

Battle Call Sounded: Exit from Afghanistan!

by Michele Steinberg

Nov. 20—Four-hundred thousand troops are needed for an open-ended deployment to Afghanistan to “win” the war, according to top U.S. military experts on Afghanistan who back the “counterinsurgency” model, and are close to Gen. David Petraeus (Commander, U.S. Central Command) and Gen. Stanley McChrystal (Commander, U.S. Forces in Afghanistan).

How open-ended? In his inauguration speech on Nov. 19, Afghan President Hamid Karzai indicated that the exit of foreign troops will be at least five years ahead. *That would be 13 years of U.S. war in Afghanistan*, the longest war in our nation’s history. The Soviet Union withdrew in 1989, after 10 years, from an action which so hobbled the regime, that its system collapsed within the next three years.

Make no mistake: 400,000 is the real figure for the McChrystal plan, not 40,000, according to U.S. experts on Afghanistan, from John Nagl, a retired Army lieutenant colonel, who helped write the widely criticized “Petraeus” Army field manual on counterinsurgency, to Amb. James Dobbins, the near-miracle worker, who, immediately after 9/11, helped to negotiate U.S. relations with the Afghan Northern Alliance, and Afghanistan’s neighbors, *especially Iran*, for an operation that ousted the Taliban in mere weeks.

There is a sleight of hand involved in explaining away the apparent contradiction between the 40,000 and 400,000 numbers: You see, say experts like Steven Coll of the New America Foundation—who agrees totally with Nagl—only one-fourth will be U.S. or NATO forces, and the other 290,000 to 300,000 will be indigenous Afghan forces—about 200,000 in a new Afghan Army, and 90,000 in an Afghan police and security force. But Coll had little to say, when confronted at a debate at New York University on Oct. 9, by Ralph Peters, a retired Army colonel who demanded (paraphrase): Where are these Afghan troops, Steve? We’ve been there eight years! Where are they? They don’t fight! When the so-called new, fresh Obama approach was implemented in Helmand Province, the Afghan forces did not perform. As for NATO, the oft-repeated U.S. request for more

NATO troops won’t be fulfilled. If 400,000 troops really are what’s needed, then a *large* percentage will be U.S. troops, paid for by U.S. taxpayers.

The second sleight of hand in this counterinsurgency argument is that we can “get it right now,” because *we did it all wrong* in the Bush-Cheney Administration, which neglected putting resources into Afghanistan, and flew off to Iraq instead. True enough, but the two successive Presidencies have spared no expense in squandering billions on U.S. paid mercenaries, i.e., private contractors. The argument of too few U.S. troops against the Taliban withers, when you realize that there are twice as many Americans deployed, if you count the private contractors hired by the Pentagon alone. It is far higher if you count the State Department and other agencies.

No Land War in Asia

U.S. political leader Lyndon LaRouche has been consistently clear that the United States *should not engage in a land war in Asia*, but most public officials who oppose the Afghanistan quagmire have been too timid to say it. However, with the British-controlled counterinsurgency fiasco looming, there are more and more calls for an exit strategy *now*, and the strongest critiques are coming from retired military figures. A letter by retired U.S. Marine Capt. Matthew Hoh (see below), who held a civilian post with the State Department in Afghanistan, until he resigned in October, is a powerful statement about the lack of direction and understanding of Afghanistan.

Then, on Nov. 17, Gen. Wesley Clark (ret.), the former Supreme Allied Commander for U.S. Forces in Europe gave testimony (see below) at the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, saying, “You’ve got to figure out where you’re going ... [and] how do we get out of here? Because our presence long term there is not a good thing. We’re playing into the hands of people who don’t like foreigners, in a country that’s not tolerant of diversity...” Clark said that there must be an exit strategy in place, if the U.S. were to increase the number of troops in Afghanistan.

Political opposition from Democrats is also mounting: A resolution titled, “End the U.S. Occupation and Air War in Afghanistan,” was passed by the 300-member executive board of the California Democratic Party meeting on Nov. 14-15. Coming from the largest Democratic Party in the country, it calls for establishing “a timetable for withdrawal of our military personnel” and “an end to the use of mercenary contractors as well as an end to air strikes that cause heavy civilian casual-

ties.” Speaking for the resolution was former Marine Cpl. Rick Reyes, who served in Afghanistan. “There is no military solution in Afghanistan.... The problems in Afghanistan are social problems that a military cannot fix,” he said, reported *The Nation* magazine.