

U.S. Employs Afghan War To Build Global NATO

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In an article entitled “How Afghanistan Became a War for NATO,” American journalist Gareth Porter argued that, contrary to the official position that an estimated 52,000 non-American troops from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and assorted partnership programs are in Afghanistan to in any manner protect their respective homelands, “NATO’s role in Afghanistan is more about NATO than it is about Afghanistan,” citing an unnamed U.S. military officer.

In relation to turning the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the overwhelming majority of foreign troops in the nation (currently 120,000 of 152,000) over to NATO command, the same official was quoted as stating, “You have to understand that the NATO lobbyists are very prominent in the Pentagon – both in the Office of the Secretary of Defense and on the Joint Staff.”

Porter reminded readers that while serving as NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander Europe from 2003-2006 Marine General James Jones (until recently the Obama administration’s National Security Advisor) “sold (Defense Secretary Donald) Rumsfeld on turning Afghanistan over to NATO,” according to the above-mentioned source.

In testimony before the U.S. Congress in 2007, Karl Eikenberry – at the time commanding general of the Pentagon’s Combined Forces Command Afghanistan, shortly afterward deputy commander of NATO’s 28-nation Military Committee and currently American ambassador to Afghanistan – argued that “the policy of turning Afghanistan over to NATO was really about the future of NATO rather than about Afghanistan...one that could ‘make’ the alliance. The long view of the Afghanistan campaign is that it is a means to continue the transformation of the alliance.” [1]



General Karl Eikenberry and NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer in 2006

Rather than “reinventing” NATO to make it “relevant” and to gratuitously preserve a Cold War relic, although doing only that allows the U.S. to retain air and naval bases and nuclear weapons on the European continent as well as extending its global missile shield and cyber warfare command there, transforming NATO means in the first place expanding it into a global military force, one able to wage wars like that in Afghanistan and others modeled after it.

It is worth noting that while making his case for NATO control of all Western military operations in Afghanistan in February of 2007, then-Lieutenant General Eikenberry was in command of 12,000 U.S. troops in the Afghan war theater. Less than four years later there are 100,000 American service members there.

The Porter article also asserts that the George W. Bush administration promoted a NATO role in Afghanistan in part to free up American forces for the invasion and occupation of Iraq which began in March of 2003.

However, as noted above, there were only 12,000 U.S. troops and a far smaller amount of non-U.S. NATO forces in Afghanistan four years after the launching of Operation Iraqi Freedom; a negligible number in relation to the 140,000 American troops in Iraq in early 2007.

In fact both Iraq and Afghanistan – previously the Balkans and since Africa – have been used by Washington to integrate the armed forces of scores of nations around the world into a global expeditionary military formation complementing the NATO Response Force.

Between 2003 and 2006 there were troop contingents from over forty nations in the Multi-National Force – Iraq, including ones from 21 of 28 current NATO member states and from the military bloc's Partnership for Peace integration program. The Polish-led Multinational Division Central-South was supported by NATO since its creation in December of 2003.

Of today's 28 NATO states, only seven – France, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, Canada, Greece and Turkey – did not deploy troops to Iraq, although all 28 are now supporting the NATO Training Mission-Iraq and Turkey permitted the stationing of three Dutch Patriot missile batteries on its soil shortly before the invasion of Iraq after all NATO members but France – at the time still outside Alliance military structures – approved the deployments under NATO's Article 4 provisions.

Starting in earnest in 2006 troops from NATO member and partner states were withdrawn from Iraq and redeployed to Afghanistan.

The following 33 nations supplied the U.S. with troops for the wars and occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan:

Albania, Armenia, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia, Britain, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Mongolia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Korea, Spain, Tonga and Ukraine.

Most of the above nations also provided troops for the NATO missions in Bosnia starting in 1995, Kosovo in 1999 and Macedonia in 2001, the last beginning only months before the invasion of Afghanistan. Late last month the NATO senior military representative to Macedonia handed control over a military camp to Macedonian Defense Minister Zoran Konjanovski, who stated on the occasion that “the act symbolized Macedonia's maturity and readiness, as well as the country's principled partnership with NATO, which has been proven in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq.” [2] NATO intervened in Macedonia in 2001 as an alleged mediator between the government and armed insurgents operating out of NATO-occupied Kosovo, members of the so-called Albanian National Army, to enforce a power sharing arrangement between the country's legitimate, elected authorities and a force of armed

invaders spawned by the Kosovo Liberation Army.

Pentagon and NATO military bases and other facilities succeed wars as night does day: Camp Eagle in Bosnia, the 1,000-acre Camp Bondsteel and its companion site Camp Monteith in Kosovo, Camp Able Sentry in Macedonia and, most recently, dozens more in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as several neighboring nations.

NATO's Allied Joint Force Command Naples, activated in 2004, oversees Kosovo Force (KFOR), the NATO Training Mission-Iraq [3], NATO Headquarters in Albania, Bosnia and Macedonia, and a Military Liaison Office in Serbia.

The seven NATO members that didn't dispatch troops to Iraq have sent them to Afghanistan, with Canada, France and Germany among the top six troop contributors, and several NATO partnership affiliates that didn't provide troops for Multi-National Force-Iraq have joined them: Partnership for Peace members Austria, Finland, Ireland, Montenegro (which became independent in 2006), Sweden and Switzerland; Mediterranean Dialogue members Jordan and Egypt; Istanbul Cooperation Initiative partners Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates.

Finland, which had not been engaged in combat operations since World War Two, and Sweden, which had not been at war in two hundred years, are in charge of four northern Afghan provinces under NATO command. Sweden has approximately 500 troops and Finland almost 200 in Afghanistan. Both countries have lost troops in the fighting there.

Australia, a NATO Contact Countries along with Japan, New Zealand and South Korea, has 1,550 troops in theater (including elite special forces), the largest contribution of any non-NATO nation. At least 21 Australian soldiers have been killed in NATO's Afghan war and 162 wounded, 62 last year.

The expansion of the Afghan war in the last days of the Bush and throughout the Obama administration, and its extension into neighboring Pakistan (with a population of over 170 million and nuclear weapons), has led to the highest-ever deaths among U.S., NATO and other ISAF contributing nations' soldiers.

This week Agence France-Presse reported that, based on official figures and other sources, over 10,000 people were killed in Afghanistan in 2010, among them 711 foreign soldiers, 810 Afghan government troops and thousands of Afghan civilians and insurgents.



USS Abraham Lincoln

The U.S. Navy announced on the first day of this year that the 1,000th sortie for the war in

Afghanistan had been launched from the nuclear-powered supercarrier USS Abraham Lincoln in the Arabian Sea on December 28.

“Lincoln pulled in to the United Arab Emirates Dec. 23-27 with a total of 999 sorties flown supporting OEF [Operation Enduring Freedom] and 76 sorties in support of Operation New Dawn (OND) during the ship’s 2010-2011 deployment to the Middle East. The first launch after returning to sea marked the carrier’s millennial OEF mission, amassing a total of more than 5,884 hours flown for OEF in just under four months.” [4]

USA Today disclosed on January 2 that the U.S. Air Force doubled the number of joint terminal attack controllers (JTACs) responsible for calling in air strikes – aerial bombings, missile attacks and strafing runs – from 53 in 2009 to 134 last year. In October of 2010 they coordinated over 1,000 missions “in which warplanes dropped bombs or fired missiles or guns, the most ever, topping the previous peak of 984 in June 2008.” [5]

Last autumn the U.S. led a joint terminal attack controller exercise, Sabre Strike 11, at the Adazi Training Area in Latvia with military personnel and warplanes from the host nation, Estonia, Lithuania and Poland.

“The purpose of this exercise was to continue mutual support for the fight in Afghanistan and demonstrate previous successful NATO coordination in Operation Iraqi Freedom.”

The U.S. Air Force’s 100th Air Refueling Wing “provided fuel to...Polish F-16s, which allowed the fighters to conduct bomb and strafing runs as coordinated by the NATO JTAC trainees and instructors. This marked the first time that live munitions were dropped in Latvia since their separation from Russia in 1992.” [6]

The American armed forces publication Stars and Stripes wrote last October that “Faced with a critical shortage of joint terminal attack controllers, the Air Force has ramped up efforts to train more from allied nations, many of whom could deploy to Afghanistan to call in NATO airstrikes.” [7]

At the time a five-week initial qualification class for JTACs conducted in Germany graduated troops from Belgium, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Romania and Slovenia.

According to the same source, the now retired U.S. Air Forces in Europe commander, General Roger Brady, instructed the school to double the amount of annual graduates from 72 to 144, and in 2009 General David Petraeus, now in charge of all U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, “highlighted in a memo to the Army and Air Force chiefs of staff the need for more JTACs, according to military officials.”

In August and September of 2010 the U.S. and NATO held Exercise Ramstein Rover 2010 in the state of Wisconsin, “the first international exercise training NATO Forward Air Controllers (FACs) in the US” and “an advanced training opportunity to exercise Close Air Support (CAS), FAC and Joint Terminal Attack Controller (JTAC) capabilities.” In addition to the U.S., participating NATO nations were Belgium, Britain, Canada, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Slovenia.

The exercise “prepare[d] NATO FACs/JTACs for their deployment to NATO’s ISAF mission in Afghanistan.” [8]

South of the Wisconsin border, last November the Illinois National Guard, which has been

deploying to Poland since 2003 “for one-year tours in support of the Global War on Terror,” trained Polish troops for NATO’s war in Afghanistan. A Polish officer present for the event was quoted as affirming: “We train together because we fight together. If we train together we fight and work better in Afghanistan. It is good idea to train together before we deploy. We are good soldiers and our brigade was deployed in Iraq two times and in Afghanistan so we work at a high level. We are ready.” [9]

In August U.S., Belgian, Danish, Dutch, German and Portuguese air force and army personnel participated in the Allied Strike 10 exercise in Germany, “in a realistic combat training environment,” that a Danish army forward air control instructor described as “the best training that is offered for JTACs (Joint Terminal Attack Controllers) in Europe.” [10]



F-15E Strike Eagle

The preceding autumn a squadron of U.S. F-15E Strike Eagles participated in a training exercise in the Baltic Sea state of Estonia “to train Estonian forward air controllers in calling in close air support.

“The event, titled Baltic Region Training Event IV Alpha, gave F-15E aircrews and the Estonian FACs the opportunity to work together in a training environment, to better prepare them for real-world missions.”

U.S. Air Forces in Europe (USAFE) characterized the maneuvers as follows: “While this was a NATO training event, it supports USAFE’s goal of building partnership capacity throughout the region.

“The program [Baltic Region Training Events] assists Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and neighbouring NATO countries also in their efforts towards interoperability and integration of air assets in line with existing NATO standards.”

An Estonian military officer said of the exercise: “This was our first time training with F-15s. We were able to exercise coordination between us, the aircraft and the ground forces. We are constantly learning, and this training helps prepare us for our deployment to Afghanistan next year.” [11]

The war in Afghanistan has also been used for U.S.-led multinational NATO special forces and other military training in Eastern and Central Europe and the acquisition and expansion of bases in Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary. Last September the Pentagon led the Jackal Stone 10 multinational military exercise in Poland and Lithuania with 1,300 special forces from the U.S., Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Croatia, Romania and Ukraine.

Building on previous NATO status of forces agreements, in 2005 and 2006 the Pentagon acquired eight new military bases in Bulgaria and Romania, including the Graf Ignatievo and Bezmer air bases in the first country and the Mikhail Kogalniceanu Airfield in the second.

The U.S. Joint Task Force-East operates out of the Mihail Kogalniceanu Airfield and the Babadag Training Area in Romania and the Novo Selo Training Area in Bulgaria, and Stryker brigades exercise in both countries for the war in Afghanistan. Last October the U.S. dispatched F-15C jet fighters to Romania's Campia Turzii Air Base for Operation Golden Lance, large-scale air exercise involving 100 U.S. airmen and 10 fighter aircraft, and in the same month the U.S. 86th Airlift Wing and 435th Air Ground Operations Wing led two weeks of maneuvers to train 1,000 Bulgarian paratroopers in the Thracian Fall 2010 exercise.

NATO has upgraded air bases in Eastern Europe, including the Amari Air Base in Estonia, the Siauliai Air Base in Lithuania and the Lielvarde Air Base in Latvia, to accommodate U.S. and NATO jet fighters and strategic transport aircraft. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have been recruited into the U.S. and NATO Northern Distribution Network to transit military equipment and personnel to Afghanistan. U.S. and NATO military transit routes to the Afghan war front will incorporate eleven of fifteen former Soviet republics, all except for Armenia, Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine for the moment.

Poland's 31st Air Base in Krzesiny will soon host U.S. F-16 Fighting Falcon multirole jet fighters and C-130 Hercules military transport aircraft. The U.S. moved Patriot Advanced Capability-3 anti-ballistic missiles and over 100 troops into Morag last May and plans to station dozens of Standard Missile-3 interceptors in Poland and Romania in the upcoming years.

In 1995 Hungary's Taszar Air Base became the first U.S. and NATO military base on former Warsaw Pact territory, used for interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo.

For several years the Pentagon has employed the Papa Air Base in Hungary, recently upgraded by NATO, for its C-17 Globemaster III transport aircraft, making it one of the few crucial strategic air transport centers outside of the U.S. In 2007 the base was selected to host three NATO C-17 transport planes for the Heavy Airlift Wing which was activated on July 27, 2009, the first multinational strategic airlift operation.

U.S. personnel and that of several NATO allies are deployed to the air base.



Interior of C-17 Globemaster III

In December of 2009 the multinational Heavy Airlift Wing (HAW) performed its first official flight, an airlift mission into Iraq which "facilitated the deployment for members of the NATO

Training Mission-Iraq.”

The mission also “enabled the redeployment of 30 International Security Assistance Force members and 25 tons of equipment from Afghanistan. Combining missions and increasing airlift efficiencies is a central wing goal.”

In the words of a U.S. military official at the time, “The HAW is starting to make a real difference in moving missions to Iraq and Afghanistan.” [12]

Though two months before, the HAW flew a C-17 Globemaster III into the Afghan capital of Kabul “with military representatives from all 28 NATO member states as well as those from the 14 non-NATO nations who also contribute forces to ISAF.” [13]

Last April it was announced that the U.S.-NATO Heavy Airlift Wing at Papa had “recently moved 2.1 million pounds of equipment essential to surge operations supporting the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.

“The international wing has been part of the operation to move more than 6 million pounds of basic expeditionary airfield resources, or BEAR materiel, to build six forward operating bases supporting 3,500 people....” [14]

In June 100 paratroopers from the American, British, German, Norwegian and Belgian air forces, armies and marines participated in “airborne jump operations to build partnerships and capabilities needed to meet future challenges” in Germany, parachuting from a C-17 from the HAW and C-130J Hercules from the 37th Airlift Squadron at Ramstein Air Base. Though it wasn’t “the first time NATO countries have participated in jump week, it was the first time the recently stood up HAW participated.” [15]

Last month the scope of the operation became evident when a a C-17 left the Papa Air Base for a three-day, 7,000-mile mission “covering the countries of Hungary, Poland, Afghanistan and Lithuania as they move[d] more than 75,000 tons of cargo” [16] to the Bagram Airfield in Afghanistan.



C-17 Globemaster IIIs

On January 4 the U.S. Defense Department’s news service announced that the C-17 Globemaster III had celebrated its two millionth flight hour.

“As a testament to the C-17 mission tempo, the aircraft passed its two millionth flight hour just four years after passing its first million-hour mark, and the first million hours took 16 years to reach.

“Although Air Mobility Command officials estimate the international C-17 fleet passed the milestone on Dec. 14, the achievement was commemorated on a Dec. 10 airdrop mission out of Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan.” The latter was identified by the source as the busiest military airport in the world, one which accommodates “approximately 100 missions, 1,500 passengers and 800 short tons of cargo daily.” [17]

Last April the White House secured an agreement with the government of Kazakhstan to permit U.S. troops to fly over the North Pole and across the Central Asian nation bordering China and Russia to Afghanistan.



USS Bainbridge

On January 3 USS Bainbridge, an Arleigh Burke class guided missile destroyer, left Naval Station Norfolk in Virginia to deploy with Standing NATO Maritime Group 2: “The ship and its crew will conduct joint operations with various countries of NATO and also conduct maritime interdiction operations near the coast of Somalia.” [18] That is, it will operate in the Gulf of Aden and the broader Arabian Sea where the U.S. and NATO have created a war zone that stretches from the Horn of Africa to the Indian subcontinent.

The Afghan war has indeed contributed in transforming NATO from a military bloc that had waged bombing campaigns in the Balkans to an international, integrated, expeditionary force the Pentagon and White House are employing to conduct military operations not short of war for a number of key geopolitical purposes.

Notes

- 1) Gareth Porter, How Afghanistan Became a War for NATO, Inter Press Service, January 3, 2011
<http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=54020>
- 2) Macedonian International News Agency, December 28, 2010
- 3) Iraq: NATO Assists In Building New Middle East Proxy Army Stop NATO, August 13, 2010
<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2010/08/14/iraq-nato-assists-in-building-new-middle-east-proxy-army>
- 4) USS Abraham Lincoln Launches 1,000th Sortie In Support of OEF Navy NewsStand January 1, 2011
- 5) USA Today, January 2, 2011

- 6) U.S. Air Forces in Europe, December 9, 2010
- 7) Stars and Stripes, October 4, 2010
- 8) North Atlantic Treaty Organization
Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe
September 2, 2010
- 9) Belleville News Democrat, November 1, 2010
- 10) United States European Command, August 9, 2010
- 11) U.S. Air Forces in Europe, September 17, 2009
- 12) U.S. Air Force, December 16, 2009
- 13) U.S. Air Forces in Europe, October 16, 2009
- 14) United States European Command
United States Air Forces in Europe
April 2, 2010
- 15) United States Air Forces in Europe, June 17, 2010
- 16) U.S. Air Forces in Europe, December 17, 2010
- 17) American Forces Press Service, January 4, 2011
- 18) WAVY, January 3, 2011

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