

Afghanistan: World's Longest War Has Just Begun

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Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)
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The higher number of Defense Department contractors, 160,000, added to over 100,000 troops - with the likely prospect of both numbers climbing yet more - will result in over a quarter of a million U.S. personnel serving under the Pentagon and NATO. The latter has 42,000 non-U.S. troops fighting under its command currently and pledges of 8,000 more to date, with thousands in addition to be conscripted after the London conference on Afghanistan next month. Approximately 35,000 U.S. soldiers are also assigned to NATO's ISAF and if the 33,000 new American troops are similarly deployed the North Atlantic bloc will have over 120,000 forces fighting a land war in Asia. Along with a Pakistani army of 700,000 active duty troops fighting on the other side of the border and an Afghan army of 100,000 soldiers, there will soon be well over a million military personnel engaged in a war with a few hundred al-Qaeda and a few thousand Taliban forces.

Despite U.S. President Barack Obama's pledge in his December 1 address at the West Point Military Academy that deploying 30,000 more of his nation's troops to Afghanistan would be coupled with "a goal of starting to withdraw forces from the country in July 2011," everything else he has said and all the facts on the ground suggest that the war will continue into the indefinite future.

At a press conference a week before the West Point troop surge announcement he said "it is my intention to finish the job," and in his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech on December 10 he affirmed: "We must begin by acknowledging the hard truth: We will not eradicate violent conflict in our lifetimes."

History establishes that it is easier to deploy to than to withdraw from an active war zone.

The White House has already increased U.S. troop strength in Afghanistan from 32,000 at the beginning of the year to over twice that amount - 68,000 - currently, with the first contingent of even more reinforcements arriving this week. The 30,000 additional troops headed to the war front and the 3,000 more support forces pledged by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates will push American military personnel in Afghanistan to over 100,000.

That number, likely to be increased yet further and accompanied by a veritable invasion of private military contractors and State Department operatives, will be augmented by over 10,000 more non-U.S. troops serving under the North Atlantic Treaty Organization-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), bringing combined American and NATO regular military forces to well over 150,000 and total Western personnel to over 300,000 with an estimated surge of as many as 56,000 new U.S. contractors. With the addition of assorted security, intelligence, private contracting and other military camp followers from NATO nations, the figure could top a third of a million.

An occupation and warfighting force of those dimensions is not designed for a limited mission or a short stay.

In fact on December 6 U.S. National Security Adviser James Jones (former top military commander for NATO in Europe) gave the lie to the 2011 withdrawal anodyne in an interview with CNN when he brashly asserted “We have strategic interests in South Asia that should not be measured in terms of finite times. We’re going to be in the region for a long time.”

Jones also emphasized the extension of the war in space as well as time by stating American reinforcements and redeployments would concentrate on eastern and southern Afghanistan to “eliminate the safe havens” inside Pakistan, a nation with a population of 175 million and nuclear weapons.

His claims, more authoritative than those of the president he serves, were echoed by Pentagon chief Robert Gates. Earlier this week it was reported that “In a visit to the war zone last week, U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates told Afghanistan’s senior military officials that while the U.S. looks forward to the day when the Afghans can take control of their country, the United States would have a large number of forces in Afghanistan for some time beyond July 2011.”

Gates in his own words: “This is a relationship forged in blood. We will see it [through] to the end.” [1]

To demonstrate the scale of the U.S. and NATO intensification of the war in Afghanistan – so urgent, evidently, that it is being qualitatively escalated during the Christmas season – in addition to Gates’s visit to the Afghan war front, Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, new German Defense Minister Karl-Theodor Zu Guttenberg and other top Western military and political leaders have recently traveled to Afghanistan to inspect their respective nations’ military forces stationed there.

On December 16 the first of the latest 30,000 U.S. troops committed to the war and the 16,000 that have received deployment orders since Obama’s December 1 speech, 1,500 Marines, arrived in the nation, prompting Pentagon Press Secretary Geoff Morrell to crow “The surge has begun in earnest.” [2]

The Washington Post ran a feature on December 16 based on a report by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) – “which provides background information to members of Congress on a bipartisan basis” – in which the CRS stated “it expects an additional 26,000 to 56,000 contractors to be sent to Afghanistan. That would bring the number of contractors in the country to anywhere from 130,000 to 160,000.”

In addition, that already astronomical figure “could increase further if the new [administration] strategy includes a more robust construction and nation building effort.” The report also remarked that as of a year ago contractors accounted for 69 percent of Defense Department personnel in Afghanistan and as such “represented the highest recorded percentage of contractors used by the Defense Department in any conflict in the history of the United States.” [3]

The higher number of Defense Department contractors, 160,000, added to over 100,000

troops - with the likely prospect of both numbers climbing yet more - will result in over a quarter of a million U.S. personnel serving under the Pentagon and NATO. The latter has 42,000 non-U.S. troops fighting under its command currently and pledges of 8,000 more to date, with thousands in addition to be conscripted after the London conference on Afghanistan next month. Approximately 35,000 U.S. soldiers are also assigned to NATO's ISAF and if the 33,000 new American troops are similarly deployed the North Atlantic bloc will have over 120,000 forces fighting a land war in Asia. Along with a Pakistani army of 700,000 active duty troops fighting on the other side of the border and an Afghan army of 100,000 soldiers, there will soon be well over a million military personnel engaged in a war with a few hundred al-Qaeda and a few thousand Taliban forces.

Washington's Afghan surge is not limited to uniformed personnel. The Wall Street Journal reported that "The White House hopes to have 1,000 State Department, Treasury and Department of Agriculture personnel in Afghanistan by next month, up from 300 a year ago."

The newspaper revealed that a former psychiatric hospital in the state of Indiana is currently "the staging ground for one of the biggest deployments of U.S. civilians since the Vietnam War." Non-Pentagon government officials en route to Afghanistan "are often paired with members of the Indiana National Guard, who are preparing for their own deployment in Afghanistan.

"Trainees spend a week on a make-believe forward operating base in the forest, where they go through military operations with the National Guard as if they were already deployed in Afghanistan. The civilian recruits learn to perform their own security functions." [4]

The dramatic escalation of the war is also not limited to increases in personnel. The U.S. Defense Department recently announced that it was expanding the deployment of Stealth warplanes and high-altitude, long-endurance Reaper "hunter-killer" drones which are equipped with fifteen times more deadly missiles than its Predator predecessor. "[T]he Air Force is looking toward developing unmanned, long-range surveillance aircraft that also can carry warheads so they can be used during combat." [5]

The U.S. Air Force's latest stealth reconnaissance drone, dubbed "the Beast of Kandahar," resembles "the much larger, swept-wing B-2 Stealth bomber, and officials confirmed this month that the military has begun using the classified, unarmed drone in Afghanistan." [6]

The skies over Afghanistan are crisscrossed by U.S. and NATO surveillance aircraft, bombers and helicopter gunships to such a degree that for Afghans to even leave their homes means to risk their lives. Three Afghans were killed and one wounded on December 17 in Kandahar province when NATO attack helicopters obliterated their minibus.

Matters are no less deadly on the Pakistani side of the border. The day before the Afghan attack, the U.S. launched ten missiles from five drones in the second of two assaults, "an unusually intense bombardment," [7] into North Waziristan, killing at least twenty people, identified as always as Taliban and al-Qaeda targets.

A Los Angeles Times feature on December 13 revealed that "Senior US officials are pushing to expand CIA drone strikes beyond Pakistan's tribal region.

"After confirmation that the CIA has been operating drone strikes in Pakistani territory, a

new report says the US is seeking to expand the attacks into the country's cities."

The report added that "CIA spokesman George Little quoted spy agency Director Leon Panetta as saying that US has been launching the attacks from secret airfields in Pakistan and Afghanistan." [8]

The U.S. is not alone in ratcheting up the longest and largest war in the world.

On December 13 U.S. Central Command chief General David Petraeus said "The number of European NATO troops in Afghanistan should swell beyond the 8,000 troops already promised...." [9]

The Pentagon is dispatching 4,000 101st Airborne paratroopers to Kandahar in southern Afghanistan in addition to a parachute battalion from the 82nd Airborne to join an American Stryker brigade and NATO ally Canada's forces there. The deployments are part of a plan to "flood areas close to Afghanistan's second largest city with Canadian and U.S. troops" and to "assist Canadian Forces to create a security noose around Kandahar City." [10]

Reuters recently reported that "Germany plans to send up to 2,000 more soldiers to Afghanistan in response to requests from the United States and other NATO partners," citing the Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung which wrote "the United States and NATO members had already received signals to this effect." [11] Germany currently has 4,500 troops stationed in Afghanistan, the third largest contingent after the U.S. and Britain. The 4,500 figure is the maximum number permitted by the nation's parliament, but will soon be exceeded in another reversal of the nation's post-World War II limits on waging wars abroad.

Agence France-Presse reported that "NATO hopes to send two tactical groups, up to 3,000 troops, to north Afghanistan under German command," according to German General Karl-Heinz Lather, the chief of staff of NATO's Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, who said "From a military point of view, the allied headquarters in Europe thinks it necessary to send two tactical groups into this zone." [12]

Herve Morin, the defense minister of France, which has 3,300 troops under NATO command in Afghanistan, announced that he may deploy "medium-sized supplementary troops" after the January 28 conference on Afghanistan in London. [13] 800 French Legionnaires are at the moment engaged in a fierce combat operation along with American counterparts east of the Afghan capital.

The top NATO military commander in Europe, Admiral James Stavridis, was in Poland earlier this week to "to discuss the Alliance's ISAF mission in Afghanistan" [14] and to recruit more Polish troops for the war. Warsaw has already pledged to raise its force level to nearly 3,000 troops as it recently signed a status of forces agreement to base U.S. missiles and troops, the first foreign soldiers on its soil since the collapse of the Warsaw Pact eighteen years ago.

The Czech Republic "is for the first time in history sending its own helicopter unit to Afghanistan."

"Czech soldiers and three upgraded Mi-171S transport helicopters will be...sent to the Sarana base in the southeast of the country to serve the needs of the NATO forces in the ISAF mission....The unit underwent comprehensive training for one and half a years, for instance in the Alps mountains and in desert areas in Israel and Texas....Czech soldiers will be first trained by their U.S. colleagues." [15]

Spain has announced its will send more than 500 additional soldiers to Afghanistan, joining NATO and NATO partner states like Italy (1,000), Georgia (1,000), Britain, Hungary, Slovakia, Colombia, South Korea, Mongolia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Armenia in committing new forces. Troops from five continents with Australia included.

Not only full NATO member states but Partnership for Peace nations are being strong-armed to provide more troops. Finland and Sweden, both of which have increased their troop strength in northern Afghanistan in recent months, have been involved in their first combat operations since World War II in the first case and in almost 200 years in the second. Troops from both nations were engaged in the latest of a series of firefights on December 13.

The Bundeswehr will soon train the first contingent of troops from former Soviet republic and current Collective Security Treaty Organization member Armenia in Germany for action in Afghanistan.

The defense minister of nominally neutral Austria, Norbert Darabos, said that the U.S. and Britain were bullying his nation to send more troops to Afghanistan, bemoaning the fact that “America’s pressure on Austria is relatively intense, sometimes it is a little bit improper” and asserting that “Austria is a sovereign country [which] will not give in to the pressure.” [16]

What Darabos may be concerned about in part is the rising rate of NATO casualties in Afghanistan. During the past few days two Dutch troops were injured, one critically, in a roadside bomb attack in Uruzgan province.

An Estonian soldier was killed in a similar incident in Helmand province, bringing the country’s casualties to four killed and 23 wounded this year.

Two more British soldiers were killed this week, raising United Kingdom deaths to 239, 102 this year.

Nearly 500 Western soldiers have been killed so far this year, 305 of them American, compared to 155 U.S. military personnel lost during all of last year.

Undaunted, on December 16 the U.S. House of Representatives – by a vote of 395 to 34 – “passed a massive military spending bill to defray annual expenses, fund operations in Afghanistan, and pay for the troop withdrawal from Iraq.”

The \$636.3 billion package, “which does not include monies for President Barack Obama’s recently announced decision to send 30,000 more US troops to Afghanistan,” allots “80 million to acquire more unmanned Predator drones, a key tool in the US air war in Afghanistan and Pakistan....With little public debate in the United States, the pace of the drone bombing raids has steadily increased, starting last year during ex-president George W. Bush’s final months in office and now under Obama’s tenure.” [17]

In approving the Pentagon’s request, the American Congress endorsed “\$130 billion to cover the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq” excluding an “estimated \$30 billion that will be needed to fund President Barack Obama’s recent decision to send 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan.”

The bill also authorized the funding of “new Air Force global strike programs – including work on new manned and unmanned systems – Army brigade combat team modernization, a Navy attack submarine, and the Navy’s new Carrier Long-Range Strike system....Analysts called the decision a victory for Defense Secretary Robert Gates, who has lobbied the White

House for more funding.

“The Obama administration will add \$100 billion to the Pentagon’s 2011-15 base budget plan to cover the rising cost of personnel and pressing modernization needs....” [18]

Militarism is a psychopathology and war can be an addiction.

Analyst Andrei Grozin of the Central Asia Department of the Institute of the CIS [Commonwealth of Independent States] Countries in Russia averred an opinion of his own on why the United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan and acquired military bases in Central Asia and why they will be loath to leave.

“[I]t’s important for Americans to coordinate the efforts of various structures, which are interested in, on the one hand, reducing traditional Russian influence on the authorities and society and preventing China from strengthening its influence, on the other hand....”

The same source’s comments were paraphrased: “One of the apparent geopolitical interests of the US in the region is to establish control over energy resources and pipelines that transport oil and gas to Central and Western Europe through Russia and also to China and Iran.” [19]

The prolongation and unprecedented expansion of the world’s lengthiest war, now in its ninth and on January 1 to enter its tenth calendar year, are by no means limited to alleged concerns over al-Qaeda, evil and opium poppies.

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Notes

- 1) Associated Press, December 14, 2009
- 2) Associated Press, December 16, 2009
- 3) Washington Post, December 16, 2009
- 4) Wall Street Journal, December 18, 2009
- 5) Associated Press, December 16, 2009
- 6) Ibid
- 7) Trend News Agency, December 18, 2009
- 8) Press TV, December 14, 2009
- 9) Trend News Agency, December 13, 2009
- 10) Canwest News Service, December 17, 2009
- 11) Reuters, December 16, 2009
- 12) Agence France-Presse, December 15, 2009
- 13) Xinhua News Agency, December 17, 2009
- 14) Polish Radio, December 14, 2009
- 15) Czech News Agency, December 14, 2009
- 16) Trend News Agency, December 18, 2009
- 17) Agence France-Presse, December 17, 2009
- 18) Defense News, December 11, 2009
- 19) Voice of Russia, December 16, 2009

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