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Global Research

Obama's Middle East Imperialism

by Shamus Cooke

Global Research, May 10, 2009



The velvet gloves are off and the reality of Obama's Middle East plans are being revealed: a bare-fisted pummeling of Afghanistan and Pakistan — with Iraq's fate yet to be determined.

The media have been preparing this for months, with incessant talk about the alleged "troop drawdown" in Iraq, the "surge" in Afghanistan and the "immediate threat" that supposedly is represented by Pakistan.

It's now crystal clear that zero "change" will be forthcoming when it comes to U.S. foreign policy, minus a strategic shifting of troops. This fact was highlighted recently when Obama asked for an additional \$83.4 billion in "emergency spending" to fight the Iraq/Afghan/Pakistan wars. It must be noted that so-called "emergency funds"

were precisely the avenue Bush chose to fight his wars, enabling him to skirt the already-gigantic military budget.

The 2010 military budget is now set at \$534 billion (!), not counting emergency spending; a 4 percent increase from the previous year. At a time when jobs, education, health, and public services are being slashed all over the country, calling such a budget "highly immoral" would be an understatement.

Also morally questionable is the extension of the Afghanistan war into Pakistan, a bitter pill to swallow for those who once sincerely believed in Obama's antiwar rhetoric. The house appropriations committee recently approved \$2.3 billion in "emergency spending" for "assistance" to Pakistan, most of it for the purpose of making war: training Pakistani "counterinsurgency" forces and police and building a fortified U.S. super embassy.

In an attempt to fool the American public about Pakistan, Obama has substituted the always-unpopular ground troops with unmanned drones, stepping up the use of this highly inaccurate form of combat since becoming President and consequently killing hundreds of civilians. Obama has also laid down the law for his puppet presidents in Afghanistan and Pakistan: they will fight his war to the end or be replaced. The recent scene in Washington of these two Presidents declaring "unity and cooperation" with Obama's war plans was perhaps the most farcical imperialist media show in recent history.

The "historic" meeting took place after weeks of U.S. government and military officials denouncing the two Presidents, along with open suggestions that a "better" leader should lead either country, i.e., wage Obama's wars. In the Washington Post we read:

"On all fronts," said a senior U.S. official, "Hamid Karzai has plateaued as a leader."

And:

"Obama intends to maintain an arm's-length relationship with Karzai in the hope that it will lead him to address issues of concern to the United States, according to senior U.S. government officials." (May 5, 2009)

What are these "issues of concern"? The Post explains:

"Obama wanted a renewed commitment by Karzai to better coordinate operations with Pakistan and the U.S., which will expand its military presence in Afghanistan under the president's revised war strategy against the Taliban."

Karzai got the message, and so did Zardari in Pakistan, who received similar messages from both the media and politicians (the Post article states that Obama has only spoken to Karzai twice since becoming President!). Above all, Obama wanted completely pliable puppets, as opposed to the anti-American rhetoric both Presidents had used on multiple occasions so as not to appear complicit in having their own people massacred.

The meeting of the Presidents quelled this. Both Presidents sounded as if they were reading scripts as they talked about their "unwavering" fight against the Taliban. Ironically, a convenient test of loyalty occurred during the summit: it was discovered that American fighter jets had massacred at least 147 people in Afghanistan. Both

Obama and the Afghani President were utterly stoic about the news. Instead of addressing the immense human suffering of the slaughter, they renewed their commitment to the war, while blandly adding: "Every effort is made to reduce civilian casualties."

Although the latest bombing resembles in every way the horrors depicted in Picasso's painting Guernica, it is not especially unique. Using fighter jets against the Afghani people has now become common place, with the number of bombing raids increasing month to month. The Washington Post article explains:

"As Taliban activity has increased in recent years, overwhelmed soldiers have increasingly resorted to calling in air strikes, resulting in numerous civilian casualties."

The tried and true colonial tactic of terrorizing a population into submission is now the route being employed in Afghanistan — shock and awe Vietnam style.

And although Obama has stated repeatedly that he is trying to "finish up" Bush's wars, he is in fact escalating them. The above-mentioned military spending prompted Democratic congresswoman Lynn Woolsey to point out the obvious:

"[The spending] will prolong our occupation of Iraq through at least the end of 2011, and it will deepen and expand our military presence in Afghanistan indefinitely." (Obama promised recently that all troops would be out of Iraq by 2011, the date the Bush administration had previously negotiated.)

The question must be asked: Why is Obama pursuing this policy?

One easy explanation is Obama's extremely close ties to Wall Street. U.S. banks are but one type of corporation that benefit greatly from a U.S.- dominated Middle East. Becoming the primary banker for the region would be a very profitable endeavor; this applies with equal weight to weapons producing companies, and those paid to "reconstruct" a country after it is destroyed, not to mention corporations — oil, mining, U.S. exporters, etc. — that benefit from having a monopoly over a fully "pacified" nation.

Straying from this policy would require that the government pursue policies that directly benefit ordinary people, instead of those that cater to corporations and the rich that own them.

Breaking the corporate dominance over social life requires that the market economy (capitalism) itself be opposed, since nothing is produced unless it can be sold for profit on the world market, and where the struggle to dominate this market leads corporations based in different countries to advocate for a policy of never-ending war.