

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نیاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر 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

Antiwar.com

On War, Obama Has Been Worse Than Bush

By Anthony Gregory

August 25, 2011

Obama said he would divert resources from Iraq to Afghanistan. To his everlasting shame, he has not broken this promise.

The real critique of the wars certainly goes beyond the numbers. It is good, however, to look at the figures. Most people in the country know that Obama hasn't exactly ended the wars. I'm sure people say, *Yeah, but Obama is ending the wars.*

This claim is not obviously 100 percent false in every respect, perhaps. And so we need to be careful when we get into the details.

So, during the run-up to the ascension of Obama to the throne, he was critical of the Iraq war. He said things like *This war's lasted longer than World War I, II, the Civil War; 4,000 Americans have died (and of course Americans are the only people that matter in the war). More than 60,000 have been injured; we spent trillions of dollars; we're less safe.*

These were very sound critiques of the Iraq war. A lot of us made these kinds of utilitarian critiques. They're almost utilitarian anyway. I don't think they are the most important reasons to oppose the Iraq war, but they are important reasons; they are sufficient reasons on their own, certainly. And Obama did sound better on the Iraq war than Bush or McCain.

At the same time — and this is forgotten — he always was worse on Afghanistan. The Democrats, from Kerry to Obama, were always worse on Afghanistan. Obama's position paper

said he's been calling for more troops and resources for the war in Afghanistan for years; he would divert resources from Iraq to Afghanistan.

Another point I want to make is on Iraq. He wasn't antiwar; he was always slippery on this war. I want to just relay a couple of interesting points.

In 2004, the position of the Democrats was always *We shouldn't have gone in; now we're in, we're going to have to get out one day, but it sure isn't responsible to talk about getting out now, because we need to be responsible; we need to fix the country, and then we'll get out.*

In '04, in the *Chicago Tribune*, Obama said, "There's not much of a difference between my position on Iraq and George Bush's position at this stage."

Throughout the years, he voted for war funding once he was senator, and he defended his votes. Presumably it would be wrong to defund an immoral war. And in 2008, Obama hailed the Iraq surge — a controversial policy harshly criticized by many Democrats the year before — going so far as to tell Bill O'Reilly that the surge "succeeded beyond our wildest dreams."

In December of '08, when he was the lame-duck president, Bush signed the Status of Forces Agreement with the Iraqi leadership, which set the timetable for withdrawal. It was almost precisely the timetable for withdrawal that Obama had proposed, within a couple months.

So the official US policy, by the time Obama took office, was that the United States would withdraw the troops from the cities by June of 2009; and by the end of this year, 2011, the troops would leave Iraq entirely. That was the policy when Obama took power. He did not expedite that.

To his credit, he hasn't put all his political capital into stopping it, although even there I would qualify my statements.

Boots on the Ground

In Iraq, at the height of the surge, which worked beyond our wildest dreams, there were 170,000 US troops in Iraq, and now there are fewer than 50,000. Which, by the way, is about the number that Rumsfeld and those clowns said that we would need for the war. So, now that the war is kind of wrapping up, we're at the level that they thought we'd need to invade and conquer and occupy and win.

In Afghanistan, meanwhile, Obama has fulfilled his promises, unfortunately. Before 2006, except for a blip in July, there were about 10 to 20,000 troops. And then by the time Bush left office, unfortunately he ramped it up to 33,000 troops. By mid-2010, there were almost three times as many — 91,000 troops. Throughout 2009, Obama has almost tripled the presence in Afghanistan.

Obama's first defense secretary, Robert Gates, who by the way was Bush's defense secretary too, floated the idea the United States might have to stay beyond 2011. And some Democrats on

the Armed Services Committee have said, *Yeah, we can't just withdraw.* (I suppose you can't just go into a country and bomb it and stay there for only eight years — that would be reckless.)

The total number of troops fighting wars under Obama has been higher than it was under Bush except at the end of Bush's term. At the first half of the Bush administration, which is when there were people in the streets shouting, "Bush is a war criminal" — when the Left was correct about something — there were fewer troops.

There were more US fatalities in Iraq under Bush, although the total number of US fatalities in 2009 and 2010 was higher than it was in 2003, and higher than it was in 2008, the last Bush year.

Let's say we had a third Bush term. If he was planning to withdraw gradually from Iraq and leave Afghanistan alone, I think the trajectory would have been much better than it is today, where Iraq is about where I think it would have been, and Afghanistan is much worse.

Obama also boosted private contractors by about a quarter in both Iraq and Afghanistan. As of January 2011 — of course, this is government data and you'd be surprised how much they don't know what they are talking about — there are 87,000 contractors in Afghanistan; 71,000 in Iraq.

There were more civilian contractors (including foreigners) that died in the first half of 2010 than there were soldiers. And some people are pointing out that shifting some of the burden to contractors obscures what is going on.

Costly Wars

Obama always said that we are spending way too much; we're going to go line by line in the budget. And one of the only good promises he made was to save money on Iraq. That's how he was planning to support everyone from cradle to grave. It doesn't really add up that way, but at least he wanted to cut spending on something big.

And he did cut the spending in Iraq. But the spending has gone up enormously in Afghanistan. Even adjusted for inflation, we see that, other than Bush's last two years with the surge, total spending was lower for most of the Bush term on the two wars.

Obama criticized Bush for financing wars off budget. In his first year Obama had a big supplemental-funding bill — another broken promise.

The Afghanistan war has expanded out of control, and the war makes no sense. The government says there are 100 al-Qaeda members in Afghanistan, and so the troop levels are higher, more people are dying and they want to stamp out the opium trade. They can't even stop people from buying crack four blocks from the White House, not that they should try. This is the most ridiculous war. It's even a more ridiculous war than the Iraq war in terms of the idea behind it.

Meanwhile, Obama is drone-attacking Pakistan. He's expanded this war greatly. One or two million Pakistani refugees have had to leave the Swat Valley. It's one of the greatest refugee

crises since Rwanda. Obama's bombed Yemen; he's bombed Somalia; he even threatened Eritrea, this tiny little country near Ethiopia, with invasion.

In a normal country, when your government says it might invade another country, people have a clue, but we're at war so much with so many countries no one even knows any of this stuff.

And on Iran, Obama continues to be belligerent when he caught Iran "red-handed" with that Qom nuclear facility. Iran *reported* that they had this facility that they hadn't really started working on yet, according to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, in which the National Intelligence Estimate, the administration, and the International Atomic Energy Agency all say Iran's basically following the law.

Civil Liberties

Warrantless surveillance has continued, and it's been normalized. The TSA outrages have gotten worse. Now the Left thinks that you're crazy if you oppose the police state, and the Right is finally realizing the federal government shouldn't get to touch us like this.

Detention without charge has continued. Habeas corpus is gutted. Obama was supposed to close Guantánamo within a year; now it looks as if they are never going to close it. And even at their best they'll say we'll have a "Guantánamo Lite" within the United States.

Even when they said they would try Khalid Sheikh Mohammed in civil court, the administration's position was *We'll try him, and we'll convict him, and if we don't convict him we'll still detain him*. So of course the American Right goes crazy because *how dare he be soft on terrorism*.

Renditioning, this outsourcing of people to be tortured, has continued, at least on some level. In 2009, they renditioned a guy who wasn't even accused of terrorism. He was accused of knowing about supposed fraud related to defense contracting.

So they tied him to a chair; they deprived him of sleep; they told him his family was in danger, that he'll never see them again — all the horrible stuff that happened under Bush, but he was basically a white-collar criminal at worst.

The drone attacks are through the roof; there's robot killing. Bradley Manning, the likely whistleblower with WikiLeaks, has been detained. And Obama used to say his administration would protect whistleblowers. I guess he meant protect them with steel cages.

We have the same basic trajectory on war, on spending, on civil liberties, on foreign policy; the Defense Department is as bloated as ever. People forget that both parties are the same on pretty much everything, and foreign policy maybe more than anything else.