

Swan Song for NATO: The real cost of defeat in Afghanistan

By [Mike Whitney](#)

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It was supposed to be “the good war”; a war against terror; a war of liberation. It was intended to fix the eyes of the world on America’s state of the art weaponry, its crack troops and its overwhelming firepower. It was supposed to demonstrate—once and for all- that the world’s only superpower could no longer be beaten or resisted; that Washington could deploy its troops anywhere in the world and crush its adversaries at will.

Then everything went sideways. The war veered from the Pentagon’s script. The Taliban retreated, waited, regrouped and retaliated. They enlisted support from the Pashtuns and the tribal leaders who could see that America would never honor its commitments; that order would never be restored. Operation Enduring Freedom has brought neither peace nor prosperity; just occupation. Seven years have passed and Afghanistan is still ruled by warlords and drug-merchants. Nothing has improved. The country is in shambles and the government is a fraud. The humiliation of foreign occupation persists while the killing goes on with no end in sight.

War is not foreign policy. It is slaughter. Seven years later; it’s still slaughter. The Taliban have taken over more than half of Afghanistan. They have conducted military operations in the capital of Kabul. They’re dug in at Logar, Wardak and Ghazni and control vast swathes of territory in Zabul, Helmand, Urzgan and Kandahar. Now they are getting ready to step-up operations and mount a Spring offensive, which means the violence will only intensify.

The Taliban’s approach is methodical and deliberate. They’ve shown they can survive the harshest conditions and still achieve tactical victories over a better-equipped enemy. They are highly-motivated and believe their cause is just. After all, they are not fighting to occupy a foreign nation; they’re fighting to defend their own country. That strengthens their resolve and keeps morale high. When NATO and American troops leave Afghanistan; the Taliban will remain, just as they did when the Russians left 20 years ago. No difference. The US occupation will just be another footnote in the country’s tragic history.

The United States has gained nothing from its invasion of Afghanistan. US troops do not control even a square inch of Afghan soil. The moment a soldier lifts his boot-heel; that ground is returned to the native people. That probably won’t change either. General Dan McNeill said recently that “if proper US military counterinsurgency doctrine were followed; the US would need 400,000 troops to defeat Pashtun tribal resistance in Afghanistan.” Currently, the US and NATO have only 66,000 troops on the ground and the allies are refusing to send more. On a purely logistical level; victory is impossible.

The battle for hearts and minds has been lost, too. A statement from the Revolutionary

Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) sums it up like this:

“The reinstatement of the Northern Alliance to power crushed the hopes of our people for freedom and prosperity and proved that, for the Bush administration, defeating terrorism has no meaning at all....The US doesn't want to defeat the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, because then they will have no excuse to stay in Afghanistan and achieve their economic and strategic goals in the region....After seven years, there is no peace, human rights, democracy or reconstruction in Afghanistan. The destitution and suffering of our people is increasing everyday. ...We believe that if the troops leave Afghanistan, our people will become more free and come out of their current puzzlement and doubts...Afghanistan's freedom can only be achieved by Afghan people themselves. Relying on one enemy to defeat another is a wrong policy which has just tightened the grip of the Northern Alliance and their masters on the neck of our nation.” (RAWA www.rawa.org)

Gradually, the Allies will see that Bush's war cannot be won and that continuing the fighting is counterproductive. There is no military solution to the conflict in Afghanistan and the political objectives are getting murkier all the time. This just adds to the growing sense of frustration.

Recently Secretary of Defense Robert Gates tried to cajole the allies into sending more combat troops to fight in the south, but he met with stiff resistance . He said:

“I am concerned that many people on this continent may not comprehend the magnitude of the direct threat to European security,” Gates said. “We must not become a two-tiered alliance of those who are willing to fight and those who are not. Such a development, with all its implications for collective security, would in effect destroy the alliance.”

But support for the war is waning in Europe. This is America's war, not theirs. Europeans don't need to occupy foreign nations to meet their energy needs. Their countries are prosperous and they can afford to buy for fuel on the open market. Only America wants the war. It's all part of a geopolitical “grand strategy” to project US power into the region to control its resources. So far, there's no indication that the plan will succeed.

Germany has the third biggest economy in the world. Over the last few years, they have strengthened ties with Russia and made agreements that will satisfy their long-term energy needs. But German involvement in Afghanistan has put a strain on relations with Moscow. Putin thinks that the US is using the war to put down roots in Central Asia so it can control pipeline-routes from the Caspian Basin and surround Russia and China with military bases. Naturally, Putin would like to persuade Chancellor Angela Merkel to withdraw German troops from Afghanistan so he could strike a blow against the US-led alliance.

Eventually, German leaders will see that its foolish to tweak the nose of the people who provide them with energy (Russia) just to support Washington's adventures. When Germany withdraws from Afghanistan; NATO will disband, new coalitions will form, and the transatlantic alliance fall apart. The cracks are already visible.

Bush has said that the war in Afghanistan must continue or the country will become a haven for drugs, terrorism and organized crime. He says we are fighting a “poisonous ideology of Islamic extremism which threatens to become a global movement”.

But the Taliban and Pashtun tribesmen see it differently. They see the conflict as an imperial

war of aggression which has only added to the suffering of their people. A recent report by the United Nations Human Development Fund appears to support this view. It shows that Afghanistan has fallen in every category. The average life expectancy has gone down, malnutrition has risen, literacy has dropped, and more than half the population is living below the poverty-line. Hundreds of thousands of people have been internally displaced by the war.

Afghanistan now produces 90% of the world's opium; more than any other country. The booming drug trade is the direct result of the US invasion. Bush has created the world's largest narco-colony. Is that success?

Presently, there are no plans to remove the warlords or improve the lives of ordinary Afghans. Reconstruction is at a standstill. If the US stays in Afghanistan, the situation 10 years from now will be the same as it is today, only more people will have needlessly died. Most Afghans now understand that the promise of democracy was a lie. The only thing the occupation has brought is more grinding poverty and random violence.

There's no back-up plan for Afghanistan. In fact, there is no plan at all. The administration thought the Taliban would see America's high-tech, laser-guided weaponry and run for the hills. They did. Now they're back. And now we are embroiled in an "unwinnable" war with a tenacious enemy that grows stronger by the day.

Eventually, the Europeans will see the futility of the war and leave. And that will be the end of NATO.

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