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US Steps up War of Words with Afghan Puppet Regime

By Patrick Martin

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The war of words between outgoing President Hamid Karzai and US-NATO forces over the legal conditions of their occupation of Afghanistan is intensifying.

Statements of US government and military officials and press commentaries in the United States have become increasingly critical, after Karzai flatly refused to sign a treaty drawn up after protracted US-Afghan talks that would have kept US troops in the country for at least another decade.

The pact is critical for future US military/intelligence operations in the region, including the Persian Gulf, Caspian Sea and Central Asia—the largest concentration of oil and gas resources on the planet. The agreement calls for nine permanent US military bases in Afghanistan, which borders on China, Pakistan, Iran and the former Soviet republics of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

On Sunday, Karzai issued a statement claiming that US-NATO forces were withholding fuel and other material support from their Afghan counterparts in an effort to force him to sign the security agreement.

“This deed is contrary to the prior commitment of America,” Karzai’s statement said. “Afghan forces are facing interruption in conducting of their activities as a result of the cessation of fuel and supportive services.” US officials denied there was any such action.

Afghan sources told the international press that helicopters had been unable to bring back the dead bodies of soldiers from remote locations because of fuel shortages.

The Afghan military is entirely dependent on US backing for its operations, from the payment of troops to fuel, food, ammunition, intelligence and air support. This year alone the Pentagon is supplying \$135 million in fuel to keep the Afghan military on the road.

Karzai initially balked at signing the pact nearly two weeks ago, citing the US refusal to make a binding commitment not to stage raids on the homes of Afghan citizens. A series of atrocities by American forces exacerbated the conflict, including a night raid on a home in eastern Afghanistan in which US commandos killed two civilians, and two drone missile strikes in the southern province of Helmand, killing a farmer and a 2-year-old boy and wounding several women.

A statement issued by Karzai November 28 denounced the attack that killed the child, blasting a house in Faqiran, a village in the Garmsir district. “This attack shows that American forces do not respect the lives and security of the people of Afghanistan,” it said. “For years, our people are being killed and their houses are being destroyed under the pretext of the war on terror.”

The US-NATO commander in Afghanistan, Marine Corps Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., called Karzai to apologize personally. The international coalition also issued a statement saying it “deeply regrets” the incident. However, other US officials defended the murder of the farmer, saying that a “precision strike” had killed an “insurgent.” Karzai was using “allegations of civilian deaths for political purposes,” they charged.

In an appearance on ABC television’s Sunday interview program “This Week,” former Obama National Security Adviser Thomas Donilon denounced Karzai’s refusal to sign the security agreement as “reckless... I think it’s reckless in terms of Afghanistan, and I think it also adversely impacts our ability to plan coherently and comprehensively for post-2014.”

“If the United States doesn’t have a bilateral security arrangement with Afghanistan that supports its troop presence there and provides the kinds of protections that we need, the United States cannot be present in Afghanistan after December 31, 2014,” he said.

Donilon concluded, “He should go ahead and sign the agreement, and if he does not, I think the United States will move towards the so-called Option B, and by the way, the United States has a lot of options with respect to being able to pursue its interests.”

The former Obama aide did not spell out what this range of options was. However, a cutoff of US funding to the Afghan puppet regime or an attempt to mobilize sections of the current puppet regime against Karzai are both possibilities. The clash between US imperialism and its Afghan

puppet recalls the friction between Washington and its stooge ruler in South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, which culminated 50 years ago in Diem's overthrow and murder in a US-backed coup.

On Sunday the *New York Times* published an article titled "Afghans Assail Karzai's Disparate Views on Killings." The article, by Rod Nordland, highlights the supposed contrast between Karzai's "fury" over US drone killings of innocent Afghan civilians, and his silence over Taliban suicide bombings that produce similar carnage.

Nordland provides little evidence to support the headline, quoting only a single Afghan, a former cabinet minister, criticizing Karzai's reaction to the killings.

The *Times* reporter effectively accuses Karzai of divided loyalties, claiming to have spoken to "many Afghans, who complain that their president has been looking for excuses to besmirch the Americans and delay signing a vitally important security deal with them, while overlooking equally serious or even worse abuses attributed to the Taliban."

The article goes on to report that "unease has spread throughout governing circles, and several prominent officials have said that a meeting of the president's cabinet last Monday was dominated by ministers who tried to persuade Mr. Karzai to sign the bilateral security agreement promptly..."

The *Times* account identifies Finance Minister Omar Zakhilwal as one of those opposing Karzai on the question of the security agreement, on the ground that failure to sign it will lead to a cutoff of the foreign cash on which the Afghan regime subsists. Zakhilwal "is also well regarded by the Americans," it continues.

The article concludes on an ominous note, citing an unnamed "Western diplomat" warning, "Mr. Karzai should be careful what he wishes for." The overt implication is that the US might cut off all aid to Afghanistan. The subtext is that Karzai could well suffer the fate of other US stooges who have been "terminated with extreme prejudice" when they became a nuisance.