai himself confirmed the completely venal character of his own government, acknowledging at a press conference Saturday, the same day as the eight deaths among the occupation forces, that his office received regular cash payments from the US Central Intelligence Agency.

These payments—an open secret in Kabul, but concealed from the American population by the corporate-controlled media—were made public in the US last week in a report in the *New York Times*. Karzai not only admitted that blocks of cash had been dropped off at his office; he said that he had met earlier in the day with the CIA station chief in Kabul to ensure that the payments would continue.

Karzai said he told the station chief: “Because of all these rumors in the media, please do not cut all this money because we really need it. We want to continue this sort of assistance.” He said the US official promised to continue making the payoffs.

The *Times* account portrayed the cash payments as a slush fund for bribing Afghan warlords to remain loyal to the Karzai government, citing such notorious mass murderers as Abdul Rashid Dostum, who has long dominated the Uzbek-speaking region around Mazar-e Sharif in western Afghanistan.

But there is another, equally important, purpose for the cash handouts. For more than a decade, top Afghan officials have been salting away money in countries with permissive banking regimes, like the Persian Gulf financial capital Dubai, in anticipation of the day when the US-backed regime would crumble, the insurgents would march into Kabul, and they would go into a well-paid exile.

Karzai suggested that he would be demanding even more cash from Washington as the price for a US-Afghan bilateral security agreement to set the conditions for a continued US-NATO military presence after 2014, when the bulk of US combat forces are to be withdrawn.

Similar talks in Iraq collapsed when the Iraqi government declared that popular opposition blocked it from offering any form of legal immunity for US soldiers deployed in the country. Obama, like Bush before him, had insisted that American troops could not be prosecuted under Iraqi law, no matter what crimes they might commit against Iraqi citizens, making a mockery of the claims that Iraq was a sovereign nation, not a conquered and occupied country. Ultimately, all US troops except for security forces at the huge US embassy in Baghdad were pulled out.

Such a result is not expected for the talks in Afghanistan, since Karzai and his fellow puppets are convinced that without US-NATO forces in Kabul, they could end up hanging from lampposts.

But Karzai & Co. still want to fatten their own bank accounts while they put off any day of reckoning with the Afghan insurgents. Karzai told the news conference that he was ready to sign a deal as long as the American government paid a sufficiently high rent for the bases it will use on Afghan territory after 2014, as well as providing additional funding for the training and equipping of Afghan security forces.

According to one press account, “The Afghan government has not said how much rent it would want for three or four US bases, but it is believed to be in the billions.” Needless to say, these sums would flow rapidly out of Afghanistan into the bank accounts of Afghan officials in Dubai, Switzerland, the Cayman Islands or other offshore financial centers where few questions are asked of large new depositors.

The other condition set by Karzai was that any long-term security agreement with the United States guarantee Afghanistan’s borders against “neighboring countries,” in what appeared to be a reference to Pakistan. Last week, Afghan troops attacked a Pakistani army outpost that Afghan officials claimed was on their territory.

In a particularly provocative statement, Karzai suggested that the Taliban should turn their weapons against Pakistan, adding that neither his government nor any other in Kabul could recognize the Durand Line, the international border between Afghanistan and Pakistan that was drawn by the British Empire.

Thousands of Afghan demonstrators took to the streets of Khewa, the home of an Afghan policeman killed in the border clash, chanting “Death to Pakistan.” Similar protests took place in the provinces of Nuristan, Khost and Uruzgan, all populated largely by Pashtuns, the same ethnic group that comprises the majority in the tribal-ruled regions of northwest Pakistan, just across the border.

The Obama administration is clearly concerned that the Karzai government—scheduled to leave office early in 2014, when Karzai’s second term ends—will leave behind a political and security vacuum. On Friday, Obama named a new diplomatic coordinator for Afghanistan and Pakistan, longtime US State Department official James F. Dobbins, who has previous experience in such crisis postings as Bosnia, Kosovo, Haiti and Somalia.

Dobbins coordinated the US intervention at the 2001 Bonn conference on Afghanistan, where the selection of Karzai as the US-NATO nominee to head the government in Kabul was ratified. Now he will be tasked with overseeing the selection of Karzai’s successor as America’s man in Kabul.