

NATO Expands Afghan War Into Pakistan

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On October 7 the United States and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization military allies will begin the tenth year of their war in Afghanistan, over 3,000 miles from NATO Headquarters in Brussels.

The following month midterm elections will be held in the U.S. and NATO will hold a two-day summit in Portugal. The American administration is eager to achieve, or appear to have achieved, a foreign policy triumph in an effort to retain Democratic Party control of the Congress and NATO something to show for the longest and largest military mission in its 61 years of existence.

President Barack Obama has tripled the amount of American combat troops in Afghanistan to 100,000 and along with forces from other NATO member states and partner nations there are now over 150,000 foreign troops in the nation, the most ever stationed in the war-ravaged country. 120,000 of those soldiers are now under the command of NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), the most ever serving in a North Atlantic Alliance-led military operation. NATO Kosovo Force at its peak had 50,000 troops, but they entered the Serbian province after an almost three-month air war had ended.

The 120,000 NATO forces currently in theater – from 50 nations already with more pledged to provide troops – are at the center of the world's longest-lasting and increasingly deadly hot war. NATO's first ground war, its first combat operations in Asia.

Last year was the most lethal for the U.S and NATO in what is now a nine-year conflict and this year has already proven even more costly in terms of combat deaths. And there are three more months to go.

Washington and Brussels could decide to save face and end the fighting through some combination of an internal political settlement and a true international peacekeeping arrangement – rather than the subversion of the International Security Assistance Force that was established by a United Nations mandate in December of 2001 but which is now the Pentagon's and NATO's vehicle for waging war in Afghanistan. And in neighboring Pakistan.

But the military metaphysic prevalent in Washington over the past 65 years will allow for nothing other than what is seen as victory, with a "Who lost Afghanistan?" legacy tarnishing the president who fails to secure it and the party to which he belongs being branded half-hearted and defeatist.

As for NATO, the Strategic Concept to be adopted in November is predicated upon the bloc's expansion into a 21st century global expeditionary force for which Afghanistan is the test case. A NATO that loses Afghanistan, that loses in Afghanistan, will be viewed more critically

by the populations of its European member states that have sacrificed their sons and daughters at the altar of NATO's international ambitions. In the words of then-Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer six years ago: "What is NATO doing in Afghanistan? Defending values at the Hindu Kush in the present day international climate. We have to fight terrorism wherever it emerges. If we don't do it at the Hindu Kush, it will end up at our doorstep. In other words, this perception gap [of the North Atlantic military alliance operating in South Asia] in the long run must be closed and must be healed - that is, for NATO's future, of the utmost importance." [1]

Not satisfied with the Vietnam that Afghanistan has become, NATO has now launched its Cambodian incursion. One with implications several orders of magnitude greater than with the prototype, though, into a nation of almost 170 million people, a nation wielding nuclear weapons. Pakistan.

As the U.S. delivered its 20th deadly drone missile attack of the month inside Pakistan on the 27th, five times the amount launched in August and the most in any month since they were started in 2004, NATO conducted a series of attacks with helicopter gunships in Northwest Pakistan. Claiming the "right of self-defense" and in "hot pursuit" of insurgents that had reportedly attacked a NATO camp, Combat Outpost Narizah, in Afghanistan's Khost province near the Pakistani border, this past weekend NATO attack helicopters conducted two forays into the Federally Administered Tribal Areas where U.S. drone strikes have killed a record number of people this month.

Estimates of those killed, dutifully referred to in the Western press as insurgents, militants or terrorists, were 30, then 50, afterward 60, 70 and later "82 or higher." [2]

The amount, like the identify, of the dead will never be definitively known.

Press reports stated the targets were members of the Haqqani network, founded by veteran Afghan Mujahedin leader Jalaluddin Haqqani, who when he led attacks from Pakistani soil against Afghan targets slightly over a generation ago was an American hero, one of Ronald Reagan's "freedom fighters." Two years ago the New York Times wrote: "In the 1980s, Jalaluddin Haqqani was cultivated as a 'unilateral' asset of the CIA and received tens of thousands of dollars in cash for his work in fighting the Soviet Army in Afghanistan, according to an account in 'The Bin Ladens,' a recent book by Steve Coll. At that time, Haqqani helped and protected Osama bin Laden, who was building his own militia to fight the Soviet forces, Coll wrote." [3]

As to the regret that the otherwise praiseworthy Haqqani has of late allied himself with the Taliban, one voiced by among other people the late Charlie Wilson who once celebrated Haqqani as "goodness personified," in an appearance on NBC's Meet the Press last year Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari told his American audience that the Taliban "was part of your past and our past, and the ISI and the CIA created them together. And I can find you 10 books and 10 philosophers and 10 write-ups on that...." [4]

On September 27 two NATO helicopters attacked the Kurram agency in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, killing six people and wounding eight. A local Pakistani government official described all the victims as civilians. According to Dawn News, "Nato has also shelled the area before." [5] Three attacks in three days and as many as 100 deaths.

On the same day a U.S. drone-launched missile strike killed four people in the North Waziristan agency. "The identities of the four people killed in the attack were not known...." [6]

The above events occurred against the backdrop of the revelation in Bob Woodward's new book *Obama's Wars* that "a 3,000-strong secret army of Afghan paramilitary forces run by the Central Intelligence Agency had conducted cross-border raids into Pakistan." [7]

After mounting in intensity for two years and consisting in part - helicopter gunship attacks and special forces assassination team raids - of covert operations, the U.S. and NATO war in Northwest Pakistan is now fully underway and can no longer be denied.

The Pentagon - the helicopters used in the attacks on September 25 and 26 were American Apaches and Kiowas - defended the strikes over the weekend as falling within its rules of engagement and Defense Department spokesman Colonel Dave Lapan said the U.S. had adhered to "appropriate protocol" and "Our forces have the right of self-defense." [8]

A spokesman for the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force initially denied that Alliance forces had launched any attacks inside Pakistani territory, although Afghan police officials had confirmed that they did. On September 27, however, the International Security Assistance Force verified that NATO forces had conducted the deadly strikes. As the third attack by NATO helicopters occurred on the same day, "Coalition officials said the cross-border attacks fell within its rules of engagement because the insurgents had attacked them from across the border." [9]

A NATO official informed the press that "ISAF forces must and will retain the authority, within their mandate, to defend themselves in carrying out their mission." [10]

Mehmood Shah, former top security official of the Pakistani government in the region where the helicopter gunship and drone strikes have killed over 200 people so far this month, said of the recent NATO attacks: "This should be considered a watershed event. They [Nato] must be warned: the next time you do this, it can lead to war. Our units should be deployed to fire upon them. This border has sanctity. Nato must realise they have a mandate to operate in Afghanistan, not in Pakistan." [11]

On September 27 Interior Minister Rehman Malik denounced the NATO raids as a violation of Pakistani territorial integrity and national sovereignty and told the nation's Senate that the Afghan ambassador to Islamabad would be summoned to explain the attacks. Malik and the Pakistani government as a whole know that the Hamid Karzai administration in Kabul has no control over what the U.S. and NATO do in its own country, much less in Pakistan. The interior minister's comment were solely for internal consumption, for placating Pakistani popular outrage, but as Pakistan itself has become a NATO partner and U.S. surrogate [12] its officials, like those of Afghanistan, will not be notified of any future attacks.

Nevertheless domestic exigencies compelled Malik to denounce the strikes inside his country and assert "I take the drone attacks in Pakistani territory as an attack on the sovereignty of Pakistan." A senator from the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz "asked the government to inform the parliament about any accord it had reached with the US under which drone attacks were being carried out." [13]

At the same time Pakistani Foreign Office spokesman Abdul Basit went further and lodged

what was described as a strong protest to NATO Headquarters in Brussels over the weekend's air strikes, issuing a statement that said in part: "These incidents are a clear violation and breach of the UN mandate under which ISAF operates," as its mandate "terminates/finishes" at the Afghan border.

"There are no agreed 'hot pursuit' rules. Any impression to the contrary is not factually correct. Such violations are unacceptable." [14]

By the evening of September 27, after the Pakistani complaints were registered, NATO's ISAF attempted to conduct damage control and reverted to the military bloc's original position: That it has not launched attacks inside Pakistan at all. On that very day it had dispatched two more helicopter gunships for the third raid in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas.

NATO will continue to launch lethal attacks inside Pakistan against whichever targets it sees fit and will proffer neither warnings nor apologies. The U.S. will continue to escalate attacks with Hellfire missiles against whomever it chooses, however inaccurate, anecdotal and self-interested the reports upon which they are based prove to be.

The death toll in Pakistan this month is well over 200 and for this year to date over 2,000. The justification for this carnage offered by the U.S. and NATO is that it is intended to extend the policy of Barack Obama to "disrupt, dismantle and defeat" insurgent networks in Afghanistan into Pakistan, supposedly the sooner to end the war.

Forty years ago Obama's predecessor Richard Nixon began his speech announcing the expansion of the Vietnam War into Cambodia with these words: "Good evening, my fellow Americans. Ten days ago, in my report to the nation on Vietnam, I announced the decision to withdraw an additional 150,000 Americans from Vietnam over the next year. I said then that I was making that decision despite our concern over increased enemy activity in Laos, in Cambodia, and in South Vietnam. And at that time I warned that if I concluded that increased enemy activity in any of these areas endangered the lives of Americans remaining in Vietnam, I would not hesitate to take strong and effective measures to deal with that situation." [15]

He claimed that "enemy sanctuaries" in Cambodia "endanger the lives of Americans who are in Vietnam," and "if this enemy effort succeeds, Cambodia would become a vast enemy staging area and a springboard for attacks on South Vietnam along 600 miles of frontier: a refuge where enemy troops could return from combat without fear of retaliation."

The course he ordered was to "go to the heart of the trouble. And that means cleaning out major North Vietnamese and Vietcong occupied territories, these sanctuaries which serve as bases for attacks on both Cambodia and American and South Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam."

The practical application of the policy was that "attacks are being launched this week to clean out major enemy sanctuaries on the Cambodian-Vietnam border."

In language that has been heard again lately in Washington and Brussels - with nothing but the place names changed - Nixon claimed: "We take this action not for the purpose of expanding the war into Cambodia, but for the purpose of ending the war in Vietnam...."

Washington indeed expanded the Vietnam War into Cambodia, with what disastrous effects

the world is fully aware, and soon thereafter departed Southeast Asia in defeat, leaving vast stretches of Vietnam and Cambodia in ruins.

Afghanistan and Pakistan will not fare any better.

Notes

- 1) Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, November 12, 2004
- 2) New York Times, September 27, 2010
- 3) New York Times, September 9, 2008
- 4) Meet the Press, May 10, 2010
<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/30658135>
- 5) Dawn News, September 28, 2010
- 6) Daily Times, September 28, 2010
- 7) Financial Times, September 27, 2010
- 8) Associated Press, September 27, 2010
- 9) New York Times, September 27, 2010
- 10) Dawn News, September 27, 2010
- 11) The Guardian, September 27, 2010
- 12) NATO Pulls Pakistan Into Its Global Network
Stop NATO, July 23, 2010
<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2010/07/23/nato-pulls-pakistan-into-its-global-network>
- 13) Dawn News, September 28, 2010
- 14) Dawn News, September 27, 2010
- 15) Richard M. Nixon, Cambodian Incursion Address
<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/richardnixoncambodia.html>

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