

Afghanistan: NATO Intensifies Its First Asian War

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With former Joint Special Operations Command chief General Stanley McChrystal in charge of what will soon be over 150,000 U.S. and NATO troops in the Afghanistan-Pakistan war theater, Washington will conduct its largest counterinsurgency operations since those in Indochina in the 1960s and early 1970s.

NATO, established in 1949 supposedly to confront the Soviet Union and its allies in Central Europe, is waging its first land war almost 3,000 miles east of its former border with the Warsaw Pact.

The world's sole military superpower...is extending its troop deployments, bases, missile shield components, warplanes and warships to all six inhabited continents, over the past decade to Afghanistan, Australia, Bulgaria, Colombia, Djibouti, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Mali, the Philippines, Poland, Romania and Seychelles.

On January 8 the Washington Post provided North Atlantic Treaty Organization secretary general Anders Fogh Rasmussen and Swedish foreign minister Carl Bildt a column in which the two, while deferring to their big brother in Washington - "The United States has played a central role in defending the values and the security of the Euro-Atlantic community" - nevertheless asserted that "Europe can deliver and can be a real partner for the United States. That is what is happening now in the global mission in Afghanistan." [1]

Unquestioned loyalty to the trans-Atlantic partnership with the United States is synonymous with subordination to NATO, and currently the touchstone for fealty to the military bloc is blind willingness to follow the U.S. further and yet deeper into the increasingly bloody imbroglio in Afghanistan.

In addressing the ongoing and by all appearances interminable colonial war in South Asia, one which cost the U.S. and its NATO allies more lives last year than in any of the seven full years preceding it, the joint propaganda puff piece by Bildt and Rasmussen included the boast that "U.S. allies and partners in the NATO-led military operation have responded clearly to President Obama's decision to significantly increase American troop levels in the mission. In early December, the other members of the mission pledged an additional 7,000 troops, on top of the almost 40,000 non-U.S. troops already on the ground. Non-U.S. forces will eventually be about 40 percent of the total; they already endure about 40 percent of the casualties. There should be no more doubt in the United States on whether America can count on its allies; we are proving that in blood and treasure every day in Afghanistan." [2]

Their arithmetic matches that of U.S. permanent representative to NATO, Netherlands-born Ivo Daalder, who four months ago quantified what it means to be a dependable member of the bloc: "Over 40 percent of the bodybags that leave Afghanistan do not go to the U.S.

They go to other countries....” [3] Daalder has long been an advocate of NATO not so much supplementing as replacing the United Nations as arbiter of international conflicts and indeed of all important world issues. [4]

It is uncertain whether leading Western governments have formally determined what the optimal distribution and division of blood and currency, deaths and dollars/euros between the United States and its NATO partners should be in order to preserve solidarity between members of the “military alliance of democratic states in Europe and North America.” Perhaps someone in Brussels and Washington computes that lethal calculus.

Bildt, whose country is not yet a full member of NATO notwithstanding the efforts of himself and co-conspirators to surreptitiously pull Sweden into full integration with the world’s only military bloc [5], presumably spoke on behalf of the European Union – though his nation does not currently hold the EU presidency. Spain does.

However, Swedish troops serve under NATO command in Afghanistan and in recent months have been involved in several firefights in the north of the nation, where with fellow former (officially) neutral Finland it is in charge of four provinces for the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force. Bildt’s nation has lost two soldiers in the Alliance’s Asian war, the first it has sacrificed in an armed conflict since the Norwegian-Swedish War of 1814.

On February 4 and 5 the defense chiefs of all 28 full NATO member states and no doubt counterparts from many of the more than twenty partner nations – from Australia to the United Arab Emirates, Mongolia to Colombia, Bosnia to Singapore, Georgia to South Korea – that have provided or pledged troops to the bloc for its first Asian war will meet in Istanbul, Turkey to plan the next phase of the escalation of the the Afghan campaign. “The situation in Afghanistan and sending military reinforcements to join the International Security Assistance Force are expected to be the key matters of the meetings.” [6]

5,000 NATO Casualties Predicted For New Year

What reinforcements from NATO member and partner states will encounter was indicated by retired U.S. general Barry McCaffrey, who earlier this month projected that “US forces in Afghanistan should brace themselves for up to 500 casualties a month this year.” The Times of London added “The anticipated increase would produce around 3,000 American casualties this year, and a total for Western forces in Afghanistan of around 5,000 killed and wounded – the equivalent of seven infantry battalions.” [7]

By way of comparison, in 2009 there were 512 U.S. Operation Enduring Freedom and NATO International Security Assistance Force deaths in Afghanistan, more than a third of the 1,500 Western fatalities since the war began in October of 2001. McCaffrey’s numbers allow for some multiple of last year’s combined U.S. and other NATO member and partner combat deaths to occur later this year.

Such is the test – and the price – of the “Euro-Atlantic” partnership touted by Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt and NATO chief Anders Fogh Rasmussen.

Recent developments substantiate predictions of heightened NATO casualties this year, even before planned spring and summer offensives commence.

The New Year has begun with NATO announcing the deaths of over a dozen soldiers,

including six in attacks on January 11. The pace of combat deaths this year already promises a total exceeding the previous high in 2009.

The main victims of the expansion of the war in South Asia by the U.S. and NATO will remain Afghan civilians and their opposite numbers in Pakistan [8], but Western military occupation forces will not fare much better.

As deployments increase so will casualties, and both are growing steadily.

NATO Recruits Middle East Partners For Afghan War

On December 30 the Jordanian Army announced that one of its officers became the nation's first fatality in Afghanistan. Before that the United Arab Emirates was thought to be the only Arab country to supply troops to NATO for that war theater, but on the day of the loss a German news agency revealed that "NATO's website listed 90 Jordanian soldiers alongside other contributions to the multinational force." [9] It was later reported that the captain killed in Afghanistan lost his life along with seven Americans in an attack on a CIA forward operating base and was the alleged handler for what has been described as a double agent, a physician from Jordan.

Nine days after its first military loss, Jordan in the person of its foreign minister, Nasser Judeh, asserted "our presence in Afghanistan will be enhanced and increased in the coming phase. This is something that is ongoing. Jordan was one of the first countries there." [10] U.S. Secretary of State Hillary was in the nation's capital on January 8 "to discuss strategic cooperation." [11]

Jordan is a member of NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue partnership along with Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia. The United Arab Emirates is a carefully cultivated NATO, American and French military ally in the Persian Gulf and a mainstay of the Alliance's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. [12]

NATO chief Rasmussen recently gave an interview to a Danish newspaper in which he "urged Muslim nations to contribute troops for service in Afghanistan." The likely recruits are the six Arab members of the Mediterranean Dialogue and the six Gulf Cooperation Council states targeted by the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.)

Afghan War Used To Train Caucasus Armies For Local Wars

The bloc has also secured troop commitments from all three former Soviet republics in the South Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Azerbaijan, bordering both Iran and Russia, has doubled its contingent under pressure from NATO's Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia Robert Simmons [13] and recently the vice speaker of its parliament said "At the recent meeting of NATO foreign ministers a proposal was made to increase the number of servicemen in Afghanistan. If we receive an appeal, the issue on increasing the number of Azerbaijani servicemen in Afghanistan may be considered." [14] Azerbaijani officials, including President Ilham Aliyev, routinely threaten war with neighboring Armenia over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Georgia hosted U.S. Marines late last year to train the first new installment of troops from that nation to be deployed to Afghanistan. [15] Georgian troop strength is projected to reach 1,000 within months, thereby rendering the state the largest per capita contributor to

NATO's war in Afghanistan. "By March, the Georgian contingent will become about 1,000 strong, according to the Defense Ministry." [16]

The nation's mercurial and bellicose head of state, U.S.-educated Mikheil Saakashvili, said of the Afghan deployment: "This is a unique chance for our soldiers to receive a real combat baptism. We do not need the army only for showing off at military parades." [17] Saakashvili meant that crack Georgian military forces trained by the U.S. Marine Corps and serving under NATO in Afghanistan will be better prepared for the next war with Russia over South Ossetia and Abkhazia when they return home.

On January 10 the first Afghanistan-bound Armenian troops "depart[ed] for Germany for training before joining the ISAF mission in Afghanistan" and "will be in Afghanistan in mid-February." [18]

Unlike its neighbors Azerbaijan and Georgia, Armenia is a member of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), seen by many observers as a bulwark against further NATO expansion into former Soviet space. Although Armenia sent a small contingent of troops to Iraq earlier, they were deployed under a bilateral arrangement with the U.S. and did not serve under NATO command as they will in Afghanistan. Armenian troops will be the first from the CSTO to do so.

Another former Soviet republic, Estonia, a full member of NATO since 2004, announced this month that in keeping with other Alliance members and partners from five continents it was prepared to increase its Afghan war contingent. "150 soldiers from the Baltic country are involved in the conflict and it's likely that more troops are going to be sent." [19]

NATO's War Trajectory: From Southeastern Europe To South Asia

The North Atlantic military bloc, the only one in the world since the formal dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in 1991, effected its transition from an alleged defensive organization to an active out of area perpetrator of armed aggression with the 78-day Operation Allied Force air war against Yugoslavia in 1999. Fifteen months after that conflict ended NATO invoked its Article 5 mutual military assistance provision to join the U.S. in Afghanistan and in the general global war on terror announced by the American administration.

Currently all six former Yugoslav federal republics except for Serbia, which is also marked for further NATO integration and will in turn be pressured for troops, have committed forces to serve under NATO in the Afghan war zone.

Late last month Defense Minister Selmo Cikotic confirmed that "Bosnia is planning to send troops next year to join the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan." [20]

A Croatian soldier was injured in Afghanistan on December 30 in an attack of an undisclosed nature.

Macedonia is a perennial candidate for full NATO membership that has attempted to prove its bona fides to the Alliance by sending troops to, first, Iraq and now Afghanistan. It will not be accepted until it changes its name under foreign pressure and effectively cedes its northwest region to Kosovo, an artificial political entity violently forged by NATO.

On January 8 the country dispatched 150 troops for a new rotation. The forces will join a

British military unit. Earlier the Macedonian Defense Ministry announced that it was increasing troop strength to over 243, a fifty percent boost.

In neighboring Bulgaria a news source recently divulged that the nation was adding deployments to Afghanistan which will bring the country's troops there to over 300.

Poland: NATO Uses Afghan War To Train Army For Combat, Warfare

Late in December Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski made a tour of inspection to the NATO Joint Force Training Center in Bydgoszcz and said, "I think that slowly but consistently we are implementing our strategy in Afghanistan. We have completed our missions in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Chad and strengthened the one in Afghanistan. I think that, as a result, the Polish Army is getting an experience there and entering NATO's first league...." [21]

Poland has pledged an additional 600 troops for the war this year and the total number will reach 2,600, the largest overseas military deployment in the nation's history, 100 more than it had deployed in Iraq where it lost 22 soldiers.

For Poland, as with fellows neighbors of Russia like Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Latvia and Lithuania [22], NATO is supplying military training and combat experience for future action nearer home. Toward the end of last year a Polish officer, speaking of his country's National Forces Reserve, said that "in the event of war, the reserve units could be mobilised" and that they will "train on a regular basis to keep up their combat skills in the event of warfare." [23] The application of such training is not for Afghanistan.

The major, older NATO nations are also stepping up their roles in the Afghan conflict.

Even before the January 28 conference on Afghanistan to be held in London, at and after which it is expected that NATO troop contributions will expand even beyond the additional 7,000 pledged since U.S. President Obama's troops surge announcement last December 1, the host nation Britain has assigned several hundred more troops. The country's death toll reached 246 early this year.

France: Back In NATO Military Command, In Afghanistan For The Duration

On January 8 French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who has already sent 2,600 soldiers to Afghanistan, "defended his country's military force in Afghanistan, saying...that now is not the time to pull out."

He also "insisted on the importance of France's participation in NATO. France rejoined NATO's integrated military command in 2009, more than 40 years after quitting it and kicking American military bases off French soil." [24]

On January 4 Der Spiegel reported that the U.S. "has decided to send 2,500 soldiers to Kunduz," where German forces called in a NATO air strike in early September of last year that killed 150 civilians [25], "the region under German command in the northern part of the country. The move is sure to increase the pressure on Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin." Pressure, that is, to dispense with the limit of 4,500 troops imposed by the parliament, the Bundestag, and "intensify the debate in Germany about sending more troops. Internally, the government in Berlin has already decided to increase German troop numbers by up to 2,000 soldiers...." [26] American troops would serve under German command for the first time in Afghanistan or anywhere else.

German Troops “Trained To Kill”

The following day the new Chairman of the Munich Security Conference, Wolfgang Ischinger, in recent years German ambassador to the United States and to Britain, was quoted as saying that “Germany must confront the reality that its soldiers are trained to kill” and that “certain military facts had to be confronted.”

Ischinger stated in his own words: “Soldiers are trained to kill others, or at least to threaten people in a way that they consider it plausible that they will be killed if they don’t do what is expected of them.”

He urged a troop increase in Afghanistan and added, “If we send too many, it can’t get so bad. If we send too few, it could be that the whole thing doesn’t work...We are building fewer wells, and unfortunately have to shoot more.” [27]

The war in Afghanistan, like that against Yugoslavia in 1999, is providing Germany the opportunity of reemerging on the world military stage. [28]

Scandinavia, Spain: Killing And Dying In South Asia

The Norwegian press this year has reported on the heightened combat role of its nation’s troops. On New Year’s Eve a “Norwegian patrol came under fire from several directions. The fighting lasted for seven hours.” [29] The country’s Defense Ministry claimed that several Afghan insurgents were killed. Norwegian troops are also not constructing wells; neither are their Finnish and Swedish counterparts who have been in regular firefights in northern Afghanistan.

“The Christmas period has seen troops from Norway involved in several battles across northern Afghanistan,” one of which “led to NATO being called on to provide assistance from the air.”

“On Christmas Day a mission with drone and helicopter support was deployed to an under siege Afghan border post by Norwegian and Afghan troops.” [30]

At the beginning of January “it was announced that Norwegian forces, which number around 500 in Afghanistan, were involved in fighting every third day on average.” [31]

On January 8 a Danish soldier was killed and five were injured in Helmand province. Denmark, which has 700 troops assigned to NATO, has lost 29 military personnel in the Afghan war.

On January 8 the Spanish contingent in Afghanistan – “Spain currently has about 800 troops serving with the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, and plans to deploy an additional 220 soldiers to that nation” [32] – lost a soldier, an Ecuadorian national, to a non-combat injury, bringing Spain’s toll to 90 Afghan war-related deaths. Another 150 soldiers have been seriously injured.

The Spanish government refuses to name a withdrawal date and “[J]udging by the amazing Spanish base being built close to the airport of the capital of the Province of Badghis, the withdrawal will not come soon.

“This base will have a capacity to accommodate around 300,000 soldiers and its cost will

exceed 44 million euros. The base will have an extension of around 173 acres and a perimeter of 3 miles." [33]

Spanish troops killed one Afghan civilian and wounded another in late December in Herat province.

During the same period "The Dutch television channel RTL news...obtained evidence that, it claims, shows that Dutch troops in Afghanistan have been responsible for more than 100 civilian deaths." [34]

On December 30 four more Canadian soldiers were killed in Afghanistan, bringing Canada's death tally to 138, the third largest of any NATO state and the largest per capita.

Two Italian troops were among those wounded on December 28 when an Afghan National Army soldier fired on NATO troops. Italy has lost 22 soldiers in the war and will add 1,000 more troops this year to the 3,200 already in Afghanistan.

Concluding Remarks

With former Joint Special Operations Command chief General Stanley McChrystal in charge of what will soon be over 150,000 U.S. and NATO troops in the Afghanistan-Pakistan war theater, Washington will conduct its largest counterinsurgency operations since those in Indochina in the 1960s and early 1970s.

The New York Times reported in late December that "Secretive branches of the military's Special Operations forces have increased counterterrorism missions...in Afghanistan and, because of their success, plan an even bigger expansion next year, according to American commanders."

"Senior military officials say it is not surprising that the commandos are playing such an important role in the fight, particularly because Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, the senior American and NATO officer in Afghanistan, led the Joint Special Operations Command for five years.

"In addition to the classified American commando missions, military officials say that other NATO special operations forces have teamed up...." [35]

NATO, established in 1949 supposedly to confront the Soviet Union and its allies in Central Europe, is waging its first land war almost 3,000 miles east of its former border with the Warsaw Pact.

Associated Press reported on January 12 that the Obama White House is to request a record \$708 billion for the Pentagon for next year and the first of what will become regular emergency requests for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, overwhelmingly for the first: \$33 billion.

The integration of U.S. armed forces and those of the other fifty nations providing troops for NATO in Afghanistan, a global NATO in embryo [36], is not limited to the war in Afghanistan.

Last week it was reported that the chief of the U.S. Joint Forces Command, Marine Corps General James Mattis, who was also NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Transformation [ACT] until last September, "pitched to Defense Secretary Robert Gates a proposal to

rename the Norfolk, Va.-based organization, aiming to reflect how much it works with non-American entities and officials.

“34 senior officers from both NATO and ‘Partnership for Peace member nations, as well as Asia Pacific, African and Middle Eastern nations,’ are hosted by the command. Nearly 90 officials from 48 nations ‘routinely collaborate’ with the joint organization,” according to Mattis. [37]

His memo to Pentagon chief Gates contained this core recommendation:

“In alignment with our mission and consistent with the continued importance of partnership with multinational partners, request your approval to immediately pursue the renaming of U.S. Joint Forces Command to U.S. Joint and Coalition Forces Command. This [proposed] name will better reflect the day-to-day reality of this non-geographically-oriented command and signify a command focused on more than internal U.S. priorities.” [38]

The world’s sole military superpower, as President Barack Obama referred to the nation whose commander-in-chief he is on the occasion of receiving the now even further tarnished Nobel Peace Prize, is extending its troop deployments, bases, missile shield components, warplanes and warships to all six inhabited continents, over the past decade to Afghanistan, Australia, Bulgaria, Colombia, Djibouti, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Mali, the Philippines, Poland, Romania and Seychelles.

The U.S. has the mightiest and most lethal military arsenal in human history at its disposal and the world’s second-largest standing army (only China’s having more troops). It intends to spend over \$700 billion next year on its defense budget and will continue to add on special appropriations for the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere.

It also is in charge of the world’s first global military bloc, NATO, which is participating with the U.S. in an expanding war in Asia with forces from over a quarter of the world’s nations under its command.

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