

NATO In Afghanistan: World War In One Country

By [Rick Rozoff](#)

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Since the North Atlantic Treaty Organization took control of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan in 2003 the amount of troops serving under that command has grown from 5,000 to over 100,000.

There are currently 134,000 foreign troops in the nation counting U.S. soldiers serving separately with Operation Enduring Freedom, although the aggregate number is to reach 150,000 by the summer and most American troops not now under NATO command will soon be. There are 47,000 troops from NATO member and partner countries in the nation.

U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan will soon outnumber those in Iraq.

Over 1,600 U.S., NATO and allied troops have been killed in the war theater, with 520 of those killed last year. U.S. deaths more than doubled from 2008 to 2009, from 155 to 318.

Over 170 Afghan civilians have been slain so far this year, a 33 percent increase over the same period last year. U.S. and NATO forces killed 90 civilians from January to April, a 76 percent rise from 51 in the same period of 2009. [1]

More than 300 people have been killed in U.S. drone missile strikes against alleged insurgent sites in Pakistan this year, bringing total deaths in such attacks to over 1,000 since August of 2008.

15,000 U.S., NATO and Afghan government troops participated in the largest ground offensive of the war this February in Marjah and there are over 23,000 troops being amassed in the southern province of Kandahar for an assault planned to begin next month.

With recent announcements that Montenegro, Mongolia and South Korea have become the 44th, 45th and 46th official troop contributing nations – Bahrain, Colombia, Egypt and Jordan have already supplied or pledged troops but have not yet been given that designation – there will be military units from 50 nations on all six populated continents serving under the North Atlantic military alliance in a war in South Asia that will enter its tenth year on October 7.

Australia, with 1,550 troops, is engaged in its first combat operations and has experienced its first war deaths since the Vietnam War. Canada since the Korean War. Germany and Finland since the Second World War. If not for military deaths in Iraq since 2003, many more European countries would also be in the last category. (The four Swedish soldiers killed in northern Afghanistan are the Scandinavian country's first combat deaths in almost 200 years.)

The effects of the war in Afghanistan have not been limited to battlefield losses, though.

Last year NATO member Denmark spent \$415 million for its mission in Afghanistan, up from \$135 million in 2007. As the nation's total defense budget for 2009 was \$3.87 billion, the Afghan war accounted for almost one-ninth of the country's annual military spending. Denmark, which lost seven soldiers in Iraq, has already lost 31 in Afghanistan.

Last week a Danish base in Helmand Province was attacked by insurgents and eleven Danish soldiers were wounded.

On May 9 a British soldier was killed in Helmand, the 40th of the year and the 285th since the war began, exceeding the 255 killed in the 1982 war with Argentina over the Falkland Islands/Las Malvinas which had been the largest number since Britain's counterinsurgency war in Malaya in the 1950s. The United Kingdom registered 179 deaths in Iraq by comparison.

Over the past weekend four French troops were injured in a landmine explosion northeast of the Afghan capital, one of them gravely.

On May 12 it was reported that a Romanian soldier was killed in southern Afghanistan, the nation's 12th death there.

Less than a week earlier, May 6 and 7, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen was in the Romanian capital of Bucharest to meet with the country's president and foreign minister, and while there praised the government's commitment to the Afghan war - Romania recently announced its troop strength would be boosted to 1,800 - as "substantial, without caveats and with a growing focus on training." [2]

A week before the NATO chief was in Albania and Croatia, the military bloc's newest members, and also pushed for more forces in Afghanistan, including military trainers.

During his four-day trip to Europe early this month, U.S. Vice President Joseph Biden promoted NATO allies' contributions to the Afghan war among other demands - which included the consolidation of a European interceptor missile system under U.S. control - and addressing 1,100 members of the Spanish Light Infantry Parachute Brigade, slated for deployment to Afghanistan in July, said, "I very much wanted to be here today to pay respect to such a group of warriors who stood side by side with American warriors in Afghanistan. As NATO allies we are working together...." [3]

In February of this year the government of Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero announced that it was sending 511 more troops to Afghanistan, raising the nation's contingent there to 1,600.

Shortly before meeting with Biden, Zapatero and his defense minister visited NATO headquarters in Brussels, where the Spanish prime minister stated that Afghanistan is "NATO's primary mission right now abroad," adding that it is "very important that we renew our confidence in the current strategy in Afghanistan...." [4]

On May 3 The Times of London wrote of intensified fighting in the north of Afghanistan, which until recently had been comparatively peaceful but where of late Germany has lost the bulk of the 47 soldiers that have died as a result of the war and where Finland and Sweden have suffered combat fatalities.

The British daily wrote that "German troops are fighting the first pitched battles witnessed

by the Bundeswehr since 1945 in the face of a growing Taliban insurgency in the north of Afghanistan.” [5]

General Stanley McChrystal, in charge of all U.S. and other foreign forces in Afghanistan as commander of both the International Security Assistance Force and the U.S.’s Operation Enduring Freedom, recently announced that he was deploying 56 helicopters and 5,000 U.S. troops to serve under German command in the north of Afghanistan.

When NATO took over the southern quadrant of the South Asian nation in 2006 it “subordinate[d] U.S. troops under foreign command in a combat situation for the first time since World War II.” [6]

Central Command’s Brigadier General Douglas Raaberg said at the time, “That’s a first since World War II.”

The chief of Central Command then, General John Abizaid, told the Associated Press that “NATO needs to grab hold of this mission for NATO’s sake. Jumping outside European boundaries is where the alliance needs to go to stay relevant for the future.”

The Associated Press wrote at the time that “Abizaid and others have said the Afghanistan mission marks a historic expansion for NATO that could see the alliance taking further missions in Africa or elsewhere.” [7]

Four months after taking control of southern Afghanistan in 2006 the NATO commander in the region, British Lieutenant General David Richards, said that NATO was conducting “land combat operations for the first time in its history.”

And in what has proven to be an understatement of the first order, Richards added: “Two years ago, when the North Atlantic Council agreed to this plan, they probably didn’t know what they were getting into.” [8] As another news agency expressed it at the same time, “The mission is considered the most dangerous and challenging in the Western alliance’s 57-year history.” [9]

A month later the British general reflected on the first few weeks of his new assignment and the “persistent low-level dirty fighting” it entailed, characterizing the situation as one in which the “sort of thing hasn’t really happened so consistently, I don’t think, since the Korean War or the Second World War.” [10]

Afghanistan is the battleground on which NATO effected the transition, the escalation, from air wars to ground wars.

“The NATO alliance...conducted aerial combat operations during the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo during the 1990s, but it has yet to conduct major ground combat operations since it was founded in 1949.” Its move into southern Afghanistan, however, signalled “the first time the alliance has conducted land combat operations....” [11]

The war in Afghanistan has in fact represented a historic expansion for NATO in Abizaid’s words of four years ago, inaugurating the bloc’s “jumping outside European boundaries” to Africa and elsewhere. That is exactly what has occurred in the interim.

It has also been employed to meld the militaries of over fifty nations - including those of Afghanistan and Pakistan - under a unified command and into a combat-experienced and integrated global force ready for future attacks, invasions, occupations and other interventions far from Euro-Atlantic space. Never before have troops from 50 nations served in one war theater, in one country. Last week a meeting of NATO's Military Committee was attended by the defense ministers of 49 nations with troops assigned to the International Security Assistance Force.

The Afghan war has secured the U.S. and its NATO allies military bases in the Central Asian nations of Kyrgyzstan, where an estimated 50,000 U.S. troops passed through to and from Afghanistan this March, and Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

It has allowed the inauguration of the world's first multinational strategic airlift operation in Hungary last year, one firmly under the control of Washington and NATO, for supplying the war effort.

It has accelerated the U.S.'s and NATO's military integration of the three former Soviet republics in the South Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

Azerbaijan, a Caspian Sea nation bordering Iran and Russia, recently doubled the size of its troop contingent in Afghanistan.

Georgia, eager to gain combat training under war conditions for its next military confrontations with Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Russia, will shortly have 900 troops in Afghanistan, the largest per capita contribution of any nation to NATO's International Security Assistance Force.

At NATO headquarters on May 5 the permanent representatives (ambassadors) of the bloc's 28 member states met with senior Georgian military officials within the framework of the NATO-Georgian Commission. "The representative stressed that the alliance appreciates Georgia's cooperation with NATO and especially the participation of Georgian soldiers in peacekeeping operations in Afghanistan and will continue to support the reformation of the country's defense system in the future." [12]

That is, Georgia will provide NATO with troops for the war in Afghanistan and NATO will reciprocate by assisting in the modernization of Georgia's armed forces in anticipation of future conflicts with its neighbors.

On May 11 Germany hosted a meeting of defense ministers and military chiefs of staff from nations that have troops deployed in northern Afghanistan where Germany is the main NATO force.

The nation's defense minister, Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, "also invited representatives of NATO, the European Union and Afghanistan to the informal May 11 meeting.

"The ministry did give details on who exactly was invited. Nations with a presence in northern Afghanistan now include the United States, Norway and Sweden." [13]

Defense Minister Seyran Ohanyan led a delegation from Armenia to the Berlin meeting.

Armenia is the first member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to supply NATO with troops for Afghanistan. The CSTO's other members are Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and it has long been viewed as a Russian effort to counter NATO expansion into the former Soviet Union.

The day after the meeting in Germany, the Armenian defense minister and the country's foreign minister were in Brussels to attend a meeting of the North Atlantic Council, NATO's highest governing body, where an assessment of NATO's Individual Partnership Action Plan for Armenia was assessed.

The two events are inextricably connected and are an integral part of NATO's plan to gain control over the South Caucasus. Armenia, like Azerbaijan, borders Iran. Azerbaijan and Georgia border Russia.

The war in Afghanistan has also provided NATO the opportunity to consolidate control over the nations of former Yugoslavia. A NATO foreign ministers meeting in Estonia last month approved Bosnia's Membership Action Plan, the last stage before full membership, after the nation announced troop deployments to Afghanistan.

"Bosnia took its first step toward joining NATO...as the 28-country alliance offered the Balkan country a conditional path for membership....In agreeing to offer the membership action plan, the NATO ministers welcomed...the country's contributions to the NATO-led security force in Afghanistan (ISAF)."
[13]

On May 10 it was reported that NATO Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Security Cooperation and Partnership – and Special Representative for the South Caucasus and Central Asia – Robert Simmons announced "Montenegro...will be the next country to join NATO." [14]

Tiny Montenegro, only an independent country for four years, sent its first troops to Afghanistan in March and this month its defense minister and chief of the general staff will visit the war zone.

Throughout March and April U.S. Special Operations Command Europe conducted aviation exercises with the Croatian Air Force based, as the website of U.S. European Command described it, on the Pentagon's new emphasis on international counterinsurgency operations, the laboratory for which is Afghanistan: "The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review highlighted the importance of increasing rotary-wing availability as one of the most significant elements to achieving success in large-scale counterinsurgency, stability and counterterrorism operations worldwide." [16]

Croatia and fellow Balkan nation Albania were welcomed as full NATO members last year after providing troops for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Albania's defense minister was in Afghanistan earlier this month to inspect his nation's 255 troops stationed in Herat Province. "The personnel belong to two units of the army's elite forces: the 2nd Battalion of the Rapid Reaction Brigade and the Commando Regiment." [17]

Along with the Balkans and the South Caucasus, the war in Afghanistan has been instrumental in NATO strengthening its grip on the Scandinavian nations that are not yet full

members. NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe, U.S. Admiral James Stavridis, visited Sweden and Finland on May 12, thanking the two nations for the 500 and 150 troops, respectively, they have in command of NATO ISAF operations in four northern Afghan provinces. Stavridis didn't mention the five Swedish and Finnish troops killed in fighting there, though he did inspect a live-fire military exercise in Finland.

The war in Afghanistan has also been the vehicle for NATO formally penetrating the Asia-Pacific area, forming what the Alliance calls Contact Country partnerships with Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea.

Earlier this month the chief of U.S. Central Command, General David Petraeus (now being touted as a 2012 presidential candidate), said "he would welcome more Australian troops in Afghanistan." [18] The nation is already the largest contributor of forces among those which are not full NATO members.

South Korean Minister of Foreign Affairs Yu Myung-hwan visited NATO headquarters on May 11, met with Secretary General Rasmussen - "During the meeting, they discussed how to foster NATO-Korea relations" [19] - and addressed the North Atlantic Council. In April South Korea became the latest nation to be designated a formal troop contributor for NATO in Afghanistan and will deploy as many as 400 soldiers.

Troops from Singapore and Mongolia [20] are also serving under NATO command and Kazakhstan, which like Mongolia borders Russia and China, has been mentioned as a location for a new U.S. and NATO military base to supplement or replace the one in Kyrgyzstan. [21]

The U.S. and NATO Afghan campaign has served to expand the military network of the Pentagon and the Alliance throughout several continents, from air bases in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania in Europe to ones in Central Asia - Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan - to transit routes and centers in the South Caucasus (Georgia and Azerbaijan) and Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan).

Through bilateral military ties between the U.S. and Pakistan and the Trilateral Afghanistan-Pakistan-NATO Military Commission, the West has penetrated the military of that key nation as well.

NATO's International Security Assistance Force commander General McChrystal was in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad "to provide an update on ISAF's operations in Afghanistan and to consult with Pakistan's army chief.

"The NATO commander's meeting came at a time when U.S. forces are planning a major offensive in the Taliban stronghold of Kandahar and they would need Pakistan's support to enhance security along the border to stop the possible intrusion of militants.

"Pakistan said it has deployed over 100,000 troops along some 2,000 kilometers [of its] border with Afghanistan...." [22]

Four days before, local media reported that NATO forces fired mortar rounds across the border from Afghanistan into Pakistan, injuring five civilians, two critically, and severely damaging a mosque. [23]

The day before McChrystal's visit to Pakistan, Reuters reported that "The CIA has received authorization to target a wider range of targets in Pakistan with its drone-guided missiles, despite national discontent on [the] growing civilian death toll." [24]

In addition to expanding a military nexus throughout Eurasia and beyond, the Afghan war has provided the Pentagon other opportunities as well.

U.S. Marine Corps Brigadier General Glenn Walters spoke at an Institute for Defense and Government Advancement conference on the subject of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), stating that "Drones are used from Yemen to Pakistan, but most of the demand is related to the surge of U.S. forces in Afghanistan."

In 2001, the year of the invasion of Afghanistan, the U.S. had approximately 200 drones in its arsenal. It now has 6,000 and according to the Marine general, in two years "We'll have 8,000 UAVs...." [25] A twentyfold increase.

The decade of the drone [26] has not been limited to Pakistan and Yemen, as the lethal missile-wielding unmanned aircraft have also been used in Somalia and Iraq, and late last year U.S. Africa Command deployed the most deadly of all drones - the Reaper - to the nation of Seychelles along with over 100 military personnel, thereby acquiring the Pentagon's second major military installation in Africa.

On May 6 "NATO representatives from around the world" visited the Camp Atterbury Joint Maneuver Training Center in the American state of Indiana to observe drone flight tests. [27]

The ongoing war in Afghanistan has also been used, particularly by current U.S. and NATO commander McChrystal, former head of Joint Special Operations Command, to qualitatively transform U.S. military doctrine and practice worldwide with an emphasis on counterinsurgency and the expanded use of special forces not seen in several decades.

Last week U.S. Army Chief of Staff General George Casey laid stress on the counterinsurgency role of his branch of the armed services, stating "the Army has to posture itself and train to operate across the spectrum." [28] (On May 10 Casey hosted over a hundred senior military leaders from more than 24 African nations at an African Land Forces Summit at the Pentagon.)

On May 6 it was reported that the head of Special Operations Command Europe and director of Special Operations, U.S. European Command - Air Force Major General Frank Kisner - would be transferred to the post of commander of NATO international special forces operations at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Special Operations Headquarters in Brussels.

NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Transformation in Norfolk, Virginia, French Air Force General Stephane Abrial - given that post when France reintegrated into NATO military command structures last year - lately spoke of the Alliance's current transformation, defining it as centered on "ensuring that NATO has the necessary means to be able to deploy forces quickly and for them to be able to stay in theater for a long time...." [29] The Afghan war is the prototype of the missions he spoke about.

From May 10-13 over "550 defense ministers, chief of staffs and senior military officials from 82 countries across the globe" gathered in Amman, Jordan for a major Special Operations Forces Symposium and Exposition (SOFEX) event, the Middle East Special Operations

Commanders Conference.

The four-day meeting was “designed with a view to enhance the capabilities of Special Operations Forces around the world to network for global security and combat terrorism.

“High-ranking military officers from Australia, France, Germany, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Pakistan and the United States delivered speeches that covered several topics, including war-fighting operations to home defense missions, counterterrorist operations, urban warfare and dismounted close combat.”

The chief of U.S. Special Operations Command Central (responsible for Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and Yemen), Major General Charles Cleveland, “highlighted the role of special operation forces in modern wars.” [30]

The information minister of Jordan revealed on May 12 that his country has trained 2,500 members of the Afghan special forces, and that NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen had requested that Jordan train Afghan police during a recent visit to the Middle Eastern nation.

The commander of Jordan’s special forces, Brigadier Ali Jaradat, confirmed that “1,500 servicemen, including anti-terror forces, from Afghanistan and Iraq have received training at the \$200 million King Abdullah II Special Operations Training Centre, which was inaugurated in May last year.”

He added that “The Americans and Europeans took part....Most of the troops serving in Afghanistan received training at the centre before they went there.” [31]

The Pentagon has recently provided 581 Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAPS) armored combat vehicles to nations serving under NATO command in Afghanistan, including Jordan, Georgia, the Czech Republic, Poland and Romania, and the U.S. Defense Department disclosed that hundreds more are being sought by troop contributing nations for the counterinsurgency war there. [32]

Last year the U.S. deployed a unit of Stryker armored combat vehicles, first used in Iraq from 2003 onward, to Afghanistan. The Stryker is the U.S. Army’s first new armored vehicle developed since the Bradley Fighting Vehicle entered service in 1981.

The German-based 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment (SCR) trained in Bulgaria and Romania last year “as part of...preparations for an upcoming deployment to Afghanistan....

“U.S. soldiers offloaded 30 Stryker combat vehicles in early August at the Mihail Kogalniceanu Airfield in eastern Romania and have since been conducting combined training with their host-nation counterparts. Soldiers of the 4th Squadron, 2nd SCR are participating in Joint Task Force-East’s third annual training exercise in Romania while soldiers of the 2nd Squadron, 2nd SCR conduct similar training in Bulgaria.” [33]

Joint Task Force-East is a European Command initiative whose purpose is the integration of Eastern European armed forces with those of the U.S. and NATO. It is in effect based at the Mihail Kogalniceanu air base and regularly deploys to and conducts exercises in Romanian and Bulgarian military bases acquired by the U.S. over the past five years. The word East

has a double connotation as its also applies to employing bases in new NATO countries to train for and deploy to the Afghan war theater.

Afghanistan has, whether by convenience, design or some combination of the two, been transformed into a vast training ground for the consolidation of a fifty-nation military structure that has already been extended into Central Asia, the Caucasus, Eastern Europe, the Horn of Africa, the Indian Ocean and the Middle East.

It is also a testing range for new 21st century weapons and combat systems intended for future use around the world.

If U.S. and NATO forces were to withdraw en masse from the country tomorrow, the above results would not be lost to war planners in Washington and Brussels.

Notes

- 1) Reuters, May 12, 2010
- 2) North Atlantic Treaty Organization, May 7, 2010
- 3) Radio Netherlands, May 8, 2010
- 4) North Atlantic Treaty Organization, May 4, 2010
- 5) The Times, May 3, 2010
- 6) Associated Press, March 13, 2006
- 7) Ibid
- 8) Reuters, July 21, 2006
- 9) Associated Press, July 30, 2006
- 10) Toronto Star, August 26, 2006
- 11) Associated Press, July 30, 2006
- 12) Trend News Agency, May 4, 2010
- 13) Associated Press, May 4, 2010
- 14) Deutsche Presse-Agentur, April 23, 2010
- 15) Makfax, May 10, 2010
- 16) United States European Command, May 1, 2010
- 17) North Atlantic Treaty Organization
International Security Assistance Force
May 5, 2010
- 18) Australia Network News, May 1, 2010
- 19) North Atlantic Treaty Organization, May 11, 2010
- 20) Mongolia: Pentagon Trojan Horse Wedged Between China And Russia
Stop NATO, March 31, 2010

<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2010/03/31/mongolia-pentagon-trojan-horse-wedged-between-china-and-russia>

- 21) Kazakhstan: U.S., NATO Seek Military Outpost Between Russia And China
Stop NATO, April 14, 2010

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

- 22) Xinhua News Agency, May 7, 2010
- 23) Pakistan Daily Mail, May 3, 2010

- 24) Reuters, May 6, 2010
- 25) Army Times, May 1, 2010
- 26) Decade Of The Drone: America's Aerial Assassins
Stop NATO, March 9, 2010

<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2010/03/09/decade-of-the-drone-americas-aerial-assassins>

- 27) Camp Atterbury Public Affairs, May 8, 2010
- 28) U.S. Department of Defense, May 7, 2010
- 29) Defense News, May 4, 2010
- 30) Xinhua News Agency, May 11, 2010
- 31) USA TODAY, May 10, 2010
- 32) USA TODAY, May 10, 2010
- 33) Joint Task Force-East, October 22, 2009

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