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Afghanistan War May End By 2024 ... Maybe

By Jack A. Smith

5/19/2013

Hamid Karzai has let the Pentagon's cat out of the bag — to the displeasure of the Obama Administration. The Afghan president revealed inside information about President Obama's war plans after all U.S. "combat troops" completely withdraw in 17 months at the end of 2014.

As was known in recent years, the Obama Administration actually plans to keep troops in Afghanistan after the "withdrawal" at least to 2024. They won't be "combat troops," so Obama didn't actually mislead the American people. Instead they are to be Special Forces troops, who certainly engage in combat but are identified by a different military designation, as well as U.S. Army trainers for the Afghan military, CIA contingents, drone operators, and various other personnel.

The White House has kept other details secret, such as troop numbers and basing arrangements, until it is certain a final Strategic Partnership Declaration is worked out with the Kabul government. When that occurs, the White House expects to make the announcement itself at a time of its choosing, sculpting the information to convey the impression that another 10 years of fighting is not actually war but an act of compassion for a besieged ally who begs for help.

On May 9, however, during a speech at Kabul University, President Karzai decided to update the world on the progress he was making in his secret talks with the U.S., evidently without Washington's knowledge.

“We are in very serious and delicate negotiations with America,” Karzai said. “America has got its demands, Afghanistan too has its own demands, and its own interests.... They want nine bases across Afghanistan. We agree to give them the bases.

“Our conditions are that the U.S. intensify efforts in the peace process [i.e., talks with the Taliban], strengthen Afghanistan’s security forces, provide concrete support to the economy — power, roads and dams — and provide assistance in governance. If these are met, we are ready to sign the security pact.”

Washington evidently was taken aback by Karzai’s unexpected public revelations that made it clear President Obama is anxious, not hesitant, to keep American troops in Afghanistan. Few analysts thought there would be as many as nine bases. Neither the White House nor State Department confirmed requesting them but both emphasized that any bases in question were not intended to be permanent, as though that’s the principal factor.

If American engagement lasts until 2024 it will mean the U.S. has been involved in Afghan wars for most of the previous 46 years. It began in 1978 when Washington (and Saudi Arabia) started to finance the right wing Islamist mujahedeen uprising against a left wing pro-Soviet government in Kabul. The left regime was finally defeated in 1992 and the Taliban emerged as the dominant force among several other fighting groups in the mid-90s.

The CIA remained active in Afghanistan and was joined by the rest of the U.S. war machine weeks after the Sept. 11, 2000, terror attacks in Washington and New York. The objective was to overthrow the Taliban and destroy al-Qaeda, which also emerged from the Washington-financed wars. The U.S. swiftly took control of Kabul and al-Qaeda fled to Pakistan. Since then, the American foreign legion has been fought to a stalemate by a much smaller poorly equipped guerrilla force, which is where the situation remains today.

The U.S. has engaged in secret talks with the Taliban off and on for a couple of years. The hope is that the Taliban will agree to stop fighting and subordinate itself to the Kabul government in return for money, and a certain amount of administrative and political power within the national and certain provincial governments.

The Taliban will agree to nothing at this stage but an immediate and total withdrawal of U.S. military forces and the closure of bases. The White House evidently thinks that a combination of U.S.-trained Afghan forces plus the remaining Americans might bring their opponents to the bargaining table. The nine bases also provide the U.S. with a strong bargaining chip to relinquish at the right time.

Washington has additional reasons for remaining in Afghanistan, as we wrote in the May 31, 2011, issue of the Activist Newsletter — and little has changed:

“The U.S. has no desire to completely withdraw from its only foothold in Central Asia, militarily positioned close to what are perceived to be its two main enemies with nuclear weapons (China, Russia), and two volatile nuclear powers backed by the U.S. but not completely under its control by any means (Pakistan, India). Also, this fortuitous geography is flanking the extraordinary oil

and natural gas wealth of the Caspian Basin and energy-endowed former Soviet Muslim republics such as Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Lastly, Iran — a possible future imperial prize — is situated directly across Afghanistan's western border.

"The U.S. wants to keep troops nearby for any contingency. Washington's foothold in Central Asia is a potential geopolitical treasure, particularly as Obama, like Bush before him, seeks to prevent Beijing and Moscow from extending their influence in what is actually their own back yard, not America's." Soon after this was written the Obama Administration revealed its "pivot" to Asia. Remaining in Central Asia is now part of what we have called America's "ring of fire" around China, singeing North Korea as well.

Karzai occasionally makes strong public statements that criticize the U.S. They seem mainly intended to bolster his position by showing the Afghan people he is not Uncle Sam's total puppet, but he's to be praised for these statements.

For example, he often complains openly when the U.S. commits war crimes in his country, which have been numerous. He has demanded the U.S. discontinue night raids on homes. In late February, according to the Guardian, he ordered "U.S. Special Forces to leave one of Afghanistan's most restive provinces, Maidan Wardak, after receiving reports from local officials claiming that the elite units had been involved in the torture and disappearance of Afghan civilians." He recently charged that Washington was allowing the Taliban to increase its violence to make it necessary for him to approve the U.S. demand to remain until 2024.

Washington named Karzai acting president soon after the Bush Administration's aggressive invasion 12 years ago. His job was to serve the interests of the United States while governing Afghanistan. Karzai was elected president with decisive U.S. backing two years later. The Obama Administration maneuvered to oust him in the 2009 election, charging him with gross corruption, but its candidate withdrew just before the voting. Karzai legally cannot run for another term, but intends to continue playing a powerful role if he can pull it off.

Karzai is shrewd and realizes America's intentions are far more corrupt than his own because he only wants money, power and a somewhat better deal for Afghanistan, while the hypocritical U.S. wants everything there is to grab for its own geopolitical interests. He has long been on the CIA's generous payroll and also distributes payoffs to various warlords, some of whom are closer to the CIA than to the government. A week before the 2001 invasion the CIA was inside the country smuggling money to the warlords to join the impending war on the Taliban.

The White House dislikes the Afghan leader but he's all they have at the moment. They desperately need him now, particularly until signing a final agreement on having U.S. troops remain until 2024. President Obama well remembers his humiliation when Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki rejected demands to keep troops in Iraq after the "withdrawal" date, Dec. 30, 2011.

Obama pressured Maliki for years to permit up to 30,000 U.S. troops in Iraq after the "combat troops" pulled out. In mid-October 2011 the Iraqi leader finally accepted 3,000 to 5,000 troops in a training-only capacity. The Iraqis then insisted that they remain largely confined to their bases,

and refused Washington's demand to grant legal immunity to the soldiers when they entered the larger society.

That was the deal-breaker. Washington routinely demands legal exemption for its foreign legions as a matter of imperial hubris, and would not compromise. The day after the deal collapsed, Obama issued a public statement intended to completely conceal his failure. "Today," he said, "I can report that, as promised, the rest of our troops in Iraq will come home by the end of the year."

Several important issues in the Washington-Kabul post-2014 negotiations seem to have been decided, including a U.S. payment of at least \$10 billion a year to train and pay for some 400,000 Afghan soldiers and police officers. Among the remaining issues are two of considerable importance — troop strength and legal immunity for American personal (both for soldiers and tens of thousands of U.S. "contractors" who will remain in the country).

Reports circulated in the last few months that between 3,000 and 20,000 U.S. troops, mainly Special Forces, CIA contingents, drone operators and contractors of various kinds, will remain after 2014. The main air cover is expected to come from Navy aircraft carriers probably stationed in the Arabian Sea or Indian Ocean. Drones are expected to play a major role in battle as well as surveillance. Last year there were some 400 drone attacks in Afghanistan and that number is expected to continue increasing.

The New York Times reported Jan. 3 that "Gen. John R. Allen, the senior American commander in Afghanistan, has submitted military options to the Pentagon that would keep 6,000 to 20,000 American troops in Afghanistan after 2014.... With 6,000 troops, defense officials said, the American mission would largely be a counterterrorism fight of Special Operations commandos who would hunt down insurgents. There would be limited logistical support and training for Afghan security forces. With 10,000 troops, the United States would expand training of Afghan security forces. With 20,000 troops, the Obama administration would add some conventional Army forces to patrol in limited areas."

The May 11 New York Times reported that "The Obama administration has yet to decide how large a force it would like to keep in Afghanistan, but administration officials have signaled that it is unlikely to total more than 10,000 service members. They said it was more important now to hash out a range of issues, like whether American troops would continue to have legal immunity in Afghanistan after next year, than to talk about the specifics of where troops would be based."

The big remaining issue is immunity for U.S. personnel. Our guess is that, unlike in Iraq — where conditions are far different — Washington will find a way around the issue. It is difficult to see how the Kabul government of Karzai or his successor in next year's elections can survive for long without substantial American financial support for a prolonged period.

American forces are engaged in Obama's drone wars in western Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia and soon Africa. Regime change in Libya would not have occurred had the Obama Administration refused to participate. President Obama has been fanning the flames of regime change in Syria for nearly two years, and now he's about to up the ante. He's strangling Iran with unjust

sanctions and keeps warning that war is possible. He calls Hezbollah, the Shia self-defense organization in Lebanon, a terrorist organization, as he does Hamas in Gaza, the victim of overwhelming Israeli hatred and violence. And now Obama in moving more military power to East Asia to confront China.

If George W. Bush was in the White House today, a huge American peace movement would be out on the streets demanding an end to America's endless immoral wars. But now a Democrat officiates in the Oval Office, his Nobel Peace Prize wisely hidden in a dark closet lest his militarist propensities provoke an unseemly contrast.

Obama's many wars are but extensions of Bush's wars plus killer drones, but the great majority of Americans either seem to have forgotten or simply don't care about the wars, even though their tax money will amount to \$80 billion for Afghanistan in fiscal 2014. Meanwhile, Pentagon generals anticipate various new wars of one kind or another well into the future. The battle against al-Qaeda is expected to last 20 more years. The world has become America's battlefield.

Afghanistan? Didn't we have a war there once? Oh, that's right, it ended when we got rid of Bush, didn't it?