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Zero troops in Afghanistan is the right number

By John Bachtell

Afghan president Hamid Karzai visited Washington, Jan. 9 and 10, to meet with President Obama and other officials and hammer out the framework for a long-term relationship with the United States.

The Obama administration is weighing future economic and military assistance and how many U.S. troops to leave behind after 2014, when the U.S. and NATO cease combat operations.

The administration, which is considering a total troop pullout, is under immense pressure from Pentagon and conservative foreign policy circles to maintain a sizeable military force.

U.S. peace leaders are urging zero troops left behind. In a letter to supporters, Kevin Martin, Executive Director of Peace Action wrote, "It should be clear to all Americans, that no residual troop levels can guarantee a political outcome in Afghanistan that will be to our liking. That's up to the people of Afghanistan."

Strategically located in Central Asia, Afghanistan remains vital to US corporate interests. For that reason, according to Zalmay Gulzad, professor at Harold Washington College in Chicago, the US foreign policy establishment wants a permanent presence.

With U.S. and NATO forces leaving, a major shift in power relations in is expected.

China, Russia, India and Iran all want to expand trade and relations with Afghanistan. The U.S. is actively inhibiting this competition.

However, Pashtun nationalist forces are pressing Karzai to develop relations with the country's neighbors. Karzai attended the Shang-



hai Cooperative Organization (SCO) meeting in Beijing in June 2012 where Afghanistan and China upgraded their relationship to a strategic and cooperative partnership.

In addition, Afghanistan is sitting on astounding riches of mineral deposits, natural gas and oil, which has transnational corporations salivating. For example, a 2010 Pentagon report called Afghanistan the "Saudi Arabia of Lithium."

Afghanistan is also seen as a prime energy transfer corridor. Among the projects is the proposed \$7.6 billion, 1,040 mile-long Turkmenistan-

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Afghanistan-Pakistan-India natural gas pipeline.

Meanwhile grassroots democratic forces are stepping up the fight for sovereignty.

Located in Central Asia, Afghanistan remains vital to U.S. corporate interests.

The Taliban and other terrorist groups commit violence to intimidate the progressive forces, create instability and scare off foreign investment with the aim of recapturing power. But Gulzad says these groups have dramatically lost support among the Afghan people.

Activity of democratic forces has grown despite contending with violence and assassination.

Afghan women still face oppression, yet women have made important gains. For the first time, women were appointed governors in one province and one district.

Among the progressive forces is the socialist oriented Democratic Party of Afghanistan (DP, formerly People's Democratic Party or PDP), which has grassroots organization across the country. Since the government offers no protection, the DP has held congresses each year outside the country.

The DP is working inside and outside Afghanistan with members constantly coming and going mainly from Europe. Others never left, spending years underground.

The Party's main concerns are bringing peace

and sovereignty, expanding education and rights for women, improving the daily conditions of life for people and farmers, building housing for war widows and orphans.

It has three major newspapers and several members of Parliament.

Gulzad said pictures of Babrak Karmal, the former leader of PDP and president of the country are a hot commodity in the streets along with that of Ana-Hita, the first woman member of PDP elected to the parliament in 1970s.

According to Gulzad, "people are missing the time when communists were in power. Back then there was more security, benefits, and peace than now. There are more beggars today than ever.

Despite the dangers, the democratic forces agree continued U.S. and NATO presence only fuels the violence.

"If anything, the more troops we leave behind, the greater our destabilizing impact will be. Zero is the right number," concurred Martin.



John Bachtell is vice chair of the Communist Party.

Second Amendment anachronistic

PW Editorial

The proliferation of assault weapons and high capacity magazines is not the result of a spontaneous popular 'love affair' with guns. It is the result of active promotion by reckless profiteers and right-wing extremists generally holding racist views and often harboring insurrectionist fantasies.

This has nothing in common with owning hunting rifles or legitimate concerns about protecting one's home or person from street crime, which are the only things that deserve protection under the law.

The fact is, the Second Amendment was hardly enacted to guarantee the right to rebel against the government. Just the opposite is the case. The new nation in 1787 had no standing army and the propertied gentlemen who wrote the Bill of Rights feared the uprisings of citizens, such as had occurred in the Shays' Rebellion the previous year, and wished to give the states power to mobilize citizens to crush them.

George Washington, who presided over the Constitutional Convention, was particularly alarmed at Shays' Rebellion and immediately after its suppression wrote that if the government "shrinks, or is unable to enforce its laws...anarchy and confusion must prevail."

Washington and the Framers were also concerned that domestic turmoil could tempt a return of the British and obviously also wanted to be able to mobilize armed citizens against slave uprisings and frontier conflicts with Native Americans.

That's why the amendment reads: "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."

Under his presidency in 1794 Washington used the combined militia of several states to suppress the Whiskey Rebellion in Pennsylvania.

The concerns that motivated the Framers have long ago disappeared and never in their wildest imaginations did they think the Second Amendment would be the basis for promoting a firearms industry and private arsenals of anti-government fanatics.

We can no longer afford to let Congress be bullied by gun merchants and right-wing insurrectionists hiding behind a fraudulent interpretation of a long outdated provision in the Constitution. We need an aggressive overhaul of national gun laws shaped entirely by the safety and security needs of the American people and, if the Second Amendment as written is in the way, it needs to be revised or repealed.

This has nothing in common with legitimate concerns about protecting one's home or person from crime.

Is the right-wing era over? Not yet

By Sam Webb

Is the era of right-wing ascendancy over? I would argue that it is a bit premature to reach that conclusion.

Now don't get me wrong. Right-wing extremism isn't the same animal that it was a decade or two ago. Its "glory days" are behind it.

The outcome of the elections last year - not to mention the divisions in the Republican Party that are cropping up now around the fiscal cliff and the president's nomination of Chuck Hagel as defense secretary - reflect a political movement that is no longer in a commanding position politically and ideologically.

That said, it continues to be the main, though not the only, obstacle to social progress.

As the people's movement readies itself for new struggles - on debt, immigration, gun control, jobs and infrastructure, equality, and so forth - in the coming year, count on the well-funded far-right at the national and state level to push the most reactionary measures, while obstructing anything remotely progressive and democratic, especially in Washington.

Of immediate concern is the attempt to use the lifting of the debt ceiling to force the president and Congress to accept massive cuts in, if not elimination of, earned income benefit programs - Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid.

On this issue, right-wing Republicans have the enthusiastic support of the main sections of the capitalist class (both on Wall Street and on Main Street), whose hooks extend into both parties, Democratic and Republican alike.

Much like the capitalist classes in the advanced capitalist countries of Europe, the U.S. capitalist class believes that capitalism can no longer afford the "welfare state."

In its view, programs for the social good should be scaled back drastically if not eliminated altogether.

To complicate matters further, there seems to be some softness among Democrats in Congress and the White House when it comes to protecting Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid.



That is evidenced by their much reported willingness to modify the formula for Social Security cost-of-living adjustments in a way that reduces benefits that are already insufficient, especially with the widespread implosion of job-related pension plans.

This is the so-called "chained Consumer Price Index" modification.

In these circumstances, it is imperative to re-energize the diverse multiracial working-class-based coalition that reelected President Obama last fall.

While sections of this coalition were active in the year-end "fiscal cliff" fight, a mobilization of greater scope, unity, and militancy will be needed in the coming battle to prevent any weakening of Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid.

Just as it took broad-based, mass action of a diverse people's coalition to win these programs in the last century, it will take a similar but even broader, deeper, and more militant coalition to retain (and strengthen) them in the 21st century.

Are we there yet?

I don't think so.

But in the people's coalition that made the difference in the recent elections we have the makings of a political force that has the potential to stymie and roll back the power of the corporate class and its political supporters.

No small task, but accomplishing it is a worthy resolution for all of us for the coming year!

Right-wing extremism isn't the same animal that it was a decade or two ago.

Homeowners fight back - and win

By Rossana Cambron

You may have heard about families trying to fight foreclosure of their homes, or a group of occupiers holding a vigil at a home when sheriffs are expected to come and evict a family.

Some families lost their homes, others expected to lose theirs, but they chose to fight for the greater good.

You may ask, will these actions really get results?

In California, the answer is YES. On Jan. 1, the Homeowners Bill of Rights, a set of measures the state legislature passed last year, took effect.

The Homeowners Bill of Rights requires that banks provide a single point of contact to borrowers at risk of default: someone who is responsible for helping them avoid foreclosure. Now homeowners no longer have to explain their situation to several bank representatives before getting help, or risk losing their home while they are negotiating a loan modification.

The measure imposes a \$7,500 civil penalty on banks that approve multiple, repeated loans in which documents are recorded that have not been verified for accuracy. This avoids potential homeowners being approved when the banks know very well they cannot afford to pay the mortgage.

Foreclosed homes are frequently abandoned, causing blight and bringing down the value of neighboring homes. Under the Homeowners Bill of Rights, the new owner of a foreclosed property must maintain it so it does not affect the appearance of the neighborhood.

The new owner cannot evict renters from a home that is sold in foreclosure, or refuse to honor their former landlord's lease; renters will have at least 90 days to find a new home.

Anuncian huelga de miles de transportistas en Nueva York

Por Prensa Latina

Miles de conductores de transportes escolares en Nueva York confirmaron hoy que irán a la huelga a partir del próximo miércoles porque la alcaldía de la ciudad quiere recortar gastos y privatizar el servicio.

Michael Cordiello, delegado principal del sindicato Unión de Tránsito Colegial, adelantó que en el paro participarán unos ocho mil chóferes y auxiliares pedagógicas, y la protesta afectará a instituciones donde estudian 152 mil niños y más de mil rutas.

El alcalde Michael Bloomberg decidió negociar la administración del sector con empresas privadas, opinamos que cientos de nuestros contratos serán perjudicados y los despidos se multiplicarán desde junio, subrayó Cordiello.

Bloomberg intentó calmar a familiares de los alumnos, afirmó que la ciudad ya tiene un plan de contingencia y que su ayuntamiento repartirá pasajes gratis en metro para todos los perjudicados.

Una huelga en el transporte neoyorquino es inevitable porque las partes (sindicatos y gobierno metropolitano) no pudieron alcanzar por el momento una fórmula de compromiso, señaló el delegado federal de educación Dennis Walcott.

El pasado 29 de diciembre un acuerdo parcial evitó que miles de trabajadores portuarios se decretaran en huelga en Estados Unidos con afectaciones previstas para el 40 por ciento de la carga nacional por contenedores.

George Cohen, mediador federal en la disputa entre patronales y sindicatos, informó que se había firmado un pacto para extender las condi-

ciones y prestaciones de los actuales contratos laborales hasta el próximo 6 de febrero.

El diario The New York Times calificó a esta fecha como un nuevo punto de ruptura para otra potencial protesta, que podría implicar la paralización de 14 grandes terminales navieras desde Boston hasta Houston y el paro voluntario de 14 mil 500 estibadores.

En otras noticias, el presidente estadounidense, Barack Obama, advirtió hoy que sería irresponsable negar un aumento del techo de la deuda en evidente referencia a la negativa republicana a acompañar esa acción en el Congreso.

Durante la última conferencia de prensa de su primer gobierno en la Casa Blanca, Obama calificó de desastrosas las consecuencias para la economía del país si el parlamento no cumple con liberar recursos para el pago del débito. Sería una herida autoinfligida a la economía, nos ralentizará el crecimiento y podría llevarnos a otra recesión, indicó.

Luego de extensas negociaciones y la adopción de medidas temporales para evitar el llamado abismo fiscal, los congresistas republicanos amenazan con bloquear propuestas gubernamentales.

El presidente urgió al Congreso a actuar sin demora porque, alertó, el tiempo se está acabando.

En otra parte de las declaraciones, Obama se centró en el tema del control de las armas, aspecto que renovó el debate tras la masacre de 20 niños y seis adultos en la escuela primaria de Newtown, en Connecticut, en diciembre último y que enfrenta amplios sectores del país.