

NATO's Fake "Non-Combat Mission" in Afghanistan

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Global Research, November 20, 2014

[Telesur](#) 19 November 2014

Region: [Asia](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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There are numerous, obvious solutions to problems in Afghanistan which NATO countries could consider, could even attempt if the alliance wasn't there for the mineral wealth.

On November 7, 2014, while visiting Kabul, The Secretary General of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg, noted that [NATO will soon launch a new chapter](#), a new non-combat mission in Afghanistan. But it's difficult to spot new methods as NATO commits itself to sustaining combat on the part of Afghan forces.

In an October 29th speech, in Brussels, Stoltenberg commended NATO Allies and partner nations from across the world because, for over a decade, they "[stood shoulder to shoulder with Afghanistan](#)." According to Stoltenberg, "[this international effort has contributed to a better future for Afghan men, women and children](#)." Rhetoric from NATO and the Pentagon regularly claims that Afghans have benefited from the past 13 years of U.S./NATO warfare, but reports from other agencies complicate these claims.

UNAMA, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, found that 2013 was "[the worst year for Afghan women, girls and boys](#) since 2009, with the highest number of deaths and injuries recorded from conflict-related violence."

"It is particularly alarming that the number of Afghan women and children killed and injured in the conflict increased again in 2013," said the [UNAMA Director of Human Rights, Georgette Gagnon](#).

"It is the awful reality that most women and children were killed and injured in their daily lives - at home, on their way to school, working in the fields or traveling to a social event. This situation demands even greater commitment and further efforts by the parties to protect women and children from conflict-related violence."

Stoltenberg's assurance of NATO's positive contribution to civilian welfare in Afghanistan is also undermined by a recently issued Amnesty International report examining NATO/ISAF operations, such as air strikes, drone attacks and night raids, which caused civilian deaths and also involved torture, disappearances, and cover-ups. The report, entitled "[Left in the Dark](#)," gives ten chilling and horrific case studies, occurring over a five year period, 2009 - 2013. Amnesty International states that two of the case studies "involve abundant and compelling evidence of war crimes."

I wish that NATO's commander could have joined [Afghan Peace Volunteers](#) (APVs) that same week, in Afghanistan, as they visited an extraordinarily sustainable project,

called [“Emergency.”](#) This Italy based network of hospitals and clinics has been particularly remarkable for effectively saving and improving the lives of Afghan people, over the past 13 years, while at the same time rejecting any form of war or use of weapons within its facilities.

At the entrance to any one of Emergency’s clinics or hospitals, a sign says “No Weapons Allowed.” A logo banning guns is next to the Emergency logo. Although they work in one of the most intense war zones in the world, Emergency staff, including security guards, reject any use of weapons inside their facilities.

Yusof Hakimi, the nurse in charge of Emergency’s ICU in the Kabul hospital, assured us that the ban is strictly upheld. A child isn’t allowed to carry a plastic toy gun inside the hospital premises. No one can wear camouflage clothing. “Even the president of Afghanistan cannot carry a gun inside our hospitals!” says Luca Radaelli, the medical coordinator of Emergency’s hospital in Kabul. He added that it’s not easy to maintain a facility where wars are banned. “But,” he adds, “everyone understands the purposes and respects the rules.”

They’ve learned unarmed ways of providing security. One such way involves an absolute commitment to neutrality. They never take sides in the various conflicts that plague Afghanistan. In fact, they don’t even ask if a patient belongs to one side or another.

Most NGOs in Afghanistan arrange for their staff to travel in heavily armed vehicles. But unarmed Emergency ambulances travel through war zones, in multiple directions, across the country. “We don’t have armed guards,” says Luca. “We don’t have bullet proof cars. We don’t change our routes because,” he explains, in his clear, matter-of-fact style, “we have never been targeted.”

Luca says they acquire security through their reputation. Since they never charge any patient for health care, no one would accuse them of trying to make a profit.

They also pursue strong diplomatic conversations with each group affected by their work. When Emergency opens a clinic, they explain their policy of maintaining neutral independence to everyone involved, including new workers, contractors, local government officials, and religious leaders. “If you provide something good, something skilled, and it is free of charge,” he adds, “there is no need to protect yourself. People won’t get angry.”

If NATO and U.S. commanders took a fraction of what they have spent securing this region by violence,- (the [Pentagon has requested 58.5 billion dollars for Fiscal Year 2015 in Afghanistan](#)),- and spent that instead on helping heal people from war and from war’s causes, providing, say, chances at a survival wage that don’t require enlisting with the local Taliban or the local warlord, sending enough food for the families war has displaced instead of weapons donated this month to one faction, next month to another; if a portion of the 104 billion the U.S. has spent on non-military aid to Afghanistan, since 2001, could have subsidized actual food crops so that poor farmers disgusted with their subsistence role in poppy production could somehow survive without it, could non-combat projects start to work, as have Emergency’s projects?

There are numerous, obvious solutions to problems in Afghanistan which NATO countries could consider, could even attempt if the alliance wasn’t there for the mineral wealth, for another foothold on which to stand between once-and-future superpower rivals and the world’s oil. The world looks so much different when you’re in it to make a profit.

But Emergency isn't in Afghanistan to point out a sane path through disaster to all the actors, here and abroad, who seem unlikely to discard paths of suicidal hatred and ignorance.

In Luca's view, Emergency is simply what a healthcare institution ought to be.

"It grows from a very simple idea. Provide high quality service for everyone, not thinking about profit, but just about patients' health."

"What is so complicated?" he asks.

We might address a similar question to NATO Sec. Gen. Jens Stoltenberg: A new, non-combat mission, in Afghanistan, one that rejects weapons and war—what would be so complicated?

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