



Afghanistan Mercenary Shocker & US Says Nuclear War “Very Real Possibility”

This transcript may not be 100% accurate due to audio quality or other factors.

Abby Martin (AM): This is Abby Martin with your Empire Update wrapping up the last week and US imperialism.

Our first story paints a startling new picture of the US occupation of Afghanistan. On January 15th during the Trump administration's last days, they announced that the U.S. troop presence in America's longest war dropped to an all time low of 2500. Great news, right? Wrong! New data from the US military's Central Command shows that the number of private mercenaries now in Afghanistan has shattered all previous records. Today 18,000 private contractors supplement U.S. troop numbers in Afghanistan. Let's put that number into perspective. In 2017, Trump increased the number of private mercenaries to around 5900. This was big news since the only time that number had ever surpassed 5000 was briefly during Obama's ill fated troop surge. Now, there are almost four times that number, basically 7 contractors for every 1 U.S. troop. And that doesn't even include the number of troops from NATO partners under U.S. command, like those from Australia recently exposed for committing horrendous war crimes against civilians. That number is still over 10,000. On January 31st of this year, senior NATO officials confirmed that those troop numbers will remain the same despite the removal of some U.S. troops as part of the flimsy Taliban deal. So while the US empire wants us to focus on this number 2500 as the size of the U.S. forever war, the real number is really about 30,000 under the control of American generals. While Trump maliciously broke his promise to end the war, Biden comes into office on a campaign promise to continue the war indefinitely. This new data should emphasize the urgency in addressing the reality of this endless war and for activists to make it untenable for Biden's White House.

In our next story, Joe Biden used his major foreign policy address on February 4th to ratchet up tensions with Russia. He noted that even though the U.S. and Russia agreed to extend the new nuclear arms control treaty for 5 years, he also said, quote, "I made it clear to President Putin in a manner very different from my predecessor that the days of the U.S. rolling over in

the face of Russia's aggressive actions, interfering with our elections, cyber attacks, poisoning its citizens are over are over."

Biden's presentation of Trump's tenure as being a period of deference to Russia is completely false. In fact, under Trump, the United States withdrew from the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, launched several missile strikes against key Russian allies Syria. Insisted NATO members dramatically increased military spending and even imposed sanctions against Russia's annexation of Crimea. However, Biden's rhetoric is evidence that his administration is redoubling its commitment to the Great Power Competition Doctrine, which holds that the United States must engage in fierce conflict with Russia and China in order to maintain its domination over the globe. Under the auspices of U.S. defense, this unacceptable footing targets two countries which pose no threat whatsoever to Americans. The only threat to American life here is the Pentagon, which threatens to get us into a war that can only result in the death of millions here and abroad for nothing more than keeping a few American capitalists at the top of the global economy.

Admiral Charles Richard, the head of U.S. Strategic Command, wrote an article in the February edition of an influential Navy Journal that the United States should step up preparations for nuclear war with China or Russia. Strategic Command, or STRAT COMM, is a branch of the U.S. armed forces responsible for the nuclear arsenal. Richard wrote, quote, "There is a very real possibility that a regional crisis with Russia or China could escalate quickly to a conflict involving nuclear weapons and therefore the U.S. military must shift its principal assumption from nuclear employment is not possible to nuclear employment is a very real possibility." End quote. In 2016 during the Obama administration, the United States began a project to modernize its nuclear arsenal at the cost of one trillion dollars.

More actions in this great power competition as the U.S. Navy sailed a guided missile destroyer very appropriately named the USS John McCain, through the Taiwan Strait on February 4th. This exercise was designed to inflame tensions with China and send a hard line signal from the new administration. After the forces of dictator Chiang Kai-shek were defeated in the Chinese revolution, they fled to the island of Taiwan and were able to remain in control with U.S. support. But Beijing has never given up its claim of sovereignty over the island. The US military frequently sails warships and flies aircraft through the body of water that separates Taiwan from mainland China as an expression of its commitment to use deadly force to thwart efforts by the Chinese government to reunify with the island. This maneuver is a major provocation, and it occurring so early in Biden's tenure is a message in itself of what's to come.

END