

# End Of The Year: U.S. Recruits Worldwide For Afghan War

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The first of 33,000 more U.S. troops have arrived in Afghanistan for a Christmas surge and they will soon be joined by as many as 10,000 additional non-American troops serving under NATO in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Washington will have over 100,000 uniformed personnel and tens of thousands of new military contractors in the South Asian war zone, and with more than 50,000 other NATO and NATO partner forces present total troop strength will exceed 150,000.

Except for a modest amount of troops assigned to the NATO Training Mission – Iraq in Baghdad, the U.S. with its 120,000 troops is now largely alone in that country. NATO, especially new NATO, member and candidate states were ordered to transfer their forces from Iraq to Afghanistan starting approximately a year ago and are now redeploying soldiers from missions in Kosovo, Lebanon and Chad to the same destination. The Afghan battlefield, then, currently has the largest amount of military forces stationed in any war zone in the world. [1]

Troops from NATO countries stationed in Bosnia, the Central African Republic, Chad, Lebanon and off the coast of Somalia are currently assigned to European Union missions (European warships also participate in NATO's Ocean Shield naval interdiction in Somali waters and the Gulf of Aden) and their transfer to the South Asian war front indicates the virtual interchangeability of armed units assigned to NATO and the European Union. [2]

Since the beginning of this year's escalation of the war in Afghanistan and into neighboring Pakistan, Western public figures and media have dwelt frequently and at length on the war being a – or the – test for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, ostensibly the major watershed and crucible in its 60-year history.

When the bloc, the world's only military alliance, invoked its Article 5 mutual assistance clause in September of 2001 to support its leading member, the U.S., in its invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, the Alliance was fresh on the heels of its first-ever war: The 78-day bombing campaign against Yugoslavia in early 1999, the first all-out military assault targeting a European nation since Hitler's and Mussolini's attacks and invasions of 1939-1941.

By activating Article 5 – “The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all [and] will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith” – NATO enlisted for its first land war and its first war in Asia.

It also exploited its effective war provision to launch Operation Active Endeavor in early

October of 2001, a comprehensive, airtight naval surveillance and interdiction program throughout the entire Mediterranean Sea that monitors all activity in NATO's new mare nostrum (our sea) and dominates all access points into the world's most important sea: The Strait of Gibraltar, the Dardanelles Strait and the Suez Canal, connecting the Mediterranean with the Atlantic Ocean, the Black Sea, the Red Sea and thence to the Indian Ocean, respectively.

The U.S.-led military alliance gained control over that vast stretch of strategic waterways by adopting the American post-September 11, 2001 pretexts of combating terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. The first was the rationale for invading Afghanistan, the second for invading Iraq.

Three years after the inauguration of Active Endeavor, which continues with full force to this day, the NATO summit in Turkey developed the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative which upgraded military partnerships with the members of the bloc's Mediterranean Dialogue – Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia – and targeted the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – for a similar relationship, one modeled on the Partnership for Peace program that prepared twelve Eastern European nations for accession to full NATO membership over the last decade. [3]

In ten years the military bloc has expanded from its Cold War confines, North America and Western and Southern Europe, into almost all of Eastern Europe including former Warsaw Pact states and Soviet and Yugoslav republics. The bipolar military division of Europe symbolized by the Berlin Wall [4] that ended twenty years ago has been replaced by a unilateral expansion of the world's sole military bloc toward Russia's western borders, from the Baltic to the Black to the Adriatic Seas. From there it has extended its reach through deployments and partnerships into the South Caucasus, Northeastern and Central Africa, and Central and South Asia.

If Afghanistan is a trial or the test of NATO in its sixtieth year, it is not so for the NATO of 1949 but of what leading Alliance officials and other proponents in recent years have referred to as 21st century NATO, expeditionary NATO, global NATO: The first attempt in history to forge an international military alliance. An international armed network with the world's self-proclaimed exclusive superpower and its nuclear arsenal as its foundation and at its core.

The "asymmetric" war in Afghanistan now in its ninth year is a seminal venture for NATO in several respects. In addition to it signifying the bloc's first ground war and its first colonial excursion outside the Euro-Atlantic world, the drawn-out and by all indications indefinite campaign in South Asia is laboratory and training camp, firing range and convergence point for the U.S.'s consolidation of a global military strike and occupation force first tested in Kosovo in 1999 with 50,000 troops under NATO command, then in Iraq after 2003 with tens of thousands of troops from NATO, new NATO and NATO candidate nations. [5]

Washington and Brussels have now dragooned armed contingents from fifty nations on five continents to serve under one commander, General Stanley McChrystal, head of all U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan. New contributing states include geographically remote and otherwise diverse countries that include Colombia, Bosnia, Georgia, Montenegro, Mongolia, Armenia and South Korea. All except Mongolia either are or have recently been the scenes

of wars or at any moment may be. As numerous statements by political and military leaders of nations supplying troops to NATO for the Afghan war have established, that battleground is an ideal location and opportunity for gaining real-life combat experience for application at home. The bulk of countries in this category border Russia on the latter's northwestern and southwestern flanks. [6]

The defense minister of Austria, one of only a small number of European nations now yet a full NATO member, recently lamented that American officials were pressuring his country to provide more troops for deployment to Afghanistan, having to remind readers of one of his country's newspapers that his is still a sovereign state. As reported in Deutsche Welle, "Austria and the United States are quarreling over Austria's troop levels in Afghanistan. The Austrian government says it feels strong pressure from the US to send more of its troops to the NATO mission."

The South Korean daily Dong-A Ilbo wrote on December 21 that "NATO has invited for the first time a Korean military delegation to a meeting next year of countries sending troops to Afghanistan."

"The dispatch of Korean troops scheduled for July will likely help expedite far-reaching military cooperation between Korea and NATO." The source added that with the advent of the new Lee Myung-bak government in Seoul "As Korea actively participates in international security cooperation, including its decision to send troops to Afghanistan and fully join the Proliferation Security Initiative, NATO's assessment of Korea is changing." The Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) is another mechanism, linked with the U.S. thousand-ship navy project as well as NATO's Operation Active Endeavor, to enmesh more and more nations around the world into an international military network run from Washington. [7]

South Korea is already what is identified by NATO as a Contact Country partner, the others being Japan, Australia and New Zealand, serving as the foundation stones for a rapidly emerging "Asian NATO" that includes Singapore and Mongolia – both of whom have or will have troops serving under NATO for the first time, in Afghanistan – as well as the Philippines, Thailand, Brunei and future prospects like India, Bangladesh and Cambodia and the five former Soviet republics in Central Asia as well as Afghanistan and Pakistan. [8]

While advancing eastward, the North Atlantic bloc has also moved south and has begun to formally penetrate Africa, with an air transport mission to the Darfur region of Sudan in 2005 and naval deployments off Somalia in the Horn of Africa beginning in 2007.

Washington's mainstay military ally in South and all of Latin America, Colombia, in addition to turning over seven military bases to the Pentagon in a move that could ignite a war with its neighbors Venezuela and Ecuador, is sending a company of battle-hardened U.S.-trained combat troops to Afghanistan for NATO's ISAF mission. They will bring their own wartime experience to bear in the South Asian nation and will return home, like their Georgian and South Korean military counterparts, also trained by the U.S., better prepared for armed conflict against neighboring states.

In addition to Britain, France and the Netherlands being obligated to lend their colonial possessions in Latin America and off its coasts to their U.S. NATO ally for use against Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) members Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Venezuela (post-coup Honduras is withdrawing), steps have been taken over the past fifteen years to expand NATO ties with other Latin American nations as well as

Colombia. [9]

In 1995 Chile and Argentina (under President Carlos Menem) sent troops to serve under NATO in Bosnia, the Alliance's first military deployment outside a member state's territory. This week Chile agreed to prolong the stationing of troops there - the mission since having been transferred from NATO to the European Union - with a government official stating, "We have been able to see Chile together with the North Atlantic Treaty organization in a European country, and the interaction of our armed forces with first-level armies of the world." [10]

The war and war zone trajectory for NATO candidates and partner states over the past fifteen years has been from Bosnia to Kosovo to Macedonia to Iraq and finally Afghanistan. Chilean armed forces, whoever wins next month's presidential run-off election, may eventually be sent to Afghanistan.

Solidifying ties with Chile, which is involved in the current multinational dispute over claims in the Antarctic, and with South Africa, where NATO warships have docked and conducted naval exercises over the past two years, in addition to Australia which has the largest non-member troop contingent serving under NATO in Afghanistan, the Alliance is positioning itself for the scramble at the southern end of the planet [11] as it is for that at the top of the world. [12]

Two months before the dismantling of the Berlin Wall and the effective end of the Cold War, the triennial summit of the Non-Aligned Movement was held in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. Present were the representatives of 108 nations that defined themselves as militarily non-aligned.

Twenty years later, and with over twenty more countries in the world after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia itself and the independence of East Timor, the pressure to join in military agreements, partnerships, deployments, exercises and base hosting with the U.S. and NATO is more intense than during the Cold War.

The newly activated U.S. Africa Command alone targets 53 nations for individual and collective partnerships with the Pentagon. The war in Afghanistan is the broadest global touchstone to date in this militarization of the world. Washington is pressuring all and sundry to contribute with troops, logistics and funds and is employing the war to build up bilateral military ties and weapons and warfighting interoperability with nations throughout the world.

The first decade of the new millennium has been one of war, starting in earnest in Afghanistan, and the expansion of American bases and troops into Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa, South America, and Central and South Asia. Areas that until now had been spared the Pentagon's permanent presence.

#### Notes

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10) Xinhua News Agency, December 22, 2009

11) NATO Of The South: Chile, South Africa, Australia, Antarctica, Stop NATO, May 30, 2009

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