

# 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.

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Capt. Matthew P. Hoh (ret.)

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## Why Are We Expending Lives in a Civil War?

*On Sept. 10, 2009, retired U.S. Marine Captain Matthew P. Hoh, a senior civilian representative for the State Department in Zabul Province, Afghanistan, submitted the following letter upon resigning from his post. Not made public until late October, Hoh's letter has helped open the floodgates of opposition to the "surge" in Afghanistan. He has given a number of interviews and speeches since his letter became public. Here are excerpts:*

It is with great regret and disappointment I submit my resignation from my appointment as a Political Officer in the Foreign Service and my post as the Senior Civilian Representative for the U.S. Government in Zabul Province. I have served six of the previous ten years in service to our country overseas, to include deployment as a U.S. Marine officer and Department of Defense civilian in the Euphrates and Tigris River Valleys of Iraq in 2004-2005 and 2006-2007. I did not enter into this position lightly or with any undue expectations nor did I believe my assignment would be without sacrifice, hardship or difficulty. However, in the course of my five months of service in Afghanistan, in both Regional Commands East and South, I have lost understanding of and confidence in the strategic purposes of the United States' presence in Afghanistan. I have doubts and reservations about our current strategy and planned future strategy, but my resignation is based not upon how we are pursuing this war, but why and to what end. *To put [it] simply: I fail to see the value or the worth in continued U.S. casualties or expenditures of resources in support of the Afghan government in what is, truly, a 35-year old civil war.* [Emphasis in original.]

This fall will mark the eighth year of U.S. combat, governance and development operations within Afghanistan. Next fall, the United States' occupation will equal in length the Soviet Union's own physical involvement in Afghanistan. Like the Soviets, we con-

tinue to secure and bolster a failing state, while encouraging an ideology and system of government unknown and unwanted by its people.

If the history of Afghanistan is one great stage play, the United States is no more than a supporting actor, among several previously, in a tragedy that not only pits tribes, valleys, clans, villages and families against one another, but, from at least the end of King Zahir Shah's reign, has violently and savagely pitted the urban, secular, educated and modern of Afghanistan against the rural, religious, illiterate and traditional. It is this latter group that composes and supports the Pashtun insurgency. The Pashtun insurgency, which is composed of multiple, seemingly infinite, local groups, is fed by what is perceived by the Pashtun people as a continued and sustained assault, going back centuries, on Pashtun land, culture, traditions and religion by internal and external enemies. The U.S. and NATO presence and operations in Pashtun valleys and villages, as well as Afghan army and police units that are led and composed of non-Pashtun soldiers and police, provide an occupation force against which the insurgency is justified. In both RC East and South, I have observed that the bulk of the insurgency fights not for the white banner of the Taliban, but rather against the presence of foreign soldiers and taxes imposed by an unrepresentative government in Kabul. . . .

The Afghan government's failings, particularly when weighed against the sacrifice of American lives and dollars, appear legion and metastatic. . . .

Our support for this kind of government, coupled with a misunderstanding of the insurgency's true nature, reminds me horribly of our involvement with South Vietnam. . . .

I find specious the reasons we ask for bloodshed and sacrifice from our young men and women in Afghanistan. If honest, our stated strategy of securing Afghanistan to prevent al-Qaeda resurgence or regrouping would require us to additionally invade and occupy western Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen, etc. . . .

Eight years into war, no nation has ever known a more dedicated, well trained, experienced and disciplined military as the U.S. Armed Forces. I do not believe any military force has ever been tasked with such a complex, opaque and Sisyphean mission as the U.S. military has received in Afghanistan. The tactical proficiency and performance of our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines is unmatched and unquestioned. However, this is not the European or Pacific theaters of World War II, but rather is a war for which our leaders, uniformed, civilian and elected, have inadequately prepared and re-