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Get the Hell Out of Afghanistan Already!

By Ron Jacobs
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The US war machine scored another win. Not in Syria, but in Afghanistan. After lying about a prolonged attack on the Medicin Sans Frontiers hospital in Kunduz, a recent decision from the White House to leave at least 10,000 troops in that country for an undetermined amount of time seems to make no sense. However, when one looks at the justification from various politicians and think tanks, the reasoning is proven to be the same as it has been for years. Let me quote a certain Rand policy analyst named S. Rebecca Zimmerman:

“There have been numerous security losses across Afghanistan, despite the 9,800 troop presence, but the government is also facing challenges of erosion of authority. It’s so focused on factions within, and pressure without that it cannot effectively govern and strongmen on the periphery are

growing in influence. The presence of U.S. troops cannot halt these trends, but it can slow their progress.” (RAND website, October 16, 2015)

In other words, Washington can't win but it can continue to keep those it opposes from winning. This is a cynical move almost on par with King David sending Uriah the Hittite into the front lines and certain death after David slept with Uriah's wife. Arms will continue to flow into the ravaged nation that is Afghanistan, so will US troops and mercenaries; Afghan soldiers will die at an increased rate as will civilians. The captains of the war industry—from Lockheed Martin to General Dynamics and beyond—will reap billions of dollars in blood money while paid-off sycophant politicians promise them more. The relatively few citizens who are paying attention to the travesty will cry out alarms about the futility of the war and the costs their fellows ultimately bear in gold and conscience. And the war will drag on.

According to Statista.com, the total cost of the US war on Afghanistan is around \$765 billion. The number of US military fatalities is (as of July 1, 2015) 2370. Other occupying forces have lost 1137 troops. The number of mercenaries and civilian contractors killed was 1582 by December 2013 (US Dept. Of Labor). Afghan deaths are unknown, but it is estimated that more than 92,000 have died, of which at least 26,000 were civilians (Watson Institute, Brown University).

The war industry's numbers, on the other hand show increases, not losses. If we look at the rankings of just three of the top defense contractors in the US, we discover that General Dynamics (which makes Stryker vehicles and many other implements of this particular war) went from being Number 180 in the Fortune 500 to Number 100 since the US first attacked Afghanistan; Northrop Grumman (which makes at least two of the helicopter gunships used in country) went from number 232 to Number 124 and Lockheed Martin (whose weapons systems are too numerous to list) went up only four rankings, from 69 to 64. These advances tell us almost all we need to know about who this war benefits.

Besides the fact that these profits are made from the taking of human life, there is also the reality that the money these companies profit from is money taken from that which US taxpayers pay into the Treasury for government services—money many US residents believe should go to helping people, not killing them. Of course, in the military itself there are also plenty of military officers who are making their careers on the continuation of this debacle.

So, when all is said and done; when losses are calculated and profits pocketed the question remains: why are US troops still in Afghanistan? Unfortunately, the answer is too simple. US troops, spies and mercenaries are still in Afghanistan because the American people allow them to be.

If one recalls the presidential campaigns of 2008 and 2012, Barack Obama promised to end the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The former is now a low-intensity conflict affected by the goings-on in Syria and Libya before it. On the other hand, the war in Afghanistan continues to founder along. The original reason for the war (as contrived as it was) no longer exists. Osama Bin Laden is dead. So is Mullah Omar.

We are told the Taliban is taking back cities, but the greater truth seems to be that Afghans with different allegiances are fighting each other for land, religions, and plunder and opium profits. The everyday Afghan is just trying to maintain an existence for themselves and their family. There is no end to this war unless we demand that US troops, CIA operatives and their mercenary accomplices leave the country. It is quite obvious no politician is going to make that demand unless the American people force their hand.

With this in mind, what I find almost as depressing as the extension of the occupation is the lackluster response from US residents. While I expect the politicians to line up behind this idiotic move, the fact that most of the rest of us barely even note the news is symptomatic of how far along we actually are as a nation into George Orwell's 1984 future where eternal war is peace.