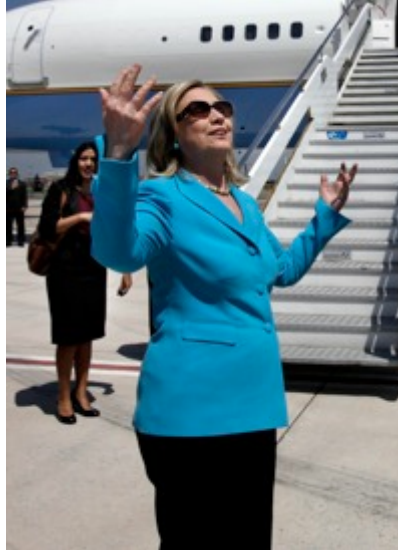




Afghanistan: Will War, U.S. Occupation Continue in Perpetuity?

“In Afghanistan,” said Clinton, “we will continue taking the fight to al-Qaida and their Taliban allies, while working to support the Afghan people as they build a stronger government and begin to take responsibility for their own security.”

On May 3, Secretary Clinton met in Washington, D.C. with Australia’s Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd, who was quick to confirm the Clinton-Obama script that the death of Osama bin Laden should not lead to thoughts of earlier departure from Afghanistan.



“We will stay the course in Afghanistan until our mission is complete,” Rudd said. “And we’ve defined what that mission is in relation to the province of Oruzgan, where our forces are by and large committed, with our American allies.”

Phrases such as “renew our resolve” and “stay the course” are again tripping off the lips of politicians and their pundit supporters, even though precisely what we are to be resolved to do and what course we are to stay on is never clearly defined and can be counted on to continue morphing in Afghanistan, as well as in Iraq.

Secretary Clinton’s and Foreign Minister Rudd’s statements, along with other similar comments by administration officials, indicate that the Obama administration remains committed to the unending and ever-changing “nation-building” intervention policies of the Bush administration. Those policies include a continuing massive infrastructure development program in Afghanistan: roads, highways, bridges, water treatment plants, mosques, schools — and military bases.

Of course, as headlines daily remind us, the United States is already broke and drowning in an ocean of debt. And we have our own infrastructure crisis to worry about. In 2005, the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) issued a report entitled *The Infrastructure Crisis*, in which they estimated that America’s roads, bridges, etc. required an investment of \$1.6 trillion to avoid widespread catastrophic structural failures.

President Obama committed in November 2010 to withdraw the bulk of U.S. troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2014. However, even that delayed withdrawal plan allows for an unspecified number of “counterterrorism” forces to remain in the country after relinquishing the main military operations to the Afghan army. Interventionists in both Republican and Democratic circles are pushing for a perpetual U.S. presence. Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) said in a January 2, 2011 interview that “the idea of putting permanent military bases on the table in 2011, I think would secure our national interest and tell the bad guys and the good guys we’re not leaving.”

David Frum, neocon pundit and former speechwriter for Pres. George W. Bush, picked up on Sen. Graham’s theme and provided space on his FrumForum.com for Wahid Monawar, founder of the



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NeoConservative Party of Afghanistan, to appeal for a perpetual American military presence. In his column entitled “An Afghan Asks for Permanent U.S. Military Bases,” Monawar writes:

Earlier this year, a leading Republican lawmaker on U.S. military policy said that he wants American officials to consider establishing permanent military bases in Afghanistan. Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina said: “having a few U.S. air bases in Afghanistan would be a benefit to the region and would give Afghan security forces an edge against the Taliban.”

A majority of Afghans couldn't agree more with Senator Graham. His idea has opened up a debate, not only amongst U.S. policymakers but, more importantly among many Afghans. Even Afghan senior officials seem to have accepted the indefinite presence of American troops in their country within a comprehensive long term strategic compact.

A majority of Afghans want U.S. troops to remain permanently? While there are, undoubtedly, many Afghans — including (especially) “Afghan senior officials” — who are salivating at the thought of the enormous personal benefit a perpetual American gravy train showering hundreds of billions of dollars would bring, there is little doubt that they represent a small minority of the privileged and the politically connected.

The announcement last year that American geologists had discovered vast mineral deposits in Afghanistan estimated to be worth more than \$1 trillion undoubtedly has many Afghan and American politicians (as well as Wall Street investors) eager to ink some kind of Pax Americanus/Afghanicus that will continue to enrich the den of thieves that rules from Kabul — and their insider partners in the United States.

The government of President Hamid Karzai has been rife with corruption from the get-go (see here, here, and here) but the U.S. taxpayer-funded gravy train keeps on rolling. There is little reason to believe the situation would improve under a government headed by Monawar's NeoConservative Party, or any of the others vying for power.

Sledgehammering Mosquitoes in the Crystal Shop

The Obama administration is attempting to wring maximum political points out of bin Laden's death, while at the same time using it to shore up support for the ongoing U.S. occupation of Afghanistan. However, the counterterrorism operation that reportedly resulted in the successful elimination of Osama bin Laden actually shows the folly of the U.S. war in Afghanistan, which is already the longest in our nation's history. Attempts to fight small, dispersed, elusive terrorist groups with massive, costly conventional forces are doomed to failure, resulting in serious collateral casualties and enormous political backlash — at home and abroad.

Lt. Col. George B. Wallace, USAF (retired), a Vietnam veteran and fighter pilot, wrote in June of last year in *The New American* (“[Proper Use of the U.S. Military](#)“):

According to the U.S. State Department's Country Reports on Terrorism 2008, released in April 2009, al-Qaeda's “organizational strength is difficult to determine” and “it is impossible to estimate their numbers.”

So, we continue to deploy hundreds of thousands of troops abroad on foreign soil supposedly to fight an enemy whose numbers are “impossible to estimate.” Like swatting flies with a sledgehammer, we do more harm than good, create more enemies than we kill, and spend far more blood and treasure than we can afford. November 27, 2006 marked the day when the Iraq War became longer than the U.S. involvement in World War II. During that time in WWII, we defeated Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany



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and their combined allies. We have now been in Iraq three and a half years longer than we were engaged against Hitler, Mussolini, and Tojo, and there is still no end in sight. Afghanistan, of course, has gone on even longer; June 7 of this year marked the 104th month of our engagement there, surpassing the Vietnam War as the longest war in our nation's history.

President Obama and the advocates of perpetual war and permanent occupation are hoping that the exhilarating announcement of bin Laden's death will reinforce their "stay the course" chant and overcome the growing unease of the war-weary American public concerning our economically and militarily unsustainable involvement in overseas quagmires.

Photo of Hillary Clinton: AP Images



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