

New York Times demands escalation of Afghanistan war

David Walsh
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In an editorial October 15 entitled “Downward Spiral,” the *New York Times* calls for the next administration to carry out “a swift and serious buildup of troops” in Afghanistan.

The editorial argues that a major escalation of the US-led war is required by the deteriorating military and political situation. The *Times* charges the Bush administration with “years of denial and negligence” and warns that urgent action is needed to reverse the “desperate mess they’ve made” in the country.

The newspaper notes the gloomy prognoses of military and intelligence officials and quotes Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as saying 2009 will be an even “tougher year.”

The *Times* also points to “the breakdown in central authority and the Taliban’s rising power.” It refers to the “rampant corruption” of the regime of President Hamid Karzai, whose brother “may be involved in the heroin trade.”

The editorial warns that unless these and other problems are addressed, “the war in Afghanistan could be lost.”

“The United States will also have to send more troops into Afghanistan and persuade its allies to send more,” the editorial declares. The *Times* criticizes America’s NATO allies for doing too little and attaching “far too many strings” to their military involvement.

“The Bush administration must drop its resistance to working with tribal leaders to fight the Taliban. The time for worrying about undermining President Karzai is long past. Reconciliation talks should also be explored with members of the Taliban—if they forsake violence,” the newspaper writes.

The editorial laments the US invasion of Iraq in 2003—an action which the *New York Times* supported at the time—and Washington’s failure to “put all of this

country’s resources and attention into defeating Al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan.” It adds, “Even optimistic analysts say that things have now gotten so bad that, with the best strategy, it could take another 5 to 10 years to stabilize Afghanistan.”

The *Times* editors conclude by insisting that the next president “must plot a swift, orderly exit from Iraq and begin a swift and serious buildup of troops and aid in Afghanistan—the real frontline in the war on terror.”

The editorial by the “newspaper of record” and leading voice of the American liberal establishment should be taken as a warning of what is to come in the next administration, whether headed by Republican John McCain or Democrat Barack Obama. US imperialism is preparing a vast intensification of violence against the Afghan people. A “serious buildup” can only mean the dispatch of tens of thousands more US troops, the deaths of many more civilians and soldiers, and the danger of a region-wide war.

The encounter of the Afghan people with American imperialism has already been an unmitigated disaster. The US intervention has produced a nightmare for the population.

Unemployment is estimated at 40 percent or more, official criminality and violence are rife.

United Nations statistics from last November reveal that life expectancy in Afghanistan has dropped to 43.1 years since 2003; adult literacy has fallen to 23.5 percent during the same time. Literacy among women is 12.6 percent, maternal deaths remain high, and the infant mortality rate is now 135 deaths per 1,000 births.

The UN notes that “60,000 children in Afghanistan are addicted to drugs. 100,000 children are disabled and otherwise severely affected physically due to the prolonged conflicts in the country.” Afghanistan also

“ranks 17th out of the 22 countries with the highest tuberculosis levels.”

The *Times* editorial does not even attempt to justify either the war or its escalation, other than to repeat the official mantra of the need to defeat Al Qaeda and prosecute the “war on terror.” This is, in part, because the column is directed primarily to US policy-makers and the ruling elite, rather than to the newspaper’s readership or the broader public.

More fundamentally, it cannot speak of the real aims that underlie both the war in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq—the drive by American imperialism to gain control of the vast energy resources in the Persian Gulf and Central Asia, by means of neo-colonial wars and occupations.

The newspaper’s demand for a major military escalation in Afghanistan, facilitated by a reduction in US troop levels in Iraq, reflects a growing consensus within the American political and military establishment, and within both political parties.

In particular, it reflects the position of the Obama campaign and its chief foreign policy advisers. The Illinois senator has made a major escalation of the war in Afghanistan a cornerstone of his campaign. It is a political assumption of those within the US political and corporate establishment who are backing Obama that American policy in Iraq has been a massive blunder and that a redeployment of US forces is necessary, focused on Afghanistan and Pakistan.

During the second presidential debate, Obama explained his three priorities in this regard: “to get more troops into Afghanistan, put more pressure on the Afghan government to do what it needs to do, eliminate some of the drug trafficking that’s funding terrorism.” He proposed sending “two or three additional brigades to Afghanistan.” This is a plan for keeping tens of thousands of US troops (as many as 50,000) in Afghanistan indefinitely.



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