

## Closed Door

US attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan are escalating. Recently the Obama administration announced it will send another 17,000 US troops (joining 36,000 already there) to Afghanistan with perhaps more to come later. This will worsen specifically the lot of Afghan women further.

The Taliban is a horror for the people, but the US occupation has not made things better particularly for women. During the 1990s, the Taliban government carried out atrocities-like public stonings of women in stadiums for "crimes" such as adultery. Today, in the regions that they control, the Taliban continue to attack women for going to school and threaten (sometimes even kill) women journalists, human rights activists, artists, and athletes.

Many feminists supported the October 2001 US invasion because they convinced themselves that Bush cared about their views and was actually waging war, even in part, to "liberate Afghan women from abuse and oppression," as a May 2002 letter to President Bush signed by prominent feminists put it.

A bloody invasion and nearly eight years of occupation have NOT improved things for Afghan women. Their lives are a nightmare-not significantly different or better than under the Taliban, and in many ways worse.

Today thousands of young girls and women are confined to their homes, kept out of school or work. "Honor killings" of women are still carried out, and disputes or debts between people are often "settled" using girls as a form of currency. Men are routinely given custody of children in divorces. Violence against women and girls rose 40 percent in 2007, and today nearly 90 percent of Afghan women suffer abuse at home. "Across Afghanistan, women are setting fire to themselves," the *Guardian* reports.

Every 30 minutes, an Afghan woman dies during childbirth. Overall, some 24,000 women die each year due to diseases and during childbirth-25 times the number killed in the war. Up to 70 percent of pregnant women don't get medical attention. 87 percent of Afghan women are illiterate; only 30 percent of girls have access to education in Afghanistan; 70 to 80 percent of women face forced marriages.

Everything Obama has done since taking office has escalated the trajectory set in motion by the Bush regime that has led to these horrors and strengthened the Taliban : adding another 17,000 troops, stepping up US airstrikes, killing even more civilians, and even arguing that detainees in the notorious US torture centre at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan have no constitutional rights.

When the US intervenes in other countries-whether militarily, politically, or economically-the overall goal is to strengthen the system of exploitation. After overthrowing the Taliban, the US empowered a reactionary cabal of warlords, gangsters, tribal chiefs and feudal lords who have maintained Afghanistan's suffocating economic, political and social relations, including traditional feudal and Islamist relations concerning women, despite a few cosmetic legal changes. The Taliban resurgence is fuelled by growing hatred of the reactionaries that the US put in power.

And the truth is that Obama couldn't do anything fundamentally different or better even if he wanted to, because the US hegemonism he represents is driven by profit, or the competitive accumulation of capital-and it can only do so by exploiting labour, markets and resources on a global scale. □□□