Another decade of neo-colonial war in Afghanistan

By Peter Symonds

In the lead-up to next month’s NATO summit in Lisbon, the Obama administration and its allies, confronting widespread anti-war sentiment at home, are attempting to dupe the public by claiming that the US/NATO combat role in Afghanistan will end by 2014, with troop withdrawals to begin next year.

Behind closed doors, however, the talk is not of an end to the war, but rather of an open-ended, neo-colonial occupation.

In opening a debate on the Afghan war in the Australian parliament on Tuesday, Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard spilled the beans. After noting that Afghan President Hamid Karzai expected to assume full responsibility for his country’s security by the end of 2014, Gillard bluntly spelt out that the “transition process” would not mean the end to the Australian military presence in Afghanistan.

“Let me be clear,” Gillard said, “this [transition process] refers to the Afghan government taking lead responsibility for security. The international community will remain engaged in Afghanistan beyond 2014. And Australia will remain engaged. There will still be a role for training and other defence cooperation. The civilian-led aid and development effort will continue... We expect this support, training and development task to continue in some form throughout this decade at least.”

While ministers and officials in the US and other countries have spoken vaguely about a continuing military role in Afghanistan after 2014, Gillard is the first leader to declare that the US-led military occupation will continue for another decade—at least. Her repeated references to the “new international strategy” highlight the fact that this is the Obama administration’s plan. And if Australia, with its current, modest troop numbers of 1,550, in fact withdraws after 10 years, then the US and its closest allies are preparing for a large military presence in Afghanistan into the indefinite future.

Taking her cue from Washington, the Obama administration is angling to declare the ongoing occupation by declaring Afghanistan must “never again become a safe haven for terrorism.” However, the intensifying US-led war is not directed against Al Qaeda—according to the CIA, it numbers no more than 50 in Afghanistan—but against the “Taliban.” The “enemy” are Afghanis, predominantly Pashtun tribesmen, who are bitterly hostile to the continued foreign military presence that has wreaked death and destruction on the civilian population for more than nine years.

Suppressing “terrorism” means a never-ending neo-colonial war against the Afghan people.

Washington’s “war on terrorism” was only ever a pretext for advancing US ambitions for dominance in the energy-rich regions of the Middle East and Central Asia. The US strategy was drawn up well in advance of the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington. The invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and the subsequent subjugation of Iraq in 2003 were part of broader plans for re-shaping the Middle East and establishing a greater US presence in Central Asia. Now focussed on the challenge posed by a rising China, the Obama administration is not about to relinquish US footholds in Iraq or Afghanistan that could prove very useful in the future. His troop “surge” in Afghanistan, like that in Iraq, is aimed at securing a permanent US presence, including military bases, while ensuring the puppet Karzai regime and its army take on the lion’s share of fighting to suppress the anti-occupation resistance.

If Gillard was a little more open about the US war plans, it was only to demonstrate that her Labor government is in lockstep with Washington.

The Australian prime minister has already indicated that she might accompany her defense minister to the NATO conference in Lisbon where she would line up with Obama in pressuring other nations to make a similar open-ended military commitment. Canada has announced that it will be pulling its 2,800 soldiers out of Afghanistan by now and has set a deadline of 2014 for the complete withdrawal of its 3,300 troops. Gillard is standing unequivocally on the US side, despite overwhelming domestic opposition to the war, in a bid to ensure full US support as Australia shores up its own strategic position in the South West Pacific.

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Salary Notch: NS105 975 p.a.
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Transport allowance N$5 040 p.a.
Duty Station: Keetmanshoop
Minimum Requirements: An appropriate 3 year Diploma in Land Management / Land Use Planning (or equivalent qualification)

NB: Preference will be given to applicants in possession of sound knowledge in mapping software understanding in GIS, ArcGIS, GeoMedia and Arch-Explorer etc. Driving license will be an added advantage.

Additional Requirements: Computer Literate

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Salary Notch: NS105 975 p.a.
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Closing date: 22 November 2010