

## Afghanistan and NATO: Figleaf Summit

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*The plan voiced at the London Afghanistan conference to pay off the Taliban is belied by the plan at the Brussels NATO conference two days earlier to bomb them into submission.*

London has been the venue of a three-ring Middle East circus over the past month. There is the ongoing Chilcot inquiry into the (il)legality of British participation in the invasion of Iraq. Two of the five committee members are Zionists — Sir Martin Gilbert a militant Zionist, and Sir Lawrence Freedman the drafter of Blair's invasion policy. Despite the deck being stacked, witness after witness has testified the invasion was illegal, and former British prime minister Tony Blair was booed after telling the inquiry he has no regrets.

Then there was an impromptu conference on "saving" Yemen, which the five major Yemeni opposition parties denounced as "intended to save the political regime in Yemen." Yemen is described by a British official as "Afghanistan with a sea".

Just as farcical was last week's summit on Afghanistan, called to "move the international effort forward in key areas of security, governance, development, and regional support." In reality, it was a cosmetic follow-up to the war council held two days earlier at NATO headquarters in Brussels, where the NATO Military Committee met, bringing together the chiefs of defence of all 28 member states along with 35 "partners", wannabes and observers — an astounding 63 nations.

The news from Afghanistan is uniformly chilling. US military deaths this January were more than double last year's record figure. Insurgents are carrying out one daring attack after another across the country, prompting NATO to launch Israeli drones in the attempt to terrify Afghans into submission. A fierce eight-hour attack on UN headquarters in Helmand last week came, ironically, as Karzai and UN Special Representative Kai Eide served up olive branches to the Taliban, removing some from their terror list and offering them a half billion dollars. Eide claims negotiations have begun, though Taliban spokesmen dismiss the offers and talk of talks.

The conferees in London piously asked that the Taliban give up their links with Al-Qaeda and stop threatening the world. But the Taliban have never tried to export their beliefs. And the supposed link with Al-Qaeda is a false flag, since the Taliban and Al-Qaeda (to what extent it even exists) have never been operating together — until recently, when the NATO surge and Pakistani offensive against its own Taliban picked up steam, presumably boosting Al-Qaeda enlistment and encouraging the very cooperation that the West is supposedly against.

US Special Envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke understands this, as revealed by his statement to reporters on the sidelines of the London summit that more than "two-thirds of the Taliban are not extremists." Ergo, if Obama wants to rid the world of

the Al-Qaeda threat, the logical thing would be to stop invading Muslim countries and inciting the people to take up arms and work with any forces against the invaders.

The Karzai regime is by now entirely threadbare. Only London summiteers give Karzai a soapbox anymore. And the only sign of democracy in Afghanistan these days are the occasional demos by Afghans hopelessly protesting the torture and murder of their loved ones by ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) troops. What is clearer each day is that the US invasion has now hardened into a civil war, with some poverty-stricken Afghans reluctantly pretending to be an army paid in dollars to face their Muslim brothers who are fighting for their country and their faith, a horrifying reality that can only mean continuing slaughter until the invaders flee.

The poor UN is flailing about helplessly in the quagmire, supporting the US in its occupation, but at the same time, warning that “widespread and systematic” secret detention of terror suspects could pave the way for charges of crimes against humanity. Western troops, notably the US and Canadian, have been arresting “suspects” and sending them to secret detention areas on military bases, often on the slightest suspicion and without the knowledge of their families. These night raids have become even more feared and hated in Afghanistan than coalition airstrikes. The scandal hit the Canadian government last month and forced the Conservatives there to shut down parliament to stave off an investigation which would most likely lead to their own demise.

At the real Afghanistan conference — the war council in Brussels, Russian Ambassador to NATO Dmitry Rogozin, with tongue bitterly in cheek, offered to rebuild the infrastructure and factories the Soviet Union built during its own ill-fated attempt to bring Afghanistan into the 20th c, undermined by US arms supplied to US-backed mujaheddin in the 1980-90s. He understandably wants this to be funded by the West, since it was responsible for the destruction in the first place.

Rogozin told *Der Spiegel* that Russia is far more concerned about the flow of heroin that became a flood after the US invasion, rather than any possible military threat from the Taliban. “Each year, 30,000 human lives are lost in Russia because of Afghan heroin.” He did not spell this out in detail, but is no doubt aware that US forces are actually abetting the smuggling, as documented by many sources, including former British ambassador to Uzbekistan Craig Murray, who himself witnessed the pretend-border controls on the Afghanistan-Uzbekistan border in 2004. Scanners and sniffing dogs were simply bypassed by the chief smuggler — current Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief of the Afghan Army Abdel Rashid Dostum, a native Uzbek who has close working relations with Uzbekistan President Islam Karimov. Rogozin accused NATO forces of ignoring the problem: “They think it’s not their problem, because Afghan heroin mostly goes to Central Asia and Russia.”

The proposal by British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and NATO General Secretary Fogh Rasmussen to double the Afghan Security Forces, soldiers and police to a level of 300,000 and speed up the withdrawal of foreign troops prompted a nervous Karzai to predict that foreign troops would be needed for 10-15 years.

Perhaps a few Taliban really have sat down with UN reps, possibly to draw them in with false promises. Not surprisingly, many starving young Afghans are willing to sell out their brothers to feed themselves and their families. But the many instances of Afghan police, soldiers — even translators — defecting to the Taliban, or suddenly turning on their masters

and collaborators and killing them before themselves dying as martyrs or escaping to freedom should be a warning to the occupiers.

This is intuitively understood by most Westerners, whether or not they admire the fighters. Despite uniformly pro-war media in the West, a majority of Canadians and Europeans (even occasionally Americans) realise the war is pointless, and want their troops to come home immediately. Germans are 80 per cent against sending further forces. Only because German Chancellor Angel Merkel's Christian Democrats faced a divided opposition and apathetic electorate was she able to stay on as leader and offer up her soldiers to the US in some kind of gruesome, misguided sacrificial offering for Germany's many past sins.

The occupation of Afghanistan was not an unpremeditated blunder, just as with the occupation of Iraq or the possible occupation of Yemen. The wars are part of the extension of US power to all corners of the globe, a process that has quietly been accelerating in the past two decades, confirmed last week by US proconsul Hillary Clinton's presence at both the Yemen and Afghanistan conferences in London, as well as their outcomes.

The current composition of ISAF reflects this consolidation, with troops from South America, Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, all the way to Korea, New Zealand and possibly soon India. Even Jordan, Egypt and the UAE have support personnel helping out. Consider for a moment: troops from all these countries and continents are, under US command, fighting a war in Central Asia, with the UN scurrying in behind them to give the whole operation a patina of respectability.

The fact that the mightiest war machine in history is being tripped up by a handful of ragged-trousered, determined young men is astounding. Obama's vow to start evacuating (excuse me, withdrawing) troops by next year, despite Gates' blustering denial and Karzai's hopes, now hovers over this criminal adventure as a sword of Damocles.

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Canadian Eric Walberg is known worldwide as a journalist specializing in the Middle East, Central Asia and Russia. A graduate of University of Toronto and Cambridge in economics, he has been writing on East-West relations since the 1980s. He has lived in both

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