

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<http://www.fff.org/freedom/fd1102b.asp>

Afghanistan: Digging In

by Sheldon Richman
June 6, 2011

President Obama once said withdrawal from Afghanistan would begin in July 2011 — maybe, conditions permitting. But he has since backed away from that date. Now NATO, echoing American officials, says security won't be fully turned over to the Afghan government any earlier than the end of 2014 — again, maybe; the alliance has signed a *long-term* security agreement with the Afghan president. Allied troops thus will remain in Afghanistan — as occupiers always say — in a supporting role beyond 2014 and even 2015. Calling the December 31, 2014, an “aspirational goal,” Pentagon spokesman Geoff Morrell said, “It does not mean that all U.S. or coalition forces would necessarily be gone by that date.” NATO chief Anders Fogh Rasmussen says the war will continue “as long as it takes.”

Even before Obama backed off the 2011 timetable and before the NATO summit, Gen. David Petraeus had told Bob Woodward, “You have to recognize that I don't think you win this war. I think you keep fighting. You have to stay after it. This is the kind of fight we're in for the rest of our lives and probably our kids' lives.”

And Defense Secretary Robert Gates went even further, telling Woodward, “We're not leaving Afghanistan prematurely. In fact, we're not ever leaving at all.”

Thus, no one seems to take target dates or even aspirational goals very seriously. The U.S. national-security apparatus is planted in Afghanistan and appears in no hurry to leave.

On the ground there are concrete signs that the U.S. government will be hanging around far into the future, no matter what Obama may say when he's trying to soothe the public. In an article

last October, award-winning investigative journalist Nick Turse wrote that the U.S. government is engaged in a “base-building surge that has left the countryside of Afghanistan dotted with military posts, themselves expanding all the time, despite the drawdown of forces promised by President Obama beginning in July 2011.” Turse cited an analysis of government documents, such as construction-bid solicitations, done by the website TomDispatch and concluded,

The documents reveal plans for large-scale, expensive Afghan base expansions of every sort and a military that is expecting to pursue its building boom without letup well into the future. These facts-on-the-ground indicate that, whatever timelines for phased withdrawal may be issued in Washington, the U.S. military is focused on building up, not drawing down, in Afghanistan.

Building boom

Turse is well qualified to discuss this. As author of *The Complex: How the Military Invades Our Everyday Lives*, he is familiar with the intimate relationship between the Pentagon and corporate military contractors, which today is far more extensive than what President Eisenhower had in mind when he referred to it in his farewell address as the “military-industrial complex.”

Turse has examined plans to expand a variety of military facilities at a cost of tens of millions of dollars, with completion not expected until well past the time the American withdrawal is supposed to commence. The facilities include airstrips that support large transport aircraft, “airfield parking space,” maintenance installations, ammunition storage facilities, and living quarters for troops.

“Documents reveal that this sort of expansion is now going on at a remarkably rapid pace all over the country,” Turse writes. “And whenever you stumble upon a document indicating that work of a certain sort is taking place at one FOB [forward operating base], you can be sure that, sooner or later, you will find similar work at other FOBs.”

The magnitude of the building project is extraordinary, Turse says. After describing the enhancement of FOB Shindand in western Afghanistan, documented by the *Washington Post*, he comments, “Multiply this, FOB by FOB, the length and breadth of Afghanistan, and you have a building program fit for a long war.”

Turse gives us reason for profound skepticism about Obama’s public pronouncements. “Despite a pledge from the Obama administration to begin its troop drawdowns next July, this ongoing base-construction splurge, when put together with recent signals from the White House, civilians at the Pentagon, and top military commanders, including Afghan war chief Petraeus, suggests that the process may be drawn out over many years.”

Eyebrows should have been raised, Turse notes, when Petraeus told ABC News last year that the military had “finally gotten the inputs right in Afghanistan” and that the “counterinsurgency clock” had restarted. Really? After many years of occupation and untold deaths and injuries the military is just now claiming that it is getting things right? “But it is just at this point that we feel that we do have the organizations that we learned in Iraq and from history are necessary for the conduct that this kind of campaign,” he said. That sounds like a talking point. The Iraqi

occupation has empowered the Iran-backed Shi'a *majority*, which does not need a U.S. presence to survive. There is nothing comparable in Afghanistan, where the U.S. government backs a puppet minority government in Kabul that has little legitimacy in the rest of the country.

“The building boom occurring on U.S. bases across Afghanistan and the contracts for future construction being awarded at the moment,” Turse writes,

seem to confirm that, whatever the White House has in mind, the military is operating on something closer to the Petraeus timeline.... And military timelines suggest that, if the Pentagon gets its way, American troop levels may not dip below the numbers present when Obama took office, approximately 36,000 troops, until 2016 or beyond....

Recently, the Army sought bids from contractors willing to supply power plants and supporting fuel systems at forward operating bases in Afghanistan for *up to five years*. Power plants, fuel systems, and the bases on which they are being built are facts on the ground. Such facts carry a weight of their own, and offer a window into U.S. designs in Afghanistan that may be at least as relevant as anything Barack Obama or his aides have been saying about draw-downs, deadlines, or future withdrawal plans.

It wouldn't be the first time an American president has misled the American people about a war. But what's disturbing in this is, who is really making policy? Obama told Bob Woodward (even if only for political reasons) that he didn't want to be stuck in Afghanistan indefinitely, but that doesn't seem to faze the military. If Petraeus is calling the shots that really matter, why aren't the self-styled Constitution-loving conservatives denouncing Obama, the putative commander in chief of the armed forces, for turning Afghanistan over to the military? Oh, that's right: Conservatives like it when presidents turn wars over to generals even if it conflicts with the Constitution.

The racketeers

Of course, the Pentagon's continuing transformation of Afghanistan into a massive U.S. garrison channels millions of dollars into the pockets of military contractors — big, well-connected corporations that thrive not by serving consumers in the free market, but rather by winning favor with generals, bureaucrats, and politicians who easily conflate their personal career interests with the public interest. In other words, what we have here is a massive scheme that lines the pockets of favored companies as the military digs in for the long haul in the middle of an Afghan civil war that shows no sign of ending.

This is not to suggest that occupations are launched only to benefit contractors — there are also geopolitical interests at play — but that is a foreseeable benefit for a set of influential interests that are not apt to take an anti-war position when opportunities arise. Moreover, as we've seen increasingly lately, the Keynesian principle that government spending is good for a sluggish economy leads easily to the suggestion that military spending provides the most politically achievable economic stimulus of all. For one thing, conservatives will accept it more readily than domestic infrastructure projects and extended unemployment benefits. Moreover, many people

believe, naively, that World War II ended the Great Depression — although it could not have done so, because war spending does not lift living standards and military conscripts and munitions makers do not produce consumer goods.

War, then, is a perfect political program: It milks the taxpayers while disguising its true beneficiaries, covering them with a mantle of national security. The entire “war on terror” can be understood in that way. No wonder the highly decorated U.S. Marine Maj. Gen. Smedley D. Butler said “war is a racket,” writing in his book of that title (1935),

I spent 33 years and four months in active military service and during that period I spent most of my time as a high-class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street, and the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism. I helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street. I helped purify Nicaragua for the International Banking House of Brown Brothers in 1902–1912. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for the American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras right for the American fruit companies in 1903. In China in 1927 I helped see to it that Standard Oil went on its way unmolested. Looking back on it, I might have given Al Capone a few hints. The best he could do was to operate his racket in three districts. I operated on three continents.