

Surging towards a US-NATO Military Disaster: Obama's Escalating War in Central and South Asia

By [Tom Burghardt](#)

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In-depth Report: [AFGHANISTAN](#), [PAKISTAN](#)

On February 18, President Barack Obama ordered 17,000 additional U.S. troops deployed to Afghanistan. Obama's announcement will result in a major escalation of America's bloody occupation of that war-ravaged country.

Currently, some 36,000 U.S. troops are in Afghanistan, including some 6,000 sent in early January under orders by the outgoing Bush regime. In addition to U.S. forces, 32,000 troops from other NATO countries and a mix of "private military contractors" (armed mercenaries) occupy the Central Asian nation.

When coupled with increasingly bellicose rhetoric from the Pentagon and military strikes inside Pakistan, the prospects for regional war-with incalculable risks for the people of Central- and South Asia-have put paid Obama's electoral hyperbole that his would be a "change" administration.

In a brief written [statement](#) issued Tuesday by the White House, Obama declared that "the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan demands urgent attention and swift action. The Taliban is resurgent in Afghanistan, and al Qaeda supports the insurgency and threatens America from its safe-haven along the Pakistani border."

Responding to "a months old" request by "General McKiernan and supported by Secretary Gates, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Commander of Central Command," Obama will soon dispatch a Marine Expeditionary Brigade (8,000 troops), an Army Stryker Brigade (4,000 soldiers) and 5,000 support troops.

Claiming that increased troop levels "will contribute to the security of the Afghan people," the White House studiously ignores reports from the United Nations, international human rights organizations-and from NATO itself-that the number of civilians killed by all armed actors increased dramatically over the previous year.

A confidential [report](#) titled "Metrics Brief, 2007-2008," was published by [Wikileaks](#). Prepared by U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) for Afghanistan, the 12 page dossier "reveals that civilian deaths from the war in Afghanistan have increased by 46% over the past year." According to the global whistleblowers,

The report shows a dramatic escalation of the war and civil disorder. Coalition deaths increased by 35%, assassinations and kidnappings by 50% and attacks on the Kabul based Government of Hamid Karzai also more than doubled, rising a massive 119%.

The report highlights huge increases on attacks aimed at Coalition forces, including a 27% increase in IED attacks, a 40% rise in rifle and rocket fire and an increase in surface to air fire of 67%.

According to the report, outside of the capital Kabul only one in two families had access to even the most basic health care, and only one in two children had access to a school. ("Wikileaks releases NATO report on civilian deaths," Wikileaks, Press Release, February 16, 2009)

While the majority of civilian deaths were attributed by the United Nations to the criminal actions of the Taliban and the Afghan-Arab database of disposable Western intelligence assets known as al-Qaeda, some 828 of 2,118 civilians killed in 2008 were the result of indiscriminate attacks by the Afghan military, U.S. Air Force bombing and berserker American Special Forces units engaged in "counterterrorism" and "counternarcotics" operations. According to [The New York Times](#),

The report singled out special forces and other military units operating outside the normal chains of command. That means their presence and movements are not always known by regular field commanders.

Special forces groups like Navy Seals and paramilitary units operated by the CIA often conduct raids in Afghanistan, and often at night.

The report also said that airstrikes that went awry were often those that were called in by troops under attack.

The United Nations report helps shed light on one of the most divisive issues between the American-led coalition and the Afghan government of Mr. Karzai. (Dexter Filkins, "Afghan Civilian Deaths Rose 40 Percent in 2008," [The New York Times](#), February 18, 2009)

The growing carnage on the ground reflects the political crisis facing the new administration as capitalism's economic meltdown compel our corporatist masters to grab as much of the world's resources as possible to stanch the economic bleed out.

But as in Iraq and the Middle East generally however, the Obama administration's "surge" across Central Asian will prove quixotic—and deadly.

Kyrgyzstan Gives America the Boot

As the politico-military situation rapidly deteriorates, how the Pentagon will keep "surged" troops resupplied is fast becoming a looming nightmare.

With critical supply routes from Pakistan cut by Afghan Talibs and Pakistani Taliban fighters, who have launched coordinated attacks with Central Asian and Arab al-Qaeda guerrillas, the virtual closure of the Khyber Pass in the North-West Frontier Province has fueled a growing logistical crisis. Prior to last December's offensive by insurgents, some 75% of supplies for NATO forces flowed into Afghanistan along this route.

Adding to NATO's headaches, on February 18 Kyrgyzstan's rubber-stamp parliament voted to close the Manas Airbase near the capital Bishkek. According to [The Guardian](#), Wednesday's vote followed "a backroom deal two weeks ago between the country's president, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, and Russia's president, Dmitry Medvedev."

The Americans have six months to pack up and vacate the premises.

The kleptocratic Bakiyev regime has been promised a \$2.15 billion loan and a debt write-off by Moscow in a move intended to wrest concessions from the United States to keep the military hardware flowing. Asia Times [reported](#) February 20,

In the end, transit salvation for the US and NATO is indeed coming from no one else but Russia—but on Moscow's terms: this means Russia possibly using its own military planes to airlift the supplies. A deceptively charming Medvedev has been on the record identifying "very positive signs" in the new US-Russia chess match. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has been on the record saying transit of US and NATO non-military supplies through Russia begins in effect only a few days after the 20th anniversary of the Soviets leaving Kabul. (Pepe Escobar, "Obama, Osama and Medvedev," Asia Times Online, February 20, 2009)

As investigative journalist Pepe Escobar points out, "the price" that the United States and NATO will pay to have their supplies arrive from Russia is being made painfully clear to Washington: "no more encirclement, no more NATO extension, no more anti-missile shield in the Czech Republic and Poland for protection against non-existent Iranian missiles. All this has to be negotiated in detail."

But in a potential move seen as a maneuver to bypass Moscow, The Independent [reported](#) that "the new US administration had indicated that it was prepared to talk to Iran about the Afghan situation."

No friend of the Sunni-based insurgency next door, nor of U.S.-backed jihadi groups such as Jundullah attacking from Pakistan, Tehran may be willing to cut a deal with Washington. Independent journalist Kim Sengupta writes that "Italy, which assumes the presidency of the G8 this year, said that Tehran would be invited to participate in a summit on Afghanistan. The Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini said: 'We want to consider how to involve Iran, not whether to involve Iran'."

But how this will play out may be determined by America's stationary aircraft carrier in the Middle East, Israel, and that country's "naval task force" in Washington, the powerful Israel lobby. And with Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right Likud party given the nod by Israeli President Shimon Peres "to take the lead" in forming the next government, it's an even bet that Bibi may cut a deal with Avigdor Lieberman's neofascist Yisrael Beiteinu party. Netanyahu and Lieberman have both threatened to bomb Iran's civilian nuclear facilities, and have called that nation Israel's number one "national security threat."

While Washington's chattering classes prattle on about the need to "fight them over there, so we don't have to fight them here," the sad reality for the Afghan people is that the Obama administration and their corporatist masters don't give a hoot about their suffering, the unprecedented "surge" in heroin production, the rise and rise of organized crime-linked "Islamic fundamentalists," or for that matter, bringing al-Qaeda to ground. It's all hot air designed to get the American people on-board as imperialism escalates the "right war" in Central- and South Asia.

With the 9/11 attacks as a backdrop—and pretext—for carrying out a long-planned military intervention to conquer Afghanistan, either through proxies (remember the enthusiasm in

petroleum board rooms when the Taliban seized Kabul in 1996!) or now, by installing a narco regime amenable to American demands, the unspoken project remains what it has always been: the “sole superpower’s” hegemonic control over the vast oil and gas reserves of Central Asia.

Pakistan, Jihadis and America’s Killer Drones

Meanwhile, on the “Pak” side of the “Afpak theatre” America’s former “best friends forever,” the Pakistani Taliban grouped under the banner of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Tehrik Nifaz Shariat-i-Muhammadi (Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Law, TNSM) have been doing some “surging” of their own.

Having successfully concluded a “truce” with the government of President Asif Ali Zardari in the North-West Frontier Province’s Malakand District, the nominally secular Pakistan Peoples Party has ceded the political ground to Army and Inter Services Intelligence agency-linked militants with long-standing ties to international terrorist outfits and drug trafficking cartels. In other words, American allies.

But before the ink on the agreement had even dried, a television journalist with Pakistan’s Geo network, Musa Khan Khel, covering TNSM head honcho Maulana Sufi Mohammed’s triumphant entry into Mingora February 17, was brutally murdered. Riddled with bullets, his nearly decapitated body was found on the side of a road shortly after the TNSM leader announced that “peace” had come to the Swat Valley. Khel, according to reports, had been seeking an interview with TTP “emir” Maulana Fazlullah.

The News [reported](#) February 20 that TNSM leaders are meeting with their TTP counterparts to seal the deal to lay down their arms in lieu of the imposition of Sharia law in Malakand.

In 2001, the “peacemaker” and self-proclaimed “[Sharia-lover](#)” had led some 10,000 untrained volunteers across the border into Afghanistan to fight the American-led narco-trafficking Northern Alliance during the initial stages of the U.S. invasion. Drawn from madrassas across Pakistan as disposable cannon-fodder for the ISI, thousands were killed.

In the aftermath of the TTP and the Army’s bloody operations Swat lay in ruins, its people terrorized and its infrastructure all but destroyed. Describing the region as a “hell-hole of bodies and ruin,” The Sunday Times [reports](#) that

In the former mountain resort of Malam Jabba, where skiing thrived when the surrounding Swat Valley was an international attraction, one can still see the remnants of the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation’s flagship hotel. The building was blown up by the Taliban because it was being used for “un-Islamic activities”.

Hundreds of other hotels in the valley have been destroyed or forced to close after threats from the militants. (Daud Khattakis, “Into a Taliban wasteland of blood and fear,” The Sunday Times, February 22, 2009)

But the destruction of critical infrastructure that fueled the region’s economy is but the visible manifestation of a virtual reign of terror that grips Swat Valley. Khattakis writes:

What I found in Swat was a hell-hole. Suicide bombings, car bombs and artillery

have scarred the valley's roads and buildings. The charred remains of hospitals and even a madrasah (seminary) litter the landscape.

Nearly 200 schools have been destroyed, all girls over the age of eight are banned from lessons and, in a symbol of the Taliban's hatred of learning, the public library in Mingora has been wrecked.

The Taliban have banned music and dancing, television and internet cafes. Women cannot leave home without wearing a burqa, the all-encompassing robe. Justice has been enforced with floggings and public executions. (The Sunday Times, *ibid.*)

In the heart of Mingora's bazaar, Green Square is now known as Khooni Chowk, or bloody square "because of the public executions carried out there by Taliban who leave the bullet-riddled bodies of police and soldiers for all to see."

One wonders what justification "Sharia-lover" Sufi Mohammed and his sociopathic son-in-law Fazlullah have for butchering whole families, including children, who simply wish to be left in peace?

According to multiple reports in the Pakistani media, since the TTP's violent take over of the region, organized crime gangs have flourished and car-jackings, armed robberies, kidnappings, rapes and murders as well as an explosive increase in the drug trade have turned Swat into an post-apocalyptic landscape. Like their American counterparts in crime, the message of TTP "emirs" seems to be: "Kill 'em all, and let God sort them out."

But here as elsewhere, the rise of reactionary fundamentalism has far more to do with failing state structures than with religious enthusiasm. Incapable of providing food, employment, housing and health care to its citizens, Pakistani elites, like corporate grifters everywhere, undermine their position by selling-off economic assets to well-connected cronies and ceding educational and social welfare services to "faith-based" groups, as in the U.S.

In this context, The Nation [reported](#) February 18 that the Cabinet Committee on Privatization approved the (fire) sale sell-off of some 21 state-owned enterprises, including "four power companies and other state-owned entities including SME Bank, National Power Construction Company, Pakistan Railways and Pakistan Post."

Utterly bankrupt and bereft of imagination when its comes to ameliorating the horrendous economic and social hardships faced by Pakistani workers and farmers, the bourgeois PPP government following "advice" from their mentors in Washington, will instead line the pockets of their "constituents," the multinational corporations and the comprador elites who do their bidding.

The Swat truce follows [revelations](#) by The Times that the "CIA is secretly using an airbase in southern Pakistan to launch the Predator drones that observe and attack al-Qaeda and Taleban militants on the Pakistani side of the border with Afghanistan."

While the Pakistani government has demanded that the U.S. halt drone attacks in the area, The Times discovered "that the CIA has been using the Shamsi airfield—originally built by Arab sheikhs for falconry expeditions in the southwestern province of Baluchistan—for at least a year."

The New York-based whistleblowing intelligence and security website [Cryptome](#) published a series of [satellite images](#) as part of their “Eyeball” series on February 18. One image, captured in 2006 before construction of a huge hangar meant to conceal America’s robot killing machines was completed, show Predator drones on the Shamsi air strip.

According to Cryptome’s anonymous correspondent, “This is a very capable base facility with a large hangar in addition to the two Predator support hangars. Nearby is a large secured compound (appears empty) which could support up to a battalion of special ops and associated command and control. The large parking area inside the compound is perfect to land choppers and leave with relative security. All security measures seem fresh.”

As I [reported](#) February 16, “U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), the chairwoman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, dropped a bombshell when she revealed that CIA Predator drones are flown from an airbase in Pakistan.” Feinstein’s disclosure came during hearings February 12 before the Senate Intelligence Committee. While the CIA and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) have refused to comment, unnamed “U.S. intelligence officials” described the senator’s statement as “accurate.”

Despite these revelations, Pakistan’s Defense Minister Chaudry Ahmad Mukhtar continues to deny “that the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is controlling drone attacks from the Shamsi base in Balochistan, and said Pakistan had no secret understanding with the US to use bases in Pakistan to carry out attacks in the Tribal Areas, according to a February 20 [report](#) in Daily Times.

Mukhtar said: “Certain news reports claiming that the CIA runs predator flights from the Shamsi Airbase in Balochistan are baseless ... Pakistan has no such understanding with the US to allow it to use its bases for predator attacks.”

How the Defense Minister squares his denial with inescapable facts on the ground is another matter entirely. But revelations over the CIA’s use of Shamsi Airbase may be the least of the Defense Ministry’s problems.

“In a dramatic development,” according to [The News](#), “three prominent Pakistani militant commanders–Baitullah Mehsud, Hafiz Gul Bahadur and Maulvi Nazeer–on Friday set aside their differences and promised to jointly fight their enemy in future.”

Two of the three Pakistani Taliban leaders were considered “pro-government” and had been recruited to fight Mehsud’s TTP and their al-Qaeda allies but have since been alienated from the state due to persistent Predator attacks by the CIA from bases provided by Pakistan. The News reports,

If the three men, who now rule South and North Waziristan tribal region in true sense, got united, they could give a tough time to the government in future.

The militants from Wana said now they had understood Pakistan’s divide and rule policy, and decided to get united and fight together against it in future. “Pakistan caused more losses to the Mujahideen than the US. It handed over 700 Arab Mujahideen to the US and jailed our people,” the commander alleged. (Mushtaq Yusufzai, “Top militant commanders resolve rift,” [The News](#), February 21, 2009)

Islamabad's double-game with the imperialist Dracula on the one hand and the jihadi Frankenstein on the other demonstrates, if nothing else, the impervious nature of the existing political system to "change" on all sides of the "Afpak problem."

Barring a dramatic transformation of the political state of affairs, the bill for American and Pakistani duplicity is coming due, and it will be the people of South Asia who will pay a heavy price.

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