



## **Obama's Coalition of the Unwilling**

[http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/20090303\\_obamas\\_coalition\\_of\\_the\\_unwilling/](http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/20090303_obamas_coalition_of_the_unwilling/)

Posted on Mar 3, 2009

**By Amy Goodman**

President Barack Obama met recently with the prime ministers of Canada and Britain. This week's meeting with Britain's Gordon Brown, who was pitching a "global New Deal," created a minor flap when the White House downsized a full news conference to an Oval Office question-and-answer session, viewed by some in Britain as a snub. The change was attributed to the weather, with the Rose Garden covered with snow.

It might have actually related not to snow cover, but to a snow job, covering up the growing divide between Afghanistan policies.

U.S. policy in Afghanistan includes a troop surge, already under way, and continued bombing in Pakistan using unmanned drones. Escalating civilian deaths are a certainty. The United Nations estimates that more than

**2,100 civilians died in 2008, a 40 percent jump over 2007.**

**The occupation of Afghanistan is in its eighth year, and public support in many NATO countries is eroding. Joseph Stiglitz, winner of the 2001 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics, told me: “The move into Afghanistan is going to be very expensive. ... Our European NATO partners are getting disillusioned with the war. I talked to a lot of the people in Europe, and they really feel this is a quagmire.”**

**Forty-one nations contribute to NATO's 56,000-troop presence in Afghanistan. More than half of the troops are from the U.S. The United Kingdom has 8,300 troops, Canada just under 3,000. Maintaining troops is costly, but the human toll is greater. Canada, with 111 deaths, has suffered the highest per capita death rate for foreign armies in Afghanistan, since its forces are based in the south around Kandahar, where the Taliban is strong.**

**Last Sunday on CNN, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper said, “We're not going to win this war just by staying ... we are not going to ever defeat the insurgency.” U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates recently wrote in Foreign Affairs magazine: “The United States cannot kill or capture its way to victory.” Yet it's Canada that has set a deadline for troop withdrawal at the end of 2011. The U.S. is talking escalation.**

Anand Gopal, Afghanistan correspondent for The Christian Science Monitor, described the situation on the ground: “A lot of Afghans that I speak to in these southern areas where the fighting has been happening say that to bring more troops, that’s going to mean more civilian casualties. It’ll mean more of these night raids, which have been deeply unpopular amongst Afghans. ... Whenever American soldiers go into a village and then leave, the Taliban comes and attacks the village.” Afghan Parliamentarian Shukria Barakzai, a woman, told Gopal: “Send us 30,000 scholars instead. Or 30,000 engineers. But don’t send more troops—it will just bring more violence.”

Women in Afghanistan play a key role in winning the peace. A photographer wrote me: “There will be various celebrations across Afghanistan to honor International Women’s Day on Sunday, March 8. In Kandahar there will be an event with hundreds of women gathering to pray for peace, which is especially poignant in a part of Afghanistan that is so volatile.” After returning from an international women’s gathering in Moscow, feminist writer Gloria Steinem noted that the discussion centered around getting the media to hire peace correspondents to balance the war correspondents. Voices of civil society would be amplified, giving emphasis to those who wage peace. In the U.S. media, there is an equating of fighting the war with fighting terrorism. Yet on the ground, civilian casualties lead to tremendous hostility. Mary

Robinson, former president of Ireland, recently told me: “I’ve been saddened and shocked by virulent anti-American responses to those wars [in Iraq and Afghanistan]. They’re seen as occupations. ... I think it’s very important we learn from mistakes of sounding war drums.” She added, “There’s such a connection from the Middle East to Afghanistan to Pakistan which builds on strengths of working with neighbors.”

Barack Obama was swept through the primaries and into the presidency on the basis of his anti-war message. Prime ministers like Brown and Harper are bending to growing public demand for an end to war. Yet in the U. S., there is scant debate about sending more troops to Afghanistan, and about the spillover of the war into Pakistan.

*Denis Moynihan contributed research to this column.*

*Amy Goodman is the host of “Democracy Now!,” a daily international TV/radio news hour airing on more than 700 stations in North America. She was awarded the 2008 Right Livelihood Award, dubbed the “Alternative Nobel” prize, and received the award in the Swedish Parliament in December.*

© 2009 Amy Goodman

Distributed by King Features Syndicate