

# Afghan War: “Payback Time”

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The United States government decided to suspend the training of Afghan security forces in the first week of September after a particularly nasty month in which many U.S. and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) soldiers lost their lives. Most of them died at the hands of Afghans who were being trained by them. Five U.S. Special Operations officers were killed in one week. Special Operations officers are in charge of training Afghan security personnel. The Barack Obama administration, which has announced its plans to end the occupation by 2014, wanted to leave behind a trained Afghan force capable of maintaining security. It had earmarked nearly \$50 billion for training Afghan security forces.

From available indications, the local security forces’ loyalty to the NATO armies is only skin deep. Troops from all the participating Western countries, including small countries such as New Zealand and Georgia, have been targeted by the Afghan forces that they have been training. The U.S. military commander in Afghanistan, General John Allen, issued an order in August directing U.S. soldiers to carry loaded weapons at all times even in secure U.S. bases such as the Bagram air base. At the last count, the U.S. had around 400 bases, most of them small, in the country. The strength of the Afghan security forces has risen to 300,000 in the last five years. In 2007, the combined strength of the Afghan Army and the national police was less than 100,000.

In the first half of this year, 21 incidents involving the killing of 30 American and European trainers were reported. The attacks have escalated since, with reports of Afghan soldiers turning their guns on their Western trainers all over the country. The number of American soldiers killed thus has now crossed 2,000. More than a thousand soldiers from other NATO and allied countries have been killed since the occupation began in 2001.

Of course, it is the ordinary Afghan who has paid the highest price. Countless numbers of Afghans have perished after the American invasion. A recent report of Afghanistan’s Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) on the atrocities committed by the Afghan government and warlords from 1978 to 2011 said that more than a million people had been killed and another 1.3 million disabled. Many of the warlords responsible for the mayhem in that period were backed by the U.S. and are now playing an important role in the politics of

the country. The U.S. embassy in Kabul had objected to the release of the report, saying that it would “reopen old wounds”. The U.S. had reasons to be wary about the AIHRC report, given the fact that its close allies, the warlords Mohammad Qasim Fahim, Karim Khalili and Rashid Dostum, occupy important positions of power today. Besides, the report also details the close relations Washington had with elements who are now with Al Qaeda.

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A significant number of Afghan Army soldiers have deserted, taking their weapons with them, since the implementation of the COIN strategy. The prominent American commentator Tom Engelhardt has tried to draw comparisons of the brewing Afghan Army rebellion with that of the first 1857 mutiny in India when sepoys turned on their British officers. Obama has been quiet on the loss of American lives, but he has reiterated that American troops will be out of Afghanistan in 2014. The prognosis for Afghanistan is gloomy after 2014. The central government in Kabul is loathed by the people and not trusted by its American paymasters. The Taliban attacks are getting more brazen by the day.

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