

## **Against the war? Get in touch and get involved**

Peace Action Wellington is a group based in Wellington, New Zealand that works for peace and justice throughout the world, with a special focus on the New Zealand government's involvement in international affairs.

We stand for peace with justice and self-determination.

Peace cannot be achieved by the subjugation of peoples by foreign powers. We are opposed to the endless and counterproductive 'War on Terror' - instead, the conditions that drive people to resort to terrorism must be addressed.

Although PAW is an independent organisation with individual membership, it also functions as a united front for groups opposed to unjust war. Members of various left wing political parties, socialist organisations, unions, other groups and anarchists, participate in running PAW. As a broad coalition of diverse people, PAW acknowledges and respects the ideological differences of its members, while working towards shared goals.

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# **NZ's bloody ten years in Afghanistan**

## **October 8th this year will be the tenth anniversary of New Zealand's longest-ever war**

### **What is the fruit of a ten year US-led occupation in Afghanistan?**

Since taking office in January 2009, United States President Barack Obama has nearly tripled the number of American troops fighting in the decade-old war. When he entered the White House, there were 34,000 troops in Afghanistan. Now there are nearly 100,000.

Despite – or because of – the Obama surge, violence in Afghanistan is now at its highest level since the US launched the war to oust the Taliban regime in October 2001. According to the United Nations, the number of civilians killed in the country last year reached 2,777, a 15 percent increase over 2009.

This year Foreign minister Murray McCully said that New Zealand troops may be in Afghanistan for another four years. This is despite the growing opposition to the continued Western occupation of the country by Afghan President Hamid Karzai, himself installed by Washington soon after its invasion of the country in 2001.

### **SAS in Afghanistan**

Immediately following 9/11, NZ Prime Minister Helen Clark acted to help 'find the evildoers'. Specifically, she committed the Special Air Service (SAS) for 'direct action missions and long-range reconnaissance', Navy frigates to patrol the Straits of Hormuz, and Air Force Orions for surveillance. Clark was tight lipped about details of SAS deployment on grounds of security.

In 2005, it was reported that the SAS had taken some 50-70 Afghan people prisoner and had turned them over to the Afghan army. It was revealed that there were no procedures in place for NZDF soldiers to meet their basic requirements under international law. Phil Goff assured the public that these people had not been tortured, but he was unable to confirm who had been taken prisoner. His information came from the Americans, who were little concerned with the Geneva convention or human rights.

The SAS deployment was exposed, and eventually, Clark found it untenable to continue its deployment or re-authorise its redeployment.

### **Reconstruction or collaboration?**

Instead, the Labour government agreed to a request from the US for a provincial reconstruction team (PRT). Phil Goff, then Minister of Defence, said the purpose of this team was in part to extend the control of the central government of Hamid Karzai in Kabul into the provinces of Afghanistan.

Deploying the PRT allowed the Labour government to continue playing a role in the war and collaborate with the Americans. This effort was touted by politicians of all parties as a humane programme of 'nation-building', 'peace-keeping', and 'reconstruction'.

Political spin may cover up facts, but it can't change them. The New Zealand State's participation in Afghanistan was and remains an action to secure dairy access and a long coveted trade deal, to lend multi-nation legitimacy to an overwhelmingly US military occupation and to prove NZ's loyalty to Washington.

Over the past few months, New Zealanders have got a better idea of what the SAS has been doing in Afghanistan. Based in Kabul, it has been at the disposal of the US forces and the Karzai government for the conduct of raids and protection services. In December 2010, SAS troops were called out for a night mission in defence of the US Embassy. That resulted in the SAS killing several private security guards at the property next door.

Afghanistan's position on the globe means it has long been used as a buffer zone by rival imperialist powers intent on dominating Central Asia. Today, the US's temporarily allied but really rival imperialist nations - Britain, France, Germany, Russia - all scheme to get into the country through diplomacy and long-term stationing of troops.

Washington needs to keep a grip on local forces and a chokehold over the region's oil production in order to thwart the strategic ambitions of the other imperialists. The US also has to keep the capitalist rulers of Pakistan, India, China and Iran from using Afghanistan as an arena to advance their interests.

### **NZ Troops out**

This brutal imperialist rivalry is not in the interests of ordinary Afghans, nor is it in the interests of ordinary New Zealand people. On the tenth anniversary of this inhuman conflict we should renew demands that New Zealand troops are immediately removed from Afghanistan.