

# Escalation of the Afghan War? US-NATO Target Russia, China and Iran

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The United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization are expanding their nearly eight-year war in Afghanistan both in scope, with deadly drone missile attacks inside Pakistan, and in intensity, with daily reports of more NATO states' troops slated for deployment and calls for as many as 45,000 American troops in addition to the 68,000 already in the nation and scheduled to be there shortly.

The NATO bombing in Kunduz province on September 4 may well prove to be the worst atrocity yet perpetrated by Western forces against Afghan civilians and close to 20 U.S and NATO troops have been killed so far this month, with over 300 dead this year compared to 294 for all of 2008.

The scale and gravity of the conflict can no longer be denied even by Western media and government officials and the war in South Asia occupies the center stage of world attention for the first time in almost eight years.

The various rationales used by Washington and Brussels to launch, to continue and to escalate the war – short-lived and successive, forgotten and reinvented, transparently insincere and frequently mutually exclusive – have been exposed as fraudulent and none of the identified objectives have been achieved or are likely ever to be so. Osama bin Laden and Omar Mullah have not been captured or killed. Taliban is stronger than at any time since their overthrow eight years ago last month, even – though the name Taliban seems to mean fairly much whatever the West intends it to at any given moment – gaining hitherto unimagined control over the country's northern provinces.

Opium cultivation and exports, virtually non-existent at the time of the 2001 invasion, are now at record levels, with Afghanistan the world's largest narcotics producer and exporter.

The Afghan-Pakistani border has not been secured and NATO supply convoys are regularly seized and set on fire on the Pakistani side. Pakistani military offensives have killed hundreds if not thousands on the other side of the border and have displaced over two million civilians in the Swat District and adjoining areas of the North-West Frontier Province.

Yet far from acknowledging that the war, America's longest since the debacle in Vietnam and NATO's first ground war and first conflict in Asia, has been a signal failure, U.S. and NATO leaders are clamoring for more troops in addition to the 100,000 already on the ground in Afghanistan and are preparing the public in the fifty nations contributing to that number for a war that will last decades. And still without the guarantee of a successful

resolution.

But the West's South Asian war is a fiasco only if judged by what Washington and Brussels have claimed their objectives were and are. Viewed from a broader geopolitical and strategic military perspective matters may be otherwise.

On September 7 a Russian analyst, Sergey Mikheev, was quoted as saying that the major purpose of the Pentagon moving into Afghanistan and of NATO waging its first war outside of Europe was to exert influence on and domination over a vast region of South and Central Asia that has brought Western military forces – troops, warplanes, surveillance capabilities – to the borders of China, Iran and Russia.

Mikheev claims that “Afghanistan is a stage in the division of the world after the bipolar system failed” and the U.S. and NATO “wanted to consolidate their grip on Eurasia...and deployed a lot of troops there,” adding that as a pretext for doing so “The Taliban card was played, although nobody had been interested in the Taliban before.” [1]

A compatriot of the writer, Andrei Konurov, earlier this month agreed with the contention that Taliban was and remains more excuse for than cause of the United States and its NATO allies deploying troops and taking over air and other bases in Afghanistan and the Central Asian nations of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In the case of Kyrgyzstan alone, there were estimates at the beginning of this year that as many as 200,000 U.S. and NATO troops have transited through the Manas air base en route to Afghanistan.

Konurov argued that “With Washington's non-intervention if not downright encouragement, the Talibs are destabilizing Central Asia and the Uyghur regions of China as well as seeking inroads into Iran. This is the explanation behind the recent upheaval of Uyghur separatism and to an extent behind the activity of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.” [2]

It must be kept in mind, however, that for the West the term of opprobrium Talib is elastic and can at will be applied to any ethnic Pushtun opponent of Western military occupation and, as was demonstrated with the NATO air strike massacre last Friday, after the fact to anyone killed by Western forces as in multi-ethnic Kunduz province.

The last-cited author also stated, again contrary to received opinion in the West, that “the best option for the US is Afghanistan having no serious central authority whatsoever and a government in Kabul totally dependent on Washington. The inability of such a government to control most of Afghanistan's territory would not be regarded as a major problem by the US as in fact Washington would in certain ways be able to additionally take advantage of the situation.” [3]

An Afghanistan that was at peace and stabilized would then be a decided disadvantage for plans to maintain and widen Western military positioning at the crossroads where Russian, Chinese, Iranian, Pakistani and Indian interests meet.

The Russian writer mentions that Washington and its NATO allies have employed the putative campaign against al-Qaeda – and now Taliban as well as the drug trade – to secure, seize and upgrade 19 military bases in Afghanistan and Central Asia, including what can become strategic air bases like former Soviet ones in Bagram, Shindand, Herat, Farah, Kandahar and Jalalabad in Afghanistan. The analyst pointed out that “The system of bases makes it possible for the US to exert military pressure on Russia, China, and Iran.”

It suffices to recall that during the 1980s current U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates was the CIA official in charge of the agency's largest-ever covert campaign, Operation Cyclone, to arm and train Afghan extremists in military camps in Pakistan for attacks inside Afghanistan. A "porous border" was not his concern at the time.

Konurov ended his article with an admonition:

"There is permanent consensus in the ranks of the US establishment that the US presence in Afghanistan must continue.

"Russia should not and evidently will not watch idly the developments at the southern periphery of post-Soviet space." [4]

Iran's top military commander, Yahya Rahim-Safavi, was quoted in his nation's media on September 7 offering a comparable analysis and issuing a similar warning. Saying that "The recent security pact between US and NATO and Afghanistan showed the United States has no plan to leave the region," he observed that "Russia worries about the US presence in Central Asia and China has concerns about US interference in its two main Muslim provinces bordering Pakistan and Afghanistan." [5]

To indicate that the range of the Western military threat extended beyond Central Asia and its borders with Russia and China, he also said the "presence of more than 200,000 foreign forces in the region particularly in South-West Asia, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Middle East, the expansion of their bases, the sale of billions of dollars of military equipments to Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and looting their oil resources are the root cause of insecurity in South-West Asia, the Persian Gulf region and Iran," and noted that "US and NATO forces in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf had been a cause for concern for Russia, China and Iran." [6]

The Iranian concern is hardly unwarranted. The August 31 edition of the Jerusalem Post revealed that "NATO's interest in Iran has dramatically increased in recent months" and "In December 2006, Israeli Military Intelligence hosted the first of its kind international conference on global terrorism and intelligence, after which Israel and NATO established an intelligence-sharing mechanism."

The same article quoted an unnamed senior Israeli official as adding, "NATO talks about Iran and the way it affects force structure and building." [7]

Six days earlier an American news agency released a report titled "Middle East arms buys top \$100 billion" which said "Middle Eastern countries are expected to spend more than \$100 billion over the next five years" the result of "unprecedented packages...unveiled by President George W. Bush in January 2008 to counter Iran...." [8]

The major recipients of American arms will be three nations in the Persian Gulf - Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Iraq - as well as Israel.

Other Gulf states are among those to participate in this unparalleled arms buildup in Iran's neighborhood. "The core of this arms-buying spree will undoubtedly be the \$20 billion U.S. package of weapons systems over 10 years for the six states of the Gulf Cooperation Council - Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E. [United Arab Emirates], Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Bahrain." [9]

A week ago Nicola de Santis, NATO's head of the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul

Cooperation Initiative Countries Section in the NATO Public Diplomacy Division, visited the United Arab Emirates and met with the nation's foreign minister, Anwar Mohammed Gargash.

"Prospects of UAE-NATO cooperation" and "NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative" were the main topics of discussion. [10]

The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative was formed at the NATO summit in Turkey in 2004 to upgrade the status of the Mediterranean Dialogue – the Alliance's military partnerships with Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, Mauritania and Algeria – to that of the Partnership for Peace. The latter was used to prepare twelve nations for full NATO accession over the last ten years.

The second component of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative concerns formal and ongoing NATO military ties with the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council: The United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain (where the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet is headquartered), Kuwait, Oman and Qatar.

In May of this year France opened its first foreign military base in half a century in the United Arab Emirates.

In addition to U.S. and NATO military forces and bases in nations bordering Iran – Iraq, Afghanistan, Turkey, Pakistan and increasingly Azerbaijan – the Persian Gulf is now becoming a Pentagon and NATO lake.

China is also being encroached upon from several directions simultaneously.

After the visit of the Pentagon's Central Command chief General David Petraeus to the region in late August, Kyrgyzstan, which borders China, relented and agreed to the resumption of U.S. military transit for the Afghan war.

Tajikistan, which also abuts China, hosts French warplanes which are to be redeployed to Afghanistan this month.

Mongolia, resting between China and Russia, hosts regular Khaan Quest military exercises with the U.S. and has now pledged troops for NATO's Afghan war.

Kazakhstan, with Russia to its north and China to its southeast, has offered the U.S. and NATO increased transit and other assistance for the Afghan war, with rumors of troop commitments also in the air, and is currently hosting NATO's 20-nation Zhetysay 2009 exercise.

Late last month China appealed to Washington to halt military surveillance operations in its coastal waters, with its Defense Ministry saying "The constant US air and sea surveillance and survey operations in China's exclusive economic zone is the root cause of problems between the navies and air forces of China and the US." [11]

A spokeswoman for the American embassy in Beijing responded by saying, "The United States exercises its freedom of navigation of the seas under international law....This policy has not changed." [12]

The war in Afghanistan was launched four months after Russia, China, Kazakhstan,

Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan formed the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a regional security and economic alliance with a military component. Now the Pentagon and NATO have bases in the last three nations and military cooperation agreements with Kazakhstan.

In 2005 India, Iran, Mongolia and Pakistan joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as observer states. Now all but Iran are being pulled into the U.S.-NATO orbit. No small part of the West's plans in South and Central Asia is to neutralize and destroy the SCO as well as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), founded in 2002 by Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Armenia and Belarus.

Uzbekistan joined in 2006 but after General Petraeus's visit to the country last month it appears ready to leave the organization. Belarus, Russia's only buffer along its entire Western border, may not be far behind.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 the U.S. and NATO immediately moved on Central Asia, and the war in Afghanistan has provided them with the opportunity to gain domination over all of South as well as Central Asia and to undermine and threaten the existence of the only regional security bodies - the SCO and CSTO - which could counteract the West's drive for control of Eurasia.

#### Notes

- 1) Russia Today, September 7, 2009
- 2) Strategic Culture Foundation, September 3, 2009
- 3) Ibid
- 4) Ibid
- 5) Press TV, September 7, 2009
- 6) Ibid
- 7) Jerusalem Post, August 31, 2009
- 8) United Press International, August 25, 2009
- 9) Ibid
- 10) Emirates News Agency, September 1, 2009
- 11) Agence France-Presse, August 27, 2009
- 12) Ibid

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