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President Obama has secretly extended the U.S. role in Afghanistan despite earlier promises to wind down America's longest war. According to the New York Times, Obama has signed a classified order that ensures U.S. troops will have a direct role in fighting. In addition, the order reportedly enables American jets, bombers and drones to bolster Afghan troops on combat missions. And, under certain circumstances, it would apparently authorize U.S. air-strikes to support Afghan military operations throughout the country. The decision contradicts Obama's earlier announcement that the U.S. military would have no combat role in Afghanistan next year. Afghanistan's new president Ashraf Ghani has also backed an expanded U.S. military role. Ghani, who took office in September, has also reportedly lifted limits on U.S. airstrikes and joint raids that his predecessor Hamid Karzai had put in place. We go to Kabul to speak with Dr. Hakim, a peace activist and physician who has provided humanitarian relief in Afghanistan for the last decade. We are also joined by Kathy Kelly of Voices for Creative Nonviolence, who has just returned from Afghanistan.

AMY GOODMAN: President Obama has secretly extended the U.S. role in Afghanistan despite earlier promises to wind down America's longest war, this year. According to the *New York Times*, Obama signed a classified order that ensures American troops will have a direct role in fighting. In addition, the order reportedly enables American jets, bombers and drones to bolster Afghan troops on combat missions. And under certain circumstances, it would apparently authorize U.S. air-strikes to support Afghan military operations throughout the country. The decision contradicts Obama's earlier announcement that the U.S. military would have no combat role in Afghanistan next year. This is Obama speaking at the White House Rose Garden in May.

PRES. OBAMA: America's combat mission will be over by the end of this year. Starting next year, Afghans will be fully responsible for securing their country. American personnel will be in an advisory role. We will no longer patrol Afghan cities or towns, mountains or valleys. That is a task for the Afghan people. Second, I've made it clear that we are open to cooperating with Afghans on two narrow missions after 2014. Training Afghan forces and supporting counterterrorism operations against the remnants of Al Qaeda.

AMY GOODMAN: Under the new order, U.S. troops will be authorized to attack not just Al Qaeda, but the Taliban, the Haqqani network and other militants. President Obama reportedly backtracked from his decision to end the U.S. combat mission in Afghanistan after a lengthy and heated debate within the White House. Top generals at the Pentagon and Afghanistan reportedly backed the expanded mission. Afghanistan's new president, Ashraf Ghani, has also backed an expanded U.S. militant role. Ghani took office in September. He is also reportedly lifted limits on U.S. airstrikes in joint rates that his predecessor, Hamid Karzai, had put in place. Meanwhile, at least 40 people are dead in eastern Afghanistan after a suicide bomber attacked a volleyball match. According to the government of the province, at least 50 more were wounded at the tournament final. Most of the casualties were civilians. In a moment, we will be joined by two guests, we will be joined from Afghanistan by Dr. Hakim, a medical doctor who has provided humanitarian relief in Afghanistan for the last decade. And we will be joined by Kathy Kelly, a well-known peace activist, co-coordinator of Voices for Creative Nonviolence. We're going to go to break and then we will be joined by both of them in Chicago and Kabul, Afghanistan. Stay with us.

AMY GOODMAN: Military Madness by Woods here on *Democracy Now!*, democracynow.org, *The War and Peace Report*. I'm Amy Goodman. To talk about President Obama's secret order to extend the war in Afghanistan, we're joined by two guests. Dr. Hakim, is a medical doctor who has provided humanitarian relief in Afghanistan for the last decade. He works with Afghan Peace Volunteers, an inter-ethnic group of young Afghans dedicated to building non-violent alternatives to war. Dr. Hakim is the 2012 recipient of the International Pfeffer Peace Prize. And in Chicago, is Kathy Kelly. She's just back from Kabul, Afghanistan. She is Co-Coordinator for Voices for Creative Nonviolence, a campaign to end U.S. military and economic warfare. Her recent article is headlined, "Obama Extends War in Afghanistan: The implications for U.S. democracy are not reassuring." We begin with Dr. Hakim who asked us not to show his face. Dr. Hakim, why don't you want people to see your face?

DR. HAKIM: Well, security in Afghanistan has been deteriorating over the past few years in the face of the ongoing U.S.- NATO military strategy and for safety reasons I'd rather remain unrecognized.

AMY GOODMAN: So your concerns about the secret order that was just revealed in *The New York Times* that President Obama has signed onto, what has been the effect of the U.S. war in Afghanistan and what do you think about this latest development?

DR. HAKIM: Well, I think it is good to look at some of the databases that are available in the states itself, a global terrorism database done by the U.S. government and the University of Maryland has shown that since the beginning of the war against terror in 2001, the number of terrorist attacks in Afghanistan and in the rest of the world, in Iraq, etc., has increased. And so, if we looked at the graph of that increase and thought of terrorism, or the war against terrorism, as a cancer that needs to be treated — as a medical doctor I would say the graph shows that the war against terror in Afghanistan —

AMY GOODMAN: We have just lost Dr. Hakim's voice. We're going to go back to him when we can. He is speaking to us from Kabul. Again he is not showing his face out of concern for his safety. Kathy Kelly, you're just back from Kabul. Talk about your response to this latest news. We just played the clip of President Obama in May saying that the troops would be pulling out, and now the secret order.

KATHY KELLY: Thank you, Amy. I think probably Hakim wanted to continue by saying the war on terror has been a failure. And I think the U.S. public knows that. We learned about heated debate between the advisors to President Obama, but at what point does the court of public opinion consulted in any way? The news released on a Friday night, and was a leak that was disclosed to *The New York Times*, but apparently the decision was made weeks before the most recent elections. Is it possible that because the Obama administration knows how popular this war is? A CNN poll that had been released in 2013 said 82% of the U.S. public disapproved of continued war in Afghanistan. So in spite of the pledge that the war was going to end, we now find out that, in fact, the war is going to continue. In the Saturday issue of *The New York Times*

, we then learn that, quietly, the new administration in Kabul, under President Ashraf Ghani, has decided to resume the night raids. They want to call them night operations instead of night raids. This is a tactic that doesn't require big sprawling military bases, it requires joint special operations forces, drone support, the capacity to use helicopters. And this is, of course, what the United States is now promising. The night raids are despised tactic. I think it is import for people in the United States, just to try and imagine if people break into your home while helicopters are hovering overhead and suddenly the women in the household are locked up and the men are subjected to brutality, and maybe a crossfire does break out, maybe there are Taliban people that are going to attack while the forces are there and civilians are killed, and you can't get them to the hospital, and this utter nightmare is taking place. Your home is being torn apart. Some people are going to be taken away and disappeared for months and months under interrogation and possible torture. Of course, nobody would want this to resume in their country, and it is sure to prolong and exacerbate the war.

AMY GOODMAN: Dr. Hakim, I think we have your audio back. I expect it is going to go in and out as we speak to you in Kabul. But, your new president, Ghani, has called for this extension, apparently. What is your response to him?

DR. HAKIM: Well, the news reports in Kabul in the past 54, 56 days since President Ashraf Ghani's inauguration has shown that there have been about 41 street-side bombing attacks across the country and 24 of those in Kabul. So, I think President Ashraf Ghani is caught in the same military madness that the entire U.S.- NATO coalition, and the world, is caught up in. I tried to say earlier and my voice was lost in transmission that a global terrorism database by the U.S. government and the University of Maryland showed that the number of terrorist attacks in Afghanistan and across the world has increased since the war against terror began in 2001. So, as a medical humanitarian person, I would say that the world's strategy in treating terrorism has failed and we ought to re-examine and so does President Ashraf Ghani.

AMY GOODMAN: And the effects on the ground, Dr. Hakim, of this war. Can you tell us what's happening? When we were trying to communicate with you by e-mail, you said, sorry, today is a no electricity day in my house. Explain the conditions on the ground.

DR. HAKIM: I think it would be good to give listeners a sense of what is happening in this country, devastated by four decades of war and a continued military strategy. By looking at what the World Health Organization announced in September as the suicide rate among Afghans. Afghans on the ground in the daily living are not coping. In this year, up to September, there have been more than 4000 Afghans, both men and women, who have set themselves on fire — self immolation. And another 4000 that have tried to poison themselves and kill themselves through drugs and poison. So we are in a situation where the people have problems with their basic human needs of food and water, chronic malnutrition has always been a problem, certainly not helped by war. And then the other basic services that ought to be available for Afghans — health care, work. Unemployment is officially at 36%, probably more. Some figures by local afghan labor organizations put it as high as 80%. So you have hungry, angry people who are unemployed and who are killing themselves. So, on the ground, we know that this war against terror in Afghanistan has been failing from year to year. The number of civilian casualties reported —

AMY GOODMAN: We've just lost Dr. Hakim again in Kabul. But I think it is worth continually going back when we get him. Kathy Kelly, if you could continue his thought.

KATHY KELLY: Well, along with the concern for civilian casualties and the mothers who weep and say, I can't feed my children, and the thousands of children that are on the streets as child laborers — 6000 children in Kabul alone — I mean, Amnesty International had reported that the war was displacing 400 people every day. And there are squalid, retched refugee camps as people are facing a very, very cold winter. The Pentagon has requested \$58.3 billion for fiscal year 2015 alone for war in Afghanistan. These resources go to the hands of war profiteers and weapons makers and enormous expenditures by the Pentagon.

I just read about November 23 request and the Pentagon for \$7,800,000 to beef up the Kandahar and Kabul airports which will, of course, allow them to engage in the night raids and the drone attacks and the air attacks. The suffering that this causes for the people in Afghanistan is lost on the U.S. public. There was an August Amnesty International report that details ten case studies that are just gruesome and chilling, horrific, telling about the situations of civilians who have been killed by United States forces. Of course, this should be entered into the U.S. media. It should be something U.S. people are talking about, and not a war that gets continued because of furtive movements on a Friday night.

AMY GOODMAN: Kathy, I wanted to ask you about a new analysis of corporate TV news that's found there's almost no debate about whether the United States — in this case it was go to war in Iraq and Syria, but I think you could certainly extend that to Afghanistan. The group Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, or FAIR, found of that the more than 200 guests that appeared on network shows to discuss the topics, just six voiced opposition to military action. On the high-profile Sunday talk shows, out of 89 guests, there was just one antiwar voice. It was Katrina vanden Heuvel of *The Nation*

. I just want to go to a snippet of the clips of voices that appear in corporate media outlets.

SEN. LINDSEY GRAHAM: Here's what I'm tired of hearing from this administration and my friends on the other side and within my party, that this is somehow easy and really not our fight.

ED RENDELL: They have to act swiftly because the President made a good point. He believes he has the authority to do this on his own, and so do I.

BOB SHIEFFER: So you're talking about a massive response? Not hitting one target but hitting as many as possible.

HENRY KISSINGER: I think when an American is murdered on television for the purpose of terrorizing Americans, there should be a response that you can, you would not analyze in terms of a normal response to provocation.

BILL KRISTOL: You can't imagine the fight against Isis going in such a way that we would say, you know what? This thing is on the cusp and we need to send in 3000 U.S. — or 5000 U.S. combat ground troops to win this thing?

JAY CARNEY: Well, but again, that would be saying specifically only 5000, not 5005 —

BILL CRYSTAL: No, it wouldn't, it would be saying — it would be leaving the option open which is what a serious commander in chief does.

JAY CARNEY: I think the short hand that a lot of people use about no boots on the ground is semantically problematic, because obviously, there would be American military personnel with their boots on the ground.

AMY GOODMAN: So, that was Jay Carney, the former spokesperson for Obama and before that the Bill Kristol and Henry Kissinger, Bob Schieffer the CBS news anchor, the former governor of Pennsylvania Ed Rendell and Lindsey Graham, the U.S. Senator. Just some of the voices. But, again, the overwhelming majority of voices on television, the range of the debate is boots on the ground or just bomb. Rarely, almost never do you hear someone say do not attack. And yet, clearly even within the White House, the debate that went on according to *The New York Times*, because this was revealed by

The New York Times

in this late revelation of a secret order signed by President Obama to continue the war in Afghanistan, there was a debate within the White House that sounds like much more than we hear on television. Kathy, you've been going back and forth to Iraq and Afghanistan. I'm sure it is well over 100 times. Your thoughts on what this public debate would mean and what that sounds like in Afghanistan? We'll ask Dr. Hakim that question.

KATHY KELLY: Well, isn't it amazing that in spite of what is such a vice like grip on education of the U.S. public that's maintained by the military and by the very cooperative media, that you do get these huge percentages of the U.S. public who nevertheless believe that these wars have been failures, who don't want to see the wars continue. You know, 94% of the U.S. public reportedly knew about the beheadings of men whose names I know by heart, and I was living in Afghanistan with barely any electricity or news coverage but I knew that Steven Sotloff and David Haines and James Foley had been killed. But people in the United States don't know the names or the circumstances of children whose bodies were torn apart by drone attacks. They will never, ever know the names of the half-million children in Iraq who were starved to death because of economic sanctions. We need to be literate in those realities as well and the conditions endured by people who can't escape our wars. And not to be made aware of that, is dangerous for the security of people in the United States. Because other people in other parts of the world are furious, they're enraged, and they don't want to continue subjecting themselves to the United States menace of our military.

AMY GOODMAN: Kathy, how many times have you been in Iraq and Afghanistan?

KATHY KELLY: Well, I traveled to Iraq 27 times during the period of economic sanctions. And you know, NPR, at one point, told us, we will never give you or your organization a platform. Well we weren't looking to call attention to ourselves. We just wanted them to go inside the hospitals and be with mothers and children who would never emerge with a healthy baby leaving the hospital. I guess I've been to Afghanistan about 16 times. Sometimes that was because you could only get a one-month visa, so I might go out and go back in. But I've been so fortunate to live with Afghan peace volunteers and with Hakim who's steady guidance and translation is always available to us. And with some very fine people from other parts of the world who've also gone over there. And by being with them, you get an entirely different perspective on the effects of the war, on the realities of poverty and displacement, and also your living with young people who themselves have lost immediate members of their family, who themselves spent time in refugee camps, and yet there they are like young social workers fanning out trying to find who are the neediest people for distribution of 3,000 duvets that they've enlisted widows and impoverished women to make. And they're trying really, really hard to overcome.

AMY GOODMAN: Kathy, you have been nominated for Nobel Peace Prize several times. You have into Iraq and Afghanistan scores of times. How many times have you been invited on the high-profile Sunday talk shows on television?

KATHY KELLY: Zero.

AMY GOODMAN: I wanted to go to Dr. Hakim for a moment, as you described working with him in Afghanistan. Dr. Hakim, what is the alternative to war in your country?

DR. HAKIM: Well, I think that young people everywhere, not just young Afghans, have got to wake up every day and build those viable alternatives to war, which means ban wars and weapons within their homes, communities, religious workplaces, farms, restaurants, shop houses. And there are places in Afghanistan in the midst of this war that have banned wars, like emergency hospital and the Border-free Nonviolence Center of the Afghan Peace Volunteers. That is one thing that they can do practically. There are many other related issues that young people can take action on. They can refrain from using fossil fuel energy. Because a lot of the wars in the Middle East and in this part of the world is really a war over resources like fossil fuels, gas and oil. If we do our daily part, that would help. And then in the area of learning, people have got to realize that the lack of debate we have just talked about shows that we are learning the wrong things. We only hear the war and military narrative. We need to be more curious, imaginative. We need to learn ways in which we can serve humanity, not get the profit. There many other practical things that people can do a daily basis, both in Kabul, Afghanistan, and in the rest of the world. And I would like to encourage everybody to do it. I've seen the Afghan Peace Volunteers try, despite the difficulties, so can American youth.

AMY GOODMAN: I'm looking at a piece from Common Dreams that is responding to the piece in *The Times* that made it clear what President Obama did, quoting him in the Rose Garden, saying "American personnel will be in an advisory role after this year, we will no longer patrol Afghan cities, towns, mountains, or valleys. That's the task for the Afghan people." That he said in May. And then, Common Dreams staff writes, "never mind, the president has now quietly authorized and expanded role for the U.S. military in Afghanistan. *The New York Times* reported last night that Obama's decision is a result of a lengthy and heated debate between the promise Mr. Obama made to end the war in Afghanistan versus the demands of the Pentagon. The Pentagon won. An official told *The Times*

that the military pretty much got what it wanted. Obama has also given the war in Afghanistan a new name, operation Resolute Support." Dr. Hakim, your response to operation Resolute Support?

DR. HAKIM: Well, before this was called operation Enduring Freedom, and the change of name doesn't change the basic predominant strategy, which is kill, kill, kill. That hasn't been a change in the strategy. There hasn't been any other options. This decision to expand the mission here is not even a new decision. In 2009, there was another decision that Obama had to make and that was whether to increase the number of troops by 30,000 American soldiers. And in the account by Bob Woodward in the book "Obama's Wars," Bob Woodward described how that process happen for Obama in the White House. Obama had to tell his war cabinet, had to ask them, why is there no other option? There was only one option, and that is the military option. So Resolute Support is just a rehash of the same military option, the same war against terrorism which has failed. And so it is going to fail.

AMY GOODMAN: Well, I want to thank you both for being with us. Dr. Hakim, I want to thank you. Dr. Hakim is a medical doctor who has provided humanitarian relief in Afghanistan for the last decade. He works with Afghan Peace Volunteers, an inter-ethnic group of young Afghans dedicated to building non-violent alternatives to war. In 2012, he won the international Pfeffer Peace Prize. And in Chicago, Kathy Kelly is co-coordinator of Voices for Creative Nonviolence, a campaign to end U.S. military and economic warfare. She just back from Kabul. And Dr. Hakim, I look forward to seeing her face one day without fear. This is *Democracy Now!*

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