OMNI NEWSLETTER ON AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN #10
July 3, 2011, Compiled by Dick Bennett for a Culture of Peace (#8 April 15, 2011; #9 June 10, 2011)

Here is the link to all the newsletters archived in the OMNI web site.

http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/

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“Afghan Civilians Dying in Record Numbers” by Laura King, Los Angeles Times

Intro: "Buried bombs killed 30 Afghan civilians in a 48-hour span in the latest grim illustration of the
dangers faced by noncombatants as the season's fighting heats up. Insurgents routinely seed roads and pathways with IEDs, or improvised explosive devices - their favored weapon against Western troops. But most often, those killed and injured by the hidden bombs are civilians". . .

Military fatalities, too, have been edging higher. Western troop deaths reached their highest levels of the year last month. Sixty-five were killed in June, according to the independent website icasualties.org, which tracks combat fatalities in Afghanistan and Iraq. Forty-six of those were Americans.


May Is Deadliest Month for Afghan Civilians Since 2007: U.N.

By BBC News 10 June 11

The UN says May was the deadliest month for civilians in Afghanistan since 2007, when the organisation started recording civilian casualties. The UN said "anti - government elements" were responsible for 82% of the 368 "conflict - related civilian deaths".

"Pro - government forces", including Nato, caused 45 of the deaths. The news came as several deadly insurgent attacks killed at least 18 people, most of them civilians, in the volatile south and east of the country.

Fifteen people, including eight children and four women, were killed when a bomb blast hit their vehicle in the southern province of Kandahar, the Interior Ministry said. [READ MORE](http://readersupportednews.org/news-section2/330-131/4961-rocking-the-cradle)
Veterans For Peace Signs On To Congressional Letter To Cut All Iraq and Afghanistan War Funding From FY2012 Budget

When the House returns from recess next week, it will take up the FY 2012 Defense Appropriations bill. VFP has signed on to a letter to members of the Congressional Progressive Caucus urging them to oppose the war funding for Afghanistan and to oppose the bill as a whole, which appropriates $648.7 billion to the military.<full story>

Tell the People about the People's Budget

This "People's Budget" would achieve a better balance by taxing the wealthy, reining in runaway military spending, and protecting the New Deal social safety net just what people tell pollsters that they want. <full story>

[Significant analysis of war in Afghanistan and President Obama’s feeble plan for withdrawal. D]

“Bad News for a Country Tired of War“  By Bill Boyarsky

Barack Obama’s plan for a limited withdrawal from Afghanistan means tens of thousands of American troops will remain there, many of them fighting, for several years to come.

In his speech Wednesday night, the president announced he will reduce the U.S. fighting force in Afghanistan by 10,000 by the end of this year and a total of 33,000 by September 2012. After that, he said, “our troops will be coming home at a steady pace as Afghan security forces move into the lead. Our mission will change from combat to support. By 2014, this process of transition will be complete. …”

Nowhere did he pledge that all the personnel would be brought home by that 2014 date.

Nor did he mention that 68,000 service personnel will remain in Afghanistan after September 2012. In addition, according to the Congressional Research Office, 18,919 “private security contractors” working for the Defense Department will also be serving in Afghanistan, performing duties seemingly indistinguishable from those done by American military
personnel. That means that after the pullout more than 86,000 personnel will remain engaged in fighting or the vague “support” duties cited by the president. They will add to the human and economic toll of a war that has killed, according to the website iCasualties, 1,632 American troops and wounded 11,191. The financial cost is now more than $426 billion. With the Iraq War added in, the figure reaches $1.2 trillion.

Although Obama’s speech was no cause for celebration, there were some pluses. The troop reduction was more substantial than the much smaller cuts advocated by outgoing Defense Secretary Robert Gates and the military command. Obama said the United States would negotiate with the Taliban if they “break from al-Qaida, abandon violence and abide by the Afghan constitution.” It’s doubtful that these conditions can be met, especially given the Taliban’s opposition to equal rights for women, part of the Afghan constitution. But at least we may be at the table with them.

Obama had a positive but not triumphal tone, saying the United States “is starting this drawdown from a position of strength.”

Actually, he is starting it from a position of weakness.

Although the war has been pretty much ignored by cable news and much of the rest of the mainstream media, apparently the American people have a different view.

Read More

http://readersupportednews.org/off-site-opinion-section/63-63/6405-bad-news-for-a-country-tired-of-war

Half of World's Refugees are Running From US Wars

http://www.truth-out.org/half-worlds-refugees-are-running-us-wars/1309017714

Saturday 25 June 2011

by: Sarah Bufkin, ThinkProgress | Report

(Photo: isafmedia / Flickr)

America’s wars are forcing Afghans and Iraqis to flee their homes in greater numbers. According to a recent U.N. High Commission for Refugees study, nearly one half of the world’s refugees are from Afghanistan and Iraq, 3.05 million and 1.68 million, respectively. But neither the United States nor much of the developed world bears the burden of the 10.55 million refugees under the UNHCR’s purview globally. Instead, Pakistan, Iran, and Syria serve
as the top host countries. The Economist has charted the numbers:

http://www.truth-out.org/half-worlds-refugees-are-running-us-wars/1309017714

VFP's Statement Regarding Obama's Speech On Troop Levels in Afghanistan
So Obama’s speech last night about troop levels in Afghanistan is all the news today. People for it and against are dutifully reporting what their tea leaves say. Veterans For Peace has some comments as well, but first, some context for the numbers, then some quotes from Obama’s speech.

I) Context for the numbers:

The U.S. now has nearly 100,000 troops and another 100,000 contractors and mercenaries in Afghanistan. NATO and other countries have about 50,000 troops, for a total of almost 250,000 U.S.-led personnel.

There are now almost three times as many troops in Afghanistan as were there when Obama took office.

By the end of next year, after the “big drawdown” scheduled in time for the 2012 election, we will have nearly twice as many troops there as were there when Obama took office.

Obama said nothing last night about how many contractors and mercenaries would be hired to replace the troops being removed.

Since 2001 1,633 US troops have been killed, including 499 in 2010 and 187 so far this year. Since the beginning of the war, almost 12,000 troops have been wounded in action; during 2011 about 10 soldiers have been wounded each day.

The number of Afghans killed and wounded is unknown but surely is many tens of thousands.

To date the Afghanistan war has cost $426 billion. Obama made no mention of reducing the $118 billion for the war contained in pending budget legislation. <full story>
http://www.veteransforpeace.org/news_detail.php?idx=83  vfp@veteransforpeace.org

FOCUS: Tom Hayden, “Pressure for Peace”
Tom Hayden's Blog
Excerpt: "Peace advocates should feel a sense of gratification, not about the numbers involved, but about contributing to the vast upswell of public opinion against Iraq and now Afghanistan, in spite of the fact that not a single network or mainstream newspaper has called for bringing our troops home. There is a magic about public opinion, which still matters despite the shadows of authoritarianism all around."
War Resisters League: “Obama’s Phony Drawdown Speech Doesn't Fool Us!” Well, Obama made it clear on Wednesday. His war in Afghanistan will go on through 2014 and probably far beyond. While some may have hoped for a shift in his approach, many of us didn’t expect much, and we certainly didn’t get much. The change in Afghanistan that he spoke about, meant to be heard as a drawdown, is hardly dramatic, and amounts only to a reduction to pre-surge troop levels. **At the end of 2012 there will still be 67,000 US troops, 100,000 contractors** (and, likely, still a fair number of NATO troops.)

Obama also talks about an expansion and escalation of covert operations and “nonconventional" warfare that allows for extra-judicial assassinations and US military intervention in other countries through drone strikes or special-forces operations without the permission of their governments or people. Much of this happens under the radar of many people living in the U.S. and the media because of the increased prominence of secret security clearances, intelligence operations, and private contractors in current-day US militarism.

This is why the anti-war movement, increasingly expanding into a move-the-war-dollars-home movement, must continue to be organizing, connecting our struggles, and bringing it to the streets. For more analysis of Obama’s plans, please check out the latest article by Phyllis Bennis. It’s insightful and has some important numbers, though she departs from WRL in her belief in ‘just war’.

While Bennis writes that "ending the wars is the most important single thing we can do to rebuild our economy and provide jobs for people across this country" we would add that that will only happen if those that are experiencing the neglect and militarization of their communities here at home - youth of color in urban schools, targets of immigration enforcement raids and the poor who are increasingly brushed aside by quality of life laws - are at the forefront of those calling for a redirection of funds towards everyday needs. Please join us as allies in this work.

To organize with the War Resisters League contact Organizing Coordinator Kimber Heinz at kimber@warresisters.org or call 212-228-0450.

“**The Way Out of Afghanistan?**”

*The New York Times | Editorial*

"Americans are impatient - and increasingly despairing - about the war in Afghanistan. After 10 years of fighting, more than 1,500 American lives lost and $450 billion spent, they need to know there is a clear way out."

TOM HAYDEN | The president's announcement that 33,000 troops will leave Afghanistan within a year is a major win for the peace movement. So why are some snatching defeat from the jaws of victory?

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Obama Fails to Outline Sensible Afghanistan Policy
ROBERT DREYFUSS | The president sticks with tired rationale about using the US military to force a political deal, rather than negotiating one.

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Obama's Afghan 'Exit' Strategy Scores No Political Points
JOHN NICHOLS | It's going to be hard for President Obama to run as an anti-war candidate in 2012, but a Republican might.

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JOURNALISTS KILLED
Jeremy Scahill, “Silencing the Press in Pakistan,” The Nation (June 20, 2011). Syed Saleem Shahzad was murdered on May 29, 2011, “the sixteenth journalist known to die in a targeted killing in Pakistan since the 2002 execution of the Wall St. Journal’s Daniel Pearl. With the exception of Pearl’s, none of the killers have been prosecuted. Last year, Pakistan was the world’s deadliest place for journalists.”

WASTED $BILLIONS IN AFGHANISTAN
Recent U.S. government reports suggest that the Obama administration has poured large sums into projects in Afghanistan that have fueled corruption, distorted local economies and left Afghanistan with technology it won't be able to maintain after NATO forces leave, Ken Dilanian reports in the Los Angeles Times. Doubts about the aid effort are likely to bolster calls for a more rapid pullout, Dilanian writes.

“US-Occupied Afghanistan Facing Insolvency Within a Month”
Jon Boone, Guardian UK  June 17, 2011
Intro: "The Afghan government will struggle to pay its bills 'within a month' after the International Monetary Fund rejected proposals for resolving the Kabul Bank scandal, western officials have warned."

John Hanrahan, Nearing the Tipping Point in the United States?
Nieman Watchdog
Intro: "A plaza two blocks from the White House is being envisioned as a Tahrir Square or Madison, Wisconsin - a place for ongoing, nonviolent citizen protest - under plans by a coalition of activist organizations and prominent individuals. Their demand: withdrawal of all 'US troops, contractors or mercenaries' from Afghanistan."
READ MORE http://www.readersupportednews.org/off-site-opinion-section/72-72/6224-nearing-the-tipping-point-in-the-united-states
END OF AFGHAN NEWSLETTER #10