

well Done

# Let's finally finish the mission and bring the troops home

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On May 1, the U.S. president addressed the nation, announcing a military victory. May 1, 2003, that is, when President George W. Bush, in his form-fitting flight suit, strode onto the deck of the aircraft carrier USS Lincoln. Under the banner announcing "Mission Accomplished," he declared that "major combat operations in Iraq have ended."

That was eight years to the day before President Barack Obama, without flight suit or swagger, made the surprise announcement that Osama bin Laden had been killed in a U.S. military operation (in a wealthy suburb of Pakistan, notably, not Afghanistan).

The U.S. war in Afghanistan has become the longest war in U.S. history. News outlets now summarily report that "The Taliban have begun their annual spring offensive," as if it were the release of a spring line of clothes. The fact is, this season has all the markings of the most violent of the war, or as

the brave reporter Anand Gopal told me from Kabul: "Every year has been more violent than the year before that, so it's just continuing that trend. And I suspect the same to be said for the summer. It will likely be the most violent summer since 2001."

Let's go back to that fateful year. Just after the Sept. 11 attacks, Congress voted to grant President Bush war authorization. The resolution passed the Senate 98-0, and passed the House 420-1. The sole vote against the invasion of Afghanistan was cast by California Rep. Barbara Lee. Her floor speech in opposition to House Joint Resolution 64 that Sept. 14 should be required reading:

"I rise today with a heavy heart, one that is filled with sorrow for the families and loved ones who were killed and injured in New York, Virginia and Pennsylvania. ... September 11 changed the world. Our deepest fears now haunt us. Yet I am convinced that military action will not prevent further acts of international terrorism against the United States. ... We must not rush to judgment. Far too many innocent people have already died. Our country is in mourning. If we rush to launch a counterattack, we run too great a risk that women, children and other non-

combatants will be caught in the crossfire. ... As a member of the clergy so eloquently said, 'As we act, let us not become the evil that we deplore.'"

Ten years after her courageous speech, Congressmember Lee, whose anti-war stance is increasingly becoming the new normal, wants a repeal of that war resolution: "That resolution was a blank check ... it was not targeted toward al-Qaida or any country. It said the president is authorized to use force against any nation, organization or individual he or she deems responsible or connected to 9/11. It wasn't a declaration of war, yet we've been in the longest war in American history now, 10 years, and it's open-ended."

Lee acknowledges that Obama "did commit to begin a significant withdrawal in July." But what does troop withdrawal mean with the presence of military contractors in war? Right now, the 100,000 contractors (called "mercenaries" by many) outnumber U.S. troops deployed in Afghanistan.

Anand Gopal says, "The U.S. is really a fundamental force for instability in Afghanistan ... allying with local actors — warlords, commanders, government officials — who've

really been creating a nightmare for Afghans, especially in the countryside, [and with] the night raids, breaking into people's homes, airstrikes, just the daily life under occupation."

Filmmaker Robert Greenwald has partnered with anti-war veterans to produce "Rethink Afghanistan," a series of films about the war, online at rethinkafghanistan.com. In response to bin Laden's death, they have launched a new petition to press the White House to bring the troops home.

Congressmember Lee supports it: "I can't overstate how important this is for our democracy — every poll has shown that over 65, 70 percent of the public now is war-weary. And they understand that we need to bring our young men and women out of harm's way. They've performed valiantly and well. They've done everything we've asked them to do, and now it's time to bring them home."

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Amy Goodman's column appears regularly on editorial pages of *The Times*. She is the host of "Democracy Now!," a daily international TV/radio news hour. Denis Moynihan contributed research to this column.

