

2011: U.S. And NATO To Extend And Expand Afghan War

By [Rick Rozoff](#)

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The war being waged by the United States and the Western military alliance it controls, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, is well into its tenth year and is already the longest war in the history of the U.S., Afghanistan and NATO alike. In fact it is NATO's first ground war and its first armed conflict in Asia.

It has now graduated into a broader war, having engulfed neighboring Pakistan with a population of 170 million and a nuclear arsenal.

The U.S. has suffered reverses in the past week and half with the death of Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke on December 13 and the recall of the Central Intelligence Agency station chief in Pakistan, Jonathan Banks, on December 16, the day the White House issued its annual policy review on the protracted and increasingly deadly war in Afghanistan.

As of December 23, American and NATO military fatalities for this year are at 705, almost a third of the total 2,275 killed since the war was launched on October 7, 2001.

The Afghan National Army created from scratch by the Pentagon and NATO acknowledged this month that it has lost 806 soldiers so far this year, an increase of 25 percent over 2009.

Earlier this month a report by the United Nations General Assembly documented that Afghan civilian casualties had risen by 20 percent in the first ten months of this year over all of last to a total of 5,480 killed and wounded.

In the past few days Western military forces have intensified lethal air strikes against Afghan civilians and troops, killing four Afghan soldiers in the south of the country in an air attack in the middle of the month, killing a civilian and wounding two children in another air strike in Helmand province during the same time period, and most recently killing a policeman and the brother of a legislator in a helicopter attack in northern Afghanistan on December 23.

The day before the last incident an Afghan provincial governor called on the North Atlantic military bloc "to pay attention to civilian casualties during operations and prevent civilian casualties." [1] The two deaths on the following day indicate that such appeals fall on deaf ears.

On the other side of the Afghan-Pakistani border, on December 16 three U.S. missile attacks killed an estimated 54 people in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, all identified as "militants" in the Western press. The overwhelming majority of deadly CIA-directed drone

attacks have occurred in North Waziristan in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. The attack in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa signals the expansion of the war deeper into the country – “a possible expansion of the CIA-led covert campaign of drone strikes inside Pakistani territory” [2] – as does a recent NATO helicopter gunship raid into Balochistan province.

Days later NATO oil tankers came under rocket attack in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and “The Pakistan-Afghanistan highway was temporarily blocked and NATO supplies suspended following the attack.” [3]

As in Afghanistan, the killing has increased substantially this year.

In the past year there have been at least 115 U.S. drone attacks in the tribal areas, more than double the amount in 2009, which itself represented a dramatic increase over previous years. In 2009 and 2010 there have been approximately 170 missile strikes in North and South Waziristan, a 300 percent increase over the last four years of the George W. Bush administration. The cumulative death toll is in the neighborhood of 2,000, with close to half of those deaths occurring this year.

The CIA’s Jonathan Banks was whisked home from Pakistan after his identity was revealed in a legal action initiated by surviving victims of the drone attacks and their families. The suit also named CIA Director Leon Panetta and Defense Secretary Robert Gates.

Nothing daunted, the special assistant to the commanding general of U.S. Army Special Operations stated that the current demand for more drones (unmanned aerial vehicles) is “insatiable. “

“It’s like crack, and everyone wants more,” Brigadier General Kevin Mangum recently announced. [4]

The U.S. is pressuring the Pakistani government to launch a military operation in North Waziristan in tandem with the marked escalation of drone attacks there, something paralleling the Pakistani army offensive in the Swat Valley in May of last year that led to the displacement of three million civilians.

In addition, the Pentagon has recently announced that U.S. and NATO forces will be stationed at a military base in the capital of Pakistan’s Balochistan province. [5]

Washington is now pushing to expand special forces operations in Pakistan’s tribal areas, supplementing CIA drone strikes and NATO helicopter attacks in the region.

Until now, “The main role in a secret war on Pakistan territory has belonged to the Central Intelligence Agency. The CIA has operated armed drones to hunt down insurgent leaders and also organized a number of secret missions carried out by Afghan operatives, known as Counterterrorism Pursuit Teams.”

The introduction of American ground forces – in the words of an American official, “We’ve never been as close as we are now to getting the go-ahead to go across” – would “open a new front in the war that is becoming more and more unpopular in America.

“It also could ruin relations with...Pakistan, especially considering the risk of civilian casualties.” [6]

However, civilian deaths on both sides of the Khyber Pass and the destabilization of nuclear Pakistan are matters of small importance to American and NATO geostrategists, who nurture grand designs for Central and South Asia.

A recent Chinese analysis put the matter this way:

“Though it started long ago, the game is still on. There are only more players with more pieces moving and moved on a bigger board, all for a newer rendition of the Great Game.

“Whichever way people prefer to describe the game – geostrategy or geopolitics – there has been a center-piece: interest in a geography that is important to world powers, past and present; that is, in whatever way these powers deem it as important.

“Sitting at one end of the board is the same old player, known as the Russian Empire, while at the other end now is an alliance orchestrated not any more by the British Empire but rather by the Americans and the military coalition they dominate, known as NATO.” [7]

Indian analyst and former diplomat M. K. Bhadrakumar stated in a recent article entitled “NATO weaves South Asian web” that after its summit in Lisbon, Portugal last month NATO “is well on the way to transforming into a global political-military role” and “is by far today the most powerful military and political alliance in the world.”

Speaking about long-term U.S. and NATO strategy in Asia, he added:

“It is within the realm of possibility that NATO would at a future date deploy components of the US missile defense system in Afghanistan. Ostensibly directed against nearby ‘rogue states’, the missile defense system will challenge the Chinese strategic capability.” [8]

Regarding the long-planned agreement on constructing a Turkmenistan- Afghanistan- Pakistan- India (TAPI) natural gas pipeline concluded earlier this month [9], the author said:

“TAPI is the finished product of the US invasion of Afghanistan. It consolidates NATO’s political and military presence in the strategic high plateau that overlooks Russia, Iran, India, Pakistan and China. TAPI provides a perfect setting for the alliance’s future projection of military power for ‘crisis management’ in Central Asia.

“The pipeline signifies a breakthrough in the longstanding Western efforts to access the fabulous mineral wealth of the Caspian and Central Asian region. Washington has been the patron saint of the TAPI concept since the early 1990s when the Taliban was conceived as its Afghan charioteer. The concept became moribund when the Taliban regime was driven out of power from Kabul.

“Now the wheel has come full circle with the project’s incremental resuscitation since 2005, running parallel with the Taliban’s fantastic return to the Afghan chessboard. TAPI’s proposed commissioning coincides with the 2014 timeline for ending the NATO ‘combat mission’ in Afghanistan. The US ‘surge’ is concentrating on Helmand and Kandahar provinces through which the TAPI pipeline will eventually run. What an amazing string of coincidences! ” [10]

Last week NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen affirmed that “as the long-term partnership that President Karzai and I signed at Lisbon demonstrates, our commitment to Afghanistan will continue well beyond 2014.” [11]

On December 22 U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry confirmed that the Pentagon “will retain a ‘sizable mission’ in Afghanistan beyond 2014” and that a troop withdrawal, if it ever occurs, would be “conditions- based; not calendar-based. ” American troops “could also stay on to carry out counter-terrorism operations,” added the retired general and former deputy chairman of the NATO Military Committee. [12]

In a recent interview, American analyst Gareth Porter asserted that NATO troops are killing and dying in Afghanistan “because bureaucrats in Brussels, in the NATO headquarters, wanted more responsibility, [they] wanted a job for NATO to be able to take on in order to justify the continued existence of that organization. ” [13]

The U.S. and NATO require and are exploiting the endless war in Afghanistan and Pakistan for more reasons than simply to justify the continued existence, even the global expansion, of the world’s only military bloc.

As Bhadrakumar has pointed out, far more is at stake: The military encirclement of Russia, China and Iran and control of Eurasia’s strategic energy resources.

- 1) Associated Press, December 22, 2010
- 2) Associated Press, December 17, 2010
- 3) Xinhua News Agency, December 20, 2010
- 4) U.S. Army: ‘Insatiable Demand’ for UAVs in War Zone
Defense News, December 16, 2010
- 5) Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan
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- 7) Gaochao Yi, More players and more pieces in the New Great Game
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- 10) Asia Times, December 23, 2010
- 11) North Atlantic Treaty Organization, December 16, 2010
- 12) Pajhwok Afghan News, December 23, 2010
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- 13) US-led Afghan war serves NATO’s existence
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