

Central Asia: U.S. Military Buildup On Chinese, Iranian And Russian Borders

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On August 4 the chairman of the NATO Military Committee, Italian Admiral Giampaolo Di Paola, concluded an official visit to Australia during which he met with the nation's acting Chief of Defence and officials from the Department of Defence. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, despite its name, has strayed far from its point of origin 61 years ago, extending its grasp from North America and Western Europe to Asia and the South Pacific.

Di Paola's deliberations with his Australian counterparts centered on "the need for NATO to work together with strategic partners like Australia, given that Euro-Atlantic security is more and more interconnected to Euro-Asian and Asian-Pacific regions."

Australia is the largest troop contributor among non-NATO states to the Alliance's war effort in South Asia, providing 1,550 troops for NATO's International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.

In an address he delivered at the Australian National University in Canberra, the head of NATO's top military body (whose first head was General Omar Bradley) spoke on the bloc's "New Strategic Concept and the relationship with Global Partners":

"In this new context, because of the vulnerabilities created by globalization and the rapid pace at which it occurred, it is all the more essential for us to maintain global connectivity if we are to successfully tackle 21st Century challenges and trends." [1]

NATO, the world's only and history's first international military bloc, now counts among its members and global partners at least 70 nations on five continents, and has troops from seven Asia-Pacific nations (Australia, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea and Tonga) serving under its command in Afghanistan.

It has expanded from the northern Atlantic Ocean region over the equator to the Antipodes and the reach of its operations extends from the Arctic Ocean to the Antarctic, from Africa's Gulf of Guinea to the Gulf of Mexico, the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Aden.

As Admiral Di Paola maintains, securing the safety of Washington and Brussels requires the expansion of a U.S.-dominated military alliance into "the Euro-Asian and Asian-Pacific regions." Having subdued and subordinated almost all of Europe through membership and partnership expansion over the last eleven years, at its Lisbon summit this November NATO will formalize its 21st century Strategic Concept in respect to placing the European continent under a U.S.-controlled interceptor missile system and expanding military partnerships into those corners of the planet so far left unincorporated into the network of the global, expeditionary military formation among other initiatives.

NATO troop deployments, utilization and upgrading of bases, armed combat operations, air patrols, naval surveillance and interdiction, armed forces training programs and regular military exercises now occur on the borders and off the coasts of China (Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan and Tajikistan), Iran (Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Iraq, Pakistan, Qatar, Turkmenistan, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates) and Russia (Azerbaijan, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine). There are no longer buffer states between the Western military alliance and major non-NATO nations in Eurasia.

At the same time the Pentagon is escalating at an unparalleled pace military provocations near China - the recently concluded Invincible Spirit war games in the Sea of Japan with the nuclear-powered supercarrier USS George Washington, the same aircraft carrier docking in central Vietnam along with the guided missile destroyer USS John S. McCain on August 8 for unprecedented naval exercises in the South China Sea, the Pentagon announcing that the George Washington will soon enter the Yellow Sea near China's coastline - and leading the largest-ever Khaan Quest military exercises in Mongolia with the participation of, for the first time, troops from fellow NATO nations Germany and Canada along with France, as well as four Asian NATO candidates that were included in Khaan Quest 2009: India, Japan, South Korea and Singapore. Mongolia shares borders with China and Russia.

Russia, China and Iran are the only major nations outside Latin America that serve as serious barriers to American worldwide military expansion and dominance. By driving into former Soviet territory in the Caspian Sea basin and Central Asia, the Pentagon and NATO are completing their military advance on all three nations. Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are situated in a compact zone between China, Iran and Russia, and all but Uzbekistan border one or more of the three nations.

Notwithstanding the deadly upheavals in Kyrgyzstan this April and June, the U.S. and NATO have substantially increased the deployment of troops - at least 50,000 a month - and equipment through the nation for the West's 150,000-troop, nine-year war in Afghanistan. Washington and Brussels have activated the Northern Distribution Network to transport supplies to the Afghan war front from ports on the Baltic, Black and Caspian Seas through the Caucasus and Central Asia, pulling Azerbaijan and the five Central Asian states deeper into the Western military phalanx.

This year leading Pentagon, State Department and NATO officials have paid visits to Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, including the first trip by a U.S. secretary of defense in five years and a secretary of state in eighteen years to the first-named state. In April President Obama secured military overflight and transit rights from his Kazakh opposite number, President Nursultan Nazarbayev, in a nation adjoining China and Russia.

U.S. ambassador-designate to Azerbaijan, preeminent post-Soviet space hand Matthew Bryza, told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on July 20 that his future host country, "located at the crossroads of Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia, and bordering Iran," immediately after September 11, 2001 "offered us unlimited overflights...for our military aircraft."

He added: "Today, Azerbaijan continues to provide valuable overflight, refueling, and

landing rights for U.S. and coalition aircraft bound for Afghanistan.

“Azerbaijan has also contributed troops to U.S. and coalition military operations in Afghanistan, as well as Kosovo and Iraq....Azerbaijan has also remained a steadfast supporter of Israel.” [2]

At the same hearing the ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Richard Lugar, connected the war in Afghanistan and beyond with America’s trans-Eurasian energy campaign against Russia and Iran: Troops and military equipment go to the east and oil and natural gas to the west by the same route.

“I am concerned that the continuing absence of a Senate-confirmed US representative there [Azerbaijan] could impede progress toward several US national security goals. Our Committee has worked closely with our Envoy for Eurasian Energy, Ambassador Richard Morningstar, to promote the expansion of the Nabucco pipeline, the key element of a southern energy corridor that would stretch from the Caspian region to Europe.

“Progress on this measure will allow our allies to diversify energy supplies, while providing nations in the region with a focus for closer cooperation. The Nabucco pipeline’s commercial and political viability will depend on both Azerbaijan’s commitment of its indigenous resources and its willingness to serve as a transport hub for Central Asian energy across the Caspian from Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and possibly other countries.

“A close partnership with Azerbaijan and other nations in the South Caucasus will also be essential to ensure the transit of supplies to our troops in the Middle East and to resolve complex disputes concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave.” [3]

Reinhard Mitschek, managing director of Nabucco Gas Pipeline International GmbH in charge of the Western natural gas project from Kazakhstan to Europe, underscored Lugar’s point this June in stating “Europe is interested in the purchasing of natural gas from Azerbaijan, Egypt, Iraq and Turkmenistan via the Nabucco pipeline. We came into agreement. Iran’s participation in this project is not a point at issue.” [4]

In the same month Agence France-Presse quoted the U.S. ambassador to Tajikistan, Ken Gross, confirming that the Pentagon plans to construct a new military facility in the Central Asian nation: “The plan [includes] almost \$10 million to build [a] national training center for the Tajik armed forces.” The new base is to be called the Karatag National Training Center and, according to Gross, could house U.S. military personnel. [5]

The August 7 edition of the Washington Post substantiated earlier reports that the U.S. plans to establish a comparable base in Kyrgyzstan, which like Tajikistan borders China.

The article revealed that “The United States is planning to move ahead with construction of a \$10 million military training base in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, the site of a bloody uprising in June....Called the Osh Polygon, the base was first proposed under former Kyrgyz president Kurmanbek Bakiyev as a facility to train Kyrgyz troops for counterterrorism operations. After the ouster of Bakiyev...discussions continued under the new Kyrgyz president, Roza Otunbayeva, with whose government Washington is trying to broaden relationships...Osh Polygon will consist of a secure garrison compound with officers’ quarters and barracks for enlisted personnel, plus range facilities, firing pistols, rifles, crew-served weapons and explosive ordnance....” [6]

Earlier this month the EurasiaNet website posted a feature titled "Is the U.S. Violating Turkmenistan's Neutrality with the NDN?" Quoting a Russian source, the piece describes the role of the U.S. and NATO Northern Distribution Network (NDN) in the Turkmen capital: "U.S. freight transited through Ashgabat is in fact military in nature and even constitutes criminal contraband. Airport employees claim they saw armored vehicles, combat helicopters and crates of ammunition. These reports challenge both the notion of Turkmen neutrality and the supposed nature of the bilateral agreement between Turkmenistan and the U.S."

Turkmenistan is a member of the NATO Partnership for Peace program, but its government doesn't acknowledge supporting U.S. war efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq, not to mention those being prepared against Iran, its neighbor to the north.

However, "The U.S. has gained access to use almost all the military airfields of Turkmenistan, including the airport in Nebit-Dag near the Iranian border, which was reconstructed at American expense. In September 2004, at the Mary-2 airfield, U.S. military experts appeared and began reconstructing the facility with the help of Arab construction companies, which provoked the protest of Moscow....An American military contingent is located in Ashgabat to oversee the operations related to refueling of military airplanes. NATO is also trying to open up a land corridor to bring freight by road and rail...." [7]

With regards to Uzbekistan, where German NATO troops remain at the Termez airbase although the U.S. military was ousted in 2005, Leonid Gusev of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations was cited last month maintaining that "The U.S. is interested in close cooperation with Uzbekistan, as the Central Asian country is strategically important for the U.S." and that "Uzbek authorities have recently strengthened cooperation with the U.S. and other Western countries."

Gusev added: "Now non-military goods are delivered through Uzbekistan to Afghanistan for NATO troops.

"There is a free industrial and economic zone, 'Navoi,' in Uzbekistan on the border with Afghanistan. It is the main transit point for shipments of goods to Afghanistan.

"This zone may soon be transformed into a transcontinental forwarding air point, which will link the Far East, South-East Asia, South Asia and Europe....[T]he U.S. plans to build a new military base near the Uzbek border to turn Uzbekistan into an important transit point for access to Afghanistan....It is planned to build an operational center, living accommodation, [a] tactical operations center, warehouses, [a] training complex, logistics center...etc. within this project." [8]

Last week Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad hosted Afghan and Tajik presidents Hamid Karzai and Emomali Rahmon in Tehran and, according to a Reuters report, "Iran's president told the leaders of Afghanistan and Tajikistan...that the three neighbors could provide a counterweight to NATO in Asia once foreign troops quit the region." Advice that China and Russia would also be wise to heed.

Ahmadinejad was quoted during a meeting with his counterparts stating "The Europeans and NATO are not interested in the progress of our three countries. Those who put pressure from abroad are unwanted guests [and] should leave, sooner or later." [9]

With the announcement of new U.S. military bases in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in addition

to the indefinite maintenance of those in the latter country, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and with American and NATO military strength in Afghanistan at a record 150,000 troops, there is no indication that the Pentagon and the North Atlantic military bloc intend to leave the strategic arc that begins in the South Caucasus and ends at the Chinese border. [10]

Notes

- 1) North Atlantic Treaty Organization
Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe
August 5, 2010
- 2) Azeri Press Agency, July 22, 2010
- 3) Ibid
- 4) Azeri Press Agency, June 23, 2010
- 5) Agence France-Presse, June 26, 2010
- 6) Walter Pincus, U.S. base in Kyrgyzstan remains on track despite tensions
Washington Post, August 7, 2010
- 7) EurasiaNet, August 1, 2010
- 8) Trend News Agency, July 15, 2010
- 9) Reuters, August 5, 2010
- 10) NATO Pulls Pakistan Into Its Global Network
<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2010/07/23/nato-pulls-pakistan-into-its-global-network>
Afghan War: Petraeus Expands U.S. Military Presence Throughout Eurasia

<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2010/07/05/afghan-war-petraeus-expands-u-s-military-presence-throughout-eurasia>

Pentagon Chief In Azerbaijan: Afghan War Arc Stretches To Caspian And Caucasus

<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2010/06/08/1761/>

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<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2010/04/15/kazakhstan-u-s-nato-seek-military-outpost-between-russia-and-china>

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<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2010/04/08/kyrgyzstan-and-the-battle-for-central-asia>

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