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FACTS ABOUT AFGHANISTAN
Est. number of Al Qaeda members now operating in Afghanistan: 100
No. of U.S. troops who will be stationed there: 108,000
Est. number of Soviet troops there in 1986, at the height of their invasion: 120,000
Chances that an American over 55 thinks more U.S. troops should be sent to Afghanistan: 4 in 9
Chance that an American under 35 thinks so: 1 in 4
("Harper's Index," Dec. 2009, with some editing to reflect Obama's surge)
87% of Afghans have no access to clean water
70% undernourished
Infant mortality 3rd highest in world
More than a quarter of children die before age 5
Life expectancy for women 43 years, for men under 43
Literacy for men 35%, women 10 to 20%

| Rabbi Arthur Waskow to jbenett  
| Shalom Center: A Prophetic Voice in Jewish, Multireligious, and American Life
| “Ten best reasons to send more US troops to Afghanistan”

10. If you want to breed and train more would-be terrorists who hate the USA, the best way to do so is attacking Afghan villages where key Al Qaeda cells have left to regroup elsewhere.

9. If you want to keep Afghan women powerless, ignore the advice of their own leaders that grass-roots economic development is crucial -- and send the Marines instead, to boost the power of macho warlords who gather loyalty by fighting foreign invaders.

8. If you want to make sure that no one is learning that government could do good things like building schools and community health clinics in America, hiring teachers and writers and railroad construction workers, feeding hungry children, or renewing our rotting sewer system -- then sink hundred of billions of dollars into this war so as to bankrupt domestic-needs programs.

7. If you want to make even higher profits from burning oil and coal instead of letting America invest in creating a wind/solar renewable energy network that will heal the climate crisis, free us from coal and oil, and make America competitive again -- a multi-billion-dollar war is terrific.

6. If you want to stymie all investigations into past use of torture and "extraordinary rendition" by past US governments and utterly negate the closing of Guantanamo, multiplying prisoners in Bagram (Afghanistan) will help a great deal.

5. If you like to knit blankets for legless veterans while making sure the Veterans Administration is so swamped with the wounded that they have to wait months in rat-infested wards for treatment, more maimed soldiers are by far the best result of a war.

4. If you are trying to do research on the suicide rate, homeless rate, and other symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome in returning soldiers, there will never be a better milieu for producing experimental subjects.

3. If you want to create a surge of right-wing populist rage that will shatter the Democratic Party and
elect Sarah Palin President in 2012, then combine thousands of dead and maimed American soldiers with millions of unemployed American workers.

If you can think of two more, please add them by clicking to this article on our website at http://www.theshalomcenter.org/node/1650

and commenting at the bottom of the page. AND -- if you think all these are terrible reasons and would like to tell your Senators to oppose sending more troops, please click to - http://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/602/t/4180/campaign.jsp?campaign_KEY=27923

and fax them. We have provided a usable letter; we welcome your adding your own thoughts.

HR3966 TRUE VALOR
“It takes a lot more courage to stand up to violence than to resort to it.” Ramsey Clark

Congress passed the 2010 Defense budget with a total of approximately $636 billion in expenditures. This includes $128.2 billion for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Only one Senator (Russ Feingold) and a handful of representative in the House voted against the money. The clearest expressions of Congressional dissent was new bill HR 3966, introduced by Barbara Lee which would prohibit the use of funds to increase the number of American soldiers in Afghanistan. It had 22 co-sponsors: To see this list of Congressional VALOR:: http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h111-3699

SIGN ON TO END THE WAR (from HAW)
A number of well-known, valorous antiwar activists have signed onto a statement being circulated by the Campaign for Peace and Democracy, calling for an end to US military intervention in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The statement and a partial list of signers are at http://www.cpdweb.org/stmts/1014/stmt.shtml

VIETNAM AND AFGHANISTAN WARS

WOUNDED
“Independent Voices” on PBS, Dr. Ronald Glasser on the numerous wounded from Iraq and Afghan wars on long-term care. Glasser has written books on the Vietnam War and the Iraq War.

CIVILIAN CASUALTIES
“Afghan civilian casualty rate at highest since Taliban rule”
Deaths due to US, Nato and Afghan troops 30% up despite new battlefield rules, says UN report

- Buzz up!
- Digg it
- Helen Pidd and agencies
- guardian.co.uk, Tuesday 17 February 2009 10.39 GMT
- Article history
Afghans at the graves of family members allegedly killed after a US raid on Azizabad in Afghanistan in August. Photograph: Faidoon Pooeyaa/AP

The number of civilians killed in the war in Afghanistan increased by 40% last year to a record 2,118 people, the UN said in a report today.

The research also showed 829 people were killed by US, Nato and Afghan forces, an increase of more than 30% year-on-year. Militants were responsible for 1,160 deaths, or 55% of the total, it said.

Campaign groups claim that 2008 marked the deadliest year in Afghanistan since the Taliban were deposed, and that ordinary Afghans have paid far too high a price. Civilian deaths have been a huge source of friction between the US and the Afghan president, Hamid Karzai, who has demanded western troops avoid killing civilians during operations.

The US and Afghan militaries announced plans this month to increase the number of Afghans taking part in US operations, a step aimed at reducing civilian deaths.

The UN's annual report on the protection of civilians noted that despite new battlefield rules designed to reduce civilian casualties, western and Afghan troops killed 31% more civilians in 2008 than in 2007 – the UN claims 629 civilians were killed by Nato and Afghan forces.

"As the conflict has intensified, it is taking an increasingly heavy toll on civilians," the UN said. Militants increasingly rely on roadside bombs, car bombs and suicide bombers – attacks that are "frequently undertaken regardless of the impact on civilians", the report said. But US, Nato and Afghan operations also have led to rise in civilian casualties, "notwithstanding efforts to implement policies and procedures to minimise the impact of their operations on civilians", the report said.

About 130 deaths could not be accounted for because of issues such as crossfire.

A US-based group that pushes for the rights of civilians in conflict zones said in a new report today that "the lack of a clear, coordinated strategy to address civilian losses has been a leading source of anger and resentment towards military forces" in Afghanistan.

"The international coalition in Afghanistan is losing public support, one fallen civilian at a time," Civic (The Campaign for Innocent Victims in Conflict), said.

The US military and other members of the Nato-led force in Afghanistan make some condolence payments to the families of civilians accidentally killed. But Civic said that a "significant number" of families receive no help from international forces and that anger is especially strong when no help is provided.

"Every family with losses not recognised and addressed is another obstacle to Afghanistan's stabilisation and development," the report said.

The Civic report urged the Pentagon to create a position to address civilian casualties, and it said the Nato-led force in Afghanistan should have a coordinated response to provide compensation payments to the families of victims.

“Afghanistan: No Reason to Stay” by Stephen Walt (The Washinton Report on Middle East Affairs Dec. 2009 and The Nation. Walt is Prof. at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Gov’t.) (excellent one-page summary)

What to do requires truthful assessments:

1. High costs of war: The US “has spent more than $223 billion on the Afghan war since 2001, and it now costs roughly $65 billion annually. The actual bill will be significantly higher……” “The bottom line: Staying in Afghanistan will cost many more dead American soldiers—and, inevitably, Afghan civilians—and hundreds of billions of additional dollars.”

2. No benefits of winning: Defeating the Taliban won’t defeat al-Qaeda: a) the corrupt Afghan gov’t. in Kabul will have limited authority over much of the country, b) eliminating Afghan. as a safe haven won’t end al-Qaeda: all al-Qaeda needs are safe houses around the world and supply of martyrs (by present US logic we should be bombing Hamburg, where the 9/11 plot was conducted). If al-Q is the concern, the Afghan war is a distraction.

3. Odds of US winning are slim: Taliban are the tribes (esp. Pashtun) of Afghan and W. Pakistan; US
troops are increasingly killing civilians, etc. Given the unpopularity of the war (see facts above) because of the costs, the few benefits, and the small odds of success, Obama could have advocated and won withdrawal. [This prospect omits the power of imperial dreams among the ruling elites—of the Pentagon and the militarized US economy and its campaign and lobbyist money to influence Congress. But it offers strong encouragement to the peace movement to continue its opposition to the war. We can believe that the majority public’s opposition to permanent war derives partly from the counter-empire education and ethics we have provided. D]

“Define Mission in Afghanistan,” (Kansas City Star) ADG (11-29-09). An effort to survey in a short editorial the reasons the US gov’t. has given for invading Afghanistan, the options ahead for achieving the mission (wipe out bin Laden and al-Qaeda): maintain present troop level, increase troops, reduce troops, withdraw. All options are flawed, esp. withdrawal. The Karzai gov’t. is irredeemably corrupt; counterinsurgency dubious because against decentralized local tribes; etc. Concludes impossible to withdraw because “seems a route to disaster” (unexplained). Our only possible policy is long-term occupation with a greatly reduced force to capture or kill bin Laden, protect friendly “pockets,” build infrastructures in these areas, and train Afghan military and police to protect them. [The writer so undermines herhimself at every point, that it become a convincing case for withdrawal. D]

“Flames from Afghanistan Ignite Pakistan” by Eric Margolis, The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs (Dec. 2009). (Margolis is the author of American Raj: Liberation or Domination and War at the Top of the World: The Struggle for Afghanistan, Kashmir, and Tibet.) War began 2001 as supposedly limited anti-terrorist op. It spread to Pakistan because Eastern Afghanistan and Western Pakistan are inhabited by the Pashtun tribes, in semi-autonomous regions in W. Pak.. Call it Pashtunistan. In search of al-Qaeda and opposing “Taliban” (tribes organized into groups for insurgency) US insisted upon Pak. Military repression of rebellious Pashtuns, which have long resisted Pak. Central gov’t. But 90% of Pakistanis oppose the US war in Afghanistan.

Consequences for Pakistan: Bombings, shooting even an attack on army HQ in Rawalpindi and massive bombing of Peshawar’s Khyber Bazaar. Pakistanis are angry at US manipulation of their nation. Worse, the US is bombing Pakistan with drones without asking gov’t permission. Now in the Kerry-Lugar-Berman (Obama) bill, the US offers $7.5 billion with strings attached: mammoth new embassy, 2nd largest; escalation of contractors; the money going to pro-Western ruling estab., or 1% of pop. “Washington seems unaware of the fury its heavy handed, counter-productive policies have whipped up in Pakis.”

Dick, Here is one of the most persuasive arguments about leaving Afghanistan. Abel “A War of Absurdity” http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/20091007_a_war_of_absurdity/ Posted on Oct 6, 2009 By Robert Scheer

Every once in a while, a statistic just jumps out at you in a way that makes everything else you hear on a subject seem beside the point, if not downright absurd. That was my reaction to the recent statement of the president’s national security adviser, former Marine Gen. James Jones, concerning the size of the terrorist threat from Afghanistan:
“The al-Qaeda presence is very diminished. The maximum estimate is less than 100 operating in the country, no bases, no ability to launch attacks on either us or our allies.”

Less than 100! And he is basing his conservative estimate on the best intelligence data available to our government. That means that al-Qaeda, for all practical purposes, does not exist in Afghanistan—so why are we having a big debate about sending even more troops to fight an enemy that has relocated elsewhere? Because of the blind belief, in the minds of those like John McCain, determined to “win” in Afghanistan, that if we don’t escalate, al-Qaeda will inevitably come back.

Why? It’s not like al-Qaeda is an evil weed indigenous to Afghanistan and dependent on its climate and soil for survival. Its members were foreign imports in the first place, recruited by our CIA to fight the Soviets because there were evidently not enough locals to do the job. After all, U.S. officials first forged the alliance between the foreign fighters and the Afghan mujahedeen, who morphed into the Taliban, and we should not be surprised that that tenuous alliance ended. The Taliban and other insurgents are preoccupied with the future of Afghanistan, while the Arab fighters couldn’t care less and have moved on to more hospitable climes.....


“In this grotesque carnival, the US military’s contractors are forced to pay suspected insurgents to protect American supply routes….and it is a deadly irony, because these funds add up to ….a minimum of 10 percent of the Pentagon’s logistics contracts—hundreds of millions of dollars....” It occurs in 2 ways: insider dealing in contracts for Afghan business, and the employment of private security businesses in a war.

Robert Naiman, “U.S. Media Bury Story of Afghan Civil War,” Extra! (Dec. 2009). The Pashtuns comprise the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan (42% mainly in south and east) and Tajiks next (27%). Before the US invasion the largely Pashtun government (called Taliban) was battling the largely Tajik Northern Alliance insurgency, which the US allied itself with to overthrow the “Taliban” government. Now the Pashtuns are the insurgents against the Karzai government composed largely of Tajiks. So “the complete exclusion from the news pages of the Times and the Post, prior to Matthew Hoh’s resignation [Oct. 27], of the idea that there is a civil war in Afghanistan is striking.” But explainable: The US is perturbing the world with its war on terrorism and extremism in Afghanistan. Facts about civil war are inconvenient to. [With the mainstream media reflecting the government’s imperial doctrine of permanent war, peace movement newsletters provide the great service of opening up alternative views for a full debate. D]


“...according to a new FAIR study of the op-ed pages of the two leading U.S. newspapers...prominent media have downplayed proponents of withdrawal in favor of...the narrow range of elite, inside-Washington opinion.” During the first 10 months of 2009, of the NYT’s 43 opinion columns on the Afghan War, 36 supported the war, and only seven opposed it, 5 to 1. Of the 67 Washington Post columns, 61 supported a continued war, while just six expressed antiwar views, 10 to 1.

TELL OBAMA
Dear Dick,
Obama's about to decide whether to send more troops.
Tell the President: DON'T.
You've probably heard that President Obama is about to decide whether to send a lot more troops to
Afghanistan. And since you're an activist, you also know that there are a ton of reasons this would be a mistake: Hundreds more troops will be killed along with countless civilians. And we could get stuck in an Iraq-style quagmire for decades, while terrorism experts say this isn't even a good way to fight Al Qaeda. Well, here's one more reason: The war will bankrupt our economy and divert funds we urgently need for health care, education and jobs. Afghanistan is just about the most remote, difficult-to-access part of the world there is. Sending a gallon of gas there costs $400; keeping a soldier armed, fed and cared for costs almost $1 million a year!2
Tell President Obama -- with the economy in shambles, we just can't afford any more war. It's time to stop sending troops, and create a clear timetable to bring everyone home from Afghanistan.
http://act.truemajorityaction.org/p/dia/action/public/?action_KEY=44
We have nearly 70,000 troops already in Afghanistan, yet over the last few months, things have consistently gone from bad to worse despite our engagement. So it's no surprise that most Americans are now opposed to the war.4
Despite Afghanistan's problems and lack of public support, some people inside the beltway want to send a huge number of additional troops into harms way -- with no timeline for their return and no clear mission to gauge progress by.5
It's the same mistake that got us trapped in Iraq, and which President Obama has promised to avoid with a new foreign policy. Don't let us go down the same path again - tell Obama not to send more troops.
Darcy Scott Martin
TrueMajority / USAction
3 - guardian.co.uk/world/2009/nov/24/barack-obama-us-troops-afghanistan
4 - cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/11/24/afghan.poll/

EDRENE MCKAY’S LETTER ON PRESIDENT OBAMA’S “DIGNITY DOCTRINE”
President Obama, I have been a strong supporter of yours. I contributed to your campaign and worked hard to persuade others to vote for you, but my heart is heavy today. You have a decision to make about Afghanistan and I pray that you will make the right one. It’s not too late to amend the decision we have been hearing about (35,000 more military troops) if, in fact, that is what you have in mind. Please do not send more troops into harm’s way. Send diplomats, teachers, agricultural experts, and builders to construct roads, hospitals, and schools. Send anything needed to stabilize the country and to prepare Afghan citizens to defend themselves. But do not send more men and women to engage in violent acts. Your foreign policy is better than that. We recognized that as early as May 2008. This entry from my blog is dated May 13, 2008: “Imagine a foreign policy that promotes human dignity (and the essentials of life that go with it) instead of capitalism and democracy. That's the Obama Doctrine. Unlike the Bush Doctrine of unilateral, pre-emptive action against our perceived enemies, the Obama Doctrine promises to get to the root of terrorism before it erupts into violence. Once people have human dignity (and the food, water, electricity, housing, education, and employment upon which it is based), amazing things can happen. A free enterprise situation that serves the local population, not foreign investors, and a democratic form of government based on popular sovereignty, not power elites, might even grow out of this foreign policy. If this sounds like a costly endeavor, think about the alternatives. We can always continue to do it George Bush's way.” I read Michael Moore’s open letter to you earlier today and it brought tears to my eyes. I am not a person prone to such emotional displays but, Mr. President, we had such high hopes for your presidency. Please read Moore’s letter, dated today (November 30, 2009),
thoughtfully and prayerfully and listen to the voice of your heart. Know that I join him in saying: “The ball is in your court. You DON’T have to do this. You can be a profile in courage. You can be your mother's son. We're counting on you.” God bless you, Mr. President.

Do I think that he'll read it? No. But the positive energy created by the very acts of thinking and writing, especially about something we care about so greatly, is palpable and will reach him – it will work like a prayer, or visualization, or positive thoughts. So if you’d like to write to him too, here's the link: http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact. Edrene McKay

OBAMA DOCTRINE

MOORE’S LETTER TO PRESIDENT OBAMA

Here’s an addendum:
DAN RATHER’S REPORT OF HIS RECENT VISIT
Dan Rather just returned from Afghanistan and reported tonight (11/30/09) on MSNBC’s Rachel Maddow Show that there have been many changes there during the past year. He said the strategy changed this summer, “it is a re-purposed war.” The focus is now on large population centers and the military feels this “realignment” is what requires additional troops. According to Rather, “this is not going to make a major difference in Afghanistan except perhaps in the very short term and to buy a little time.” His analysis is that “corruption, cronyism, mismanagement in terms of the government…, plus the tremendous production of opium (some of the finances of which go to support the Taliban and US forces), and the resistance of the majority of mullahs… to foreigners (the infidels) in the country are obstacles.” The reality of the situation is that Afghanistan is “tribal…, predominantly rural…, and it is basically illiterate.” The official literacy rate is about ten percent. Although they’re “quick on the uptake, they’re smart, and they’re hard-working,” rebuilding the Afghan army, the police, and the border patrol will be a tremendous undertaking considering the literacy rate. The difference between this effort and previous efforts is that they are coupling it now with so-called “soft power” (people from the state department, those who work with AID, various civilian workers). They are working with the population to build governance from the ground up while the embassy and Washington are trying to build governance from the top down. At the local level, they meet with the elders and discuss potential projects (e.g., they will ask “do you want to build a retaining wall or a catfish farm?)” This is a change from a year ago but, in Rather’s estimation, the surge on the civilian side is still not enough.
EDRENE’S COMMENT ON RATHER
I think what Rather described is evidence of the Obama Doctrine. Although the President is now surrounded by military advisors and more hawkish foreign policy advisors, I don’t think he has abandoned the foreign policy of human dignity and we'll see strong traces of it in what he says tomorrow in his speech to the nation about Afghanistan. I'm hoping he will make it clear that the troops are there to accomplish those other objectives, not to engage in acts of violence. If this is true, the policy is worth supporting by peace advocates – especially because the Republicans are likely to want to cut the “soft power” in favor of military power. Pressure needs to be exerted against that. Rather’s report on Afghanistan will premiere on the HDNet program "Dan Rather Reports" starting on December 8, 2009. For previews, see http://www.hd.net/danrather.html. DVDs are of his reports are $9.95 at the HDNet Online Store: http://hdnet-store.stores.yahoo.net/danrare.html. Transcripts are free: http://www.hd.net/transcript_list.php?pd=danrather.
The Afghan Speech Obama Should Give (But Won't)
By Tom Engelhardt  November 25, 2009
This article originally appeared on TomDispatch.

.........What follows, then, is my version of the president's Afghan announcement. Here's my President Obama--in, I hope, something like his voice--doing what no American president has yet done and what, unfortunately, he's not going to do. So sit down, turn on your TV, and see what you think. [Go to: http://www.thenation.com/doc/20091214/engelhardt?rel=EmailNation ]

END OF AFGHANISTAN NEWSLETTER #4, December 1, 2009