

Global Military Bloc: NATO's Drive Into Asia

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With the sixtieth anniversary summit of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to occur jointly in the French city of Strasbourg and the German one of Kehl on April 3-4, the world should take note of how far from its original area of operations this, history's first, international military bloc has expanded in the interim since its creation in 1949.

At its genesis the Alliance did seem to have chosen an accurate name, as 10 of its 12 founding members – Belgium, Britain, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and the United States – had coastlines on the Atlantic Ocean and the North Sea.

Italy of course didn't and neither did Luxembourg. And Iceland learned the first lesson of the new trans-Atlantic system by being forced into the Alliance against the will of its populace.

Three years later, after bloody civil war and heavy-handed repression made Greece and Turkey ready for NATO's 'Euro-Atlantic values,' the Alliance, whose tortuous logic and distorted sense of geography are both equally infamous, expanded into the Aegean, Marmara and Black Seas and demonstrated that its aims extended far deeper into Eurasia than its name – false like everything about it – indicated.

During the 42 years of its Cold War embryonic stage NATO's major powers (surely no one can imagine nations like Iceland and Luxembourg having much of a say in important matters or, as NATO officials disingenuously and routinely state, possessing veto power) were content to use other, comparable, regional military blocs like CENTO (Central Treaty Organization), SEATO (Southeast Treaty Organization) and ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty) to both continue a half-millennium long Western domination of Asia and the South Pacific and to expand the American Century into former European colonial and semi-colonial domains.

Both the above objectives faced formidable opposition from the peoples of the affected areas in the wave of post-World War II anti-colonial and liberation struggles, where the wartime propaganda of the Western powers was taken at face value and the notion seized hold that democracy both within and between nations could no longer be denied to the majority of the human race.

But it was no easy or peaceful struggle. In fact it immediately cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of Asians and several million more in the aftermath. The following founding members of NATO still possessed as colonies, territories or outposts in Asia, aside from the Middle East and the South Pacific:

Britain -Burma until 1947 -British Indian Empire (now India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and

Bhutan) 1947 -Sri Lanka 1947 -Malaya (now Malaysia) 1957 -Hong Kong 1997

France -Cambodia 1953 -Laos 1954 -Vietnam 1954 -French India (Pondicherry, Karikal, Yanaon, Mahe [Malabar coast], and Chandannagar [Bengal]) 1954

Netherlands -Indonesia 1949

Portugal -Goa 1961 -East Timor 1975 -Macau 1999

With the end of the Asian anti-colonial and post-War anti-neo-colonial campaigns – all against founding members of NATO, note – in 1975, it appeared that the continent and its peoples were finally rid of Western military presence and threats.

But after the self-dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, itself formed six years after NATO and as a reaction to it, in 1989 NATO and its major powers in the first place saw that not only all of Europe but the entirety of Eurasia as well was open to it.

Five years later it initiated what it chooses to call the Partnership for Peace, effectively an apprenticeship program for full NATO membership, and immediately inducted all fifteen former Soviet republics, all former non-Soviet ex-Warsaw Pact/Comecon nations and six of the seven mainland European nations that had been in neither bloc formerly – Albania, Austria, Finland, Ireland (a holdout until 1999), Sweden and Switzerland – as well as Malta in the Mediterranean Sea.

That is, NATO established military-security relations with every state in Europe except for those in Yugoslavia, former and then present, excepting Macedonia by 1999.

The latter gap would soon be addressed, with NATO's first two military operations – Operation Deliberate Force in Bosnia in 1995 and Operation Allied Force against what remained of Yugoslavia in 1999 – completing the fragmentation of the nation.

Now all six former Yugoslav republics – Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro (the world's newest nation, only two and a half years old), Serbia and Slovenia – are in the Partnership for Peace and four of the six have been levied for troops for the Afghan and Iraqi wars.

The Balkans and the Black Sea region – of the last nine nations invited to join NATO five are in the Balkans (Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Slovenia), two on the Black Sea (Bulgaria and Romania) and three on the Baltic Sea (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) – are NATO's bridgehead to the Caucasus and from there to Central and South Asia and to Western Asia, the Middle East.

But with the incorporation of the former Soviet republics into NATO's nexus the bloc acquired outposts and basing and transit rights within Asia itself: In the South Caucasus with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia and in Central Asia, right to the Russian and Chinese borders, in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

NATO was then well-positioned for its next transformation, the deployment into Central and South Asia and its first Asian and first ground war after the events of 9/11 in the United States.

As the State Department's Matthew Bryza, formerly Deputy to the Special Advisor to the President and Secretary of State on Caspian Basin Energy Diplomacy (1998-2001, the three

years preceding 9/11) and current Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, boasted last year:

“The East-West Corridor we had been building from Turkey and the Black Sea through Georgia and Azerbaijan and across the Caspian became the strategic air corridor, and the lifeline, into Afghanistan allowing the United States and our coalition partners to conduct Operation Enduring Freedom.” (U.S. Department of State, June 24, 2008)

NATO’s tortuous, indeed torturous, logic and geography have already been remarked upon. That attacks on the capitals of US finance and government blamed by Washington on nineteen perpetrators from Arab nations would be used as justification for global and permanent military operations from the Strait of Gibraltar to the Philippines archipelago and from the Indian Ocean to the Caribbean Sea is, then, perhaps not to be wondered at.

For such is exactly what has occurred.

The US launched Operation Enduring Freedom (after its initial name, Operation Infinite Justice, was discarded) which to this day takes in fifteen nations:

Afghanistan, Cuba (Guantanamo Bay Naval Base), Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Jordan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, the Philippines, the Seychelles, Sudan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Uzbekistan and Yemen.

Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) has four components:

Operation Enduring Freedom – Afghanistan (OEF-A)
Operation Enduring Freedom – Philippines (OEF-P)
Operation Enduring Freedom – Horn of Africa (OEF-HOA)
Operation Enduring Freedom – Trans Sahara (OEF-TS)

And formerly Operation Enduring Freedom – Kyrgyzstan and Operation Enduring Freedom – Pankisi Gorge {Georgia}.

Operation Enduring Freedom – Horn of Africa is too little examined and commented upon, but as it’s the US-NATO opening to naval expansion into the Arabian Sea and from there to the Indian Ocean where it links up with Operation Enduring Freedom – Afghanistan, a few details are warranted.

After 9/11 the Pentagon’s Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa moved into the French Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti in the Horn of Africa, setting up what in Pentagonese is called a forward operating site.

There, with the participation of French, German and other NATO forces, Lemonnier has been a base for overseeing the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, the latter leading into the Persian Gulf, and for coordinating what can only be described as counterinsurgency wars in Yemen and Somalia (with the US also shelling the latter from sea) and proxy conflicts like the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia and the Ethiopia-Eritrea and Djibouti-Eritrea border wars of the past seven years.

The importance of this control over the Horn of Africa, the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea

will be demonstrated later when the role of NATO's most ambitious project in Asia, the military integration of India, is explored.

In conjunction with Operation Enduring Freedom, both its naval and its ground and air war components, on October 4, 2001 NATO activated for the first time in its then 52-year history the Alliance's Article 5 'mutual defense' clause and embarked on the 'international war on terror.' (Though one would be hardpressed to find many references to terror or terrorism in NATO documents prior to that.)

This unprecedented action played out in three realms. NATO began what it calls and continues to run as Operation Active Endeavor, a comprehensive naval surveillance and interdiction effort throughout the Mediterranean Sea, controlling all access into and out of such key chokepoints as the Strait of Gibraltar, the Suez Canal (at the north end of the Red Sea) and the Dardanelles Strait leading into the Sea of Marmara, which in turn leads into the Black Sea.

As NATO itself fairly brags of, Operation Active Endeavor has already 'contacted' 100,000 vessels and boarded 148.

As the Alliance describes it, "The mission assigned to Operation Active Endeavour was to conduct naval operations in the Mediterranean to actively demonstrate NATO's resolve and solidarity."

Secondly, NATO contributed – German – Airborne Warning and Control Systems aircraft (AWACS) to the United States to patrol its Atlantic coast.

The third and most significant facet of NATO invoking its Article 5 was to open up South and Central Asia to NATO military forces.

In 2003 NATO officially took over the International Security Assistance Force mission in Afghanistan, which includes most military forces outside of the bulk of US ones, that is all troops not serving with Operation Enduring Freedom.

All twenty six NATO members have troops in Afghanistan and the war that is now in its ninth calendar year has also been used as training grounds for NATO combat deployments for such Partnership for Peace members as Albania, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bosnia, Croatia, Finland, Georgia, Ireland, Macedonia, Sweden and Ukraine.

In addition, the US has an air force contingent at the Manas airbase in Kyrgyzstan and had one at the Karshi-Khanabad base in Uzbekistan before the government in Tashkent expelled it in 2005.

Germany retains a military base in Uzbekistan at Termez and France has a military force and six Mirage fighters in Tajikistan, the latter to be transferred directly to Afghanistan as the West escalates its South Asian war.

US, French and other NATO nations' militaries are also present in Pakistan, though the fact is not touted for obvious reasons.

NATO now comprises not only 26 full and two new candidate members, and not only 23 Partnership for Peace adjuncts throughout Eurasia from the Irish Sea to the Chinese border, but also enough other partners on five continents to comprise over a third of the world's

nations.

As the Alliance's US-based headquarters reported of a recent meeting in Albania:

"Allied Command Transformation (ACT) and various other NATO member Nations joined together for the 2008 Strategic Military Partnership Conference (SMPC) Nov. 3 - 5 in Tirana, Albania. "SMPC [Strategic Military Partnership Conference] is an annual event dedicated to providing a unique venue for all [26] NATO, Partnership for Peace (PfP), Mediterranean Dialogue (MD), Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) and selected Contact Country (CC) Chiefs of Defence for frank and open discussions on issues important to partners and NATO." [NATO International, Allied Command Transformation, November 5, 2008)

The following is an attempt at a comprehensive list from the Stop NATO email list:

Partnership for Peace members: Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Finland, Georgia, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro Serbia, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Mediterranean Dialogue: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia. Istanbul Cooperation Initiative: Effectively the Gulf Cooperation states of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Contact Country: A looser term to designate NATO partners, ad hoc and long-term, that are not in any of the above three categories, which at this point could reasonably include Afghanistan, Australia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, India, Iraq, Kenya, Kosovo, Japan, Mongolia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, Somalia, South Korea and others not yet openly acknowledged to have agreements with NATO such as Lebanon, the Dutch Antilles and numerous sub-Saharan African nations. (Stop NATO, November 6, 2008)

The so-called Contact Country allies are largely in the Asia-Pacific area and are such primarily because of their involvement in NATO's Afghan and related operations.

Australia has as many as 1,500 combat troops, including special forces, serving under NATO command.

New Zealand has military forces serving similarly.

South Korea had over 200 troops in Afghanistan before pulling them out in exchange for the release of kidnapped aid workers.

In reference to earlier comments about the new, self-proclaimed, global NATO absorbing members of former Cold War military blocs like ANZUS, CENTO and SEATO, the ongoing and endless Afghan war marks the first time that US, Australian, New Zealand and South Korean troops have fought together since the Vietnam War.

Despite the withdrawal of South Korean ground forces, it's recently been reported that "The Korean government plans to send an investigation team to Afghanistan in the wake of the Obama administration's expected request to Seoul for deploying troops to Afghanistan." (Dong-a Ilbo, January 2, 2009)

And that "South Korean officials said Thursday that South Korean and Japanese government

will hold talks on expanding their roles in Afghanistan.” (Xinhua News Agency, January 22, 2009)

The Japanese navy has been assisting Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan in the Indian Ocean from 2001 until a brief pause last year when the nation’s political opposition demanded a halt, but plans seem afoot to resume that role soon.

Another historical footnote: The war in Afghanistan (and increasingly in Pakistan) is the first time since World War Two that military forces from the former Axis powers – Germany, Italy and Japan – are engaged in a joint military campaign.

NATO has established a tripartite commission with Afghanistan and Pakistan to prosecute the wars in both nations independently of the US and Operation Enduring Freedom and NATO General Secretary Jaap de Hoop Scheffer was in the Pakistani capital two days ago to ratchet up the war effort.

Yesterday the official NATO website (URL: www.nato.int – NATO International) announced that “The Secretary General welcomed Pakistan’s acceptance of NATO’s offer to provide training to Pakistani officers in NATO schools....”

Afghan troops have been trained by NATO in Europe for years. (Analogous to the NATO Training Mission – Iraq.)

Growing out of the Greater Afghan War and the Proliferation Security Initiative begun by the US in 2003, a worldwide naval interdiction effort similar to NATO’s Operation Active Endeavor in the Mediterranean, but far more comprehensive and aimed predominantly against Asia, recent years have witnessed increasing references to the creation of an Asian NATO.

Candidates for this emerging bloc include Afghanistan, Brunei, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore (with troops in Afghanistan), South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand, with Australia and New Zealand further expanding their military roles in South and Far East Asia. (Australia, for example, is involved in the counterinsurgency campaigns in the Philippines in addition to its activities in Fiji, East Timor and the Solomon Islands.)

Two perspectives on this development appeared, one recently, the other almost three years ago, in the Russian and American press, respectively:

“The meeting [of the Russian and Chinese defense ministers] will...address the creation of a regional missile defense system in Asia and the Pacific involving the U.S, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and Taiwan.” (Interfax-Military, December 10, 2009)

“[T]he Navy’s 7th Fleet currently holds 100 exercises per year and will increase that number. It will include exercises with India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Australia, the Philippines, South Korea and Japan. “All branches of the U.S. military also have been conducting secret war games that use China as an adversary. The war games have been kept secret to avoid alerting the Chinese.” (Washington Times, April 20, 2006)

To consolidate the Pentagon’s and NATO’s plans for complete global military domination, and to further the encirclement of China as well as Russia, the main target of both is India,

acquisition of which would be the most significant advancement in both's history along with the intended absorption of Ukraine.

Former career India diplomat M K Bhadrakumar wrote in 2007:

"Washington genuinely seeks a NATO-India partnership. As NATO retools for the 21st century for new missions in Africa and South Asia, and as it advances across the Middle East toward the Indian Ocean, looking for global partnerships (numbering 20 at present), India inevitably figures in its agenda. "NATO's future role in the Indian Ocean forms part of a well-thought Western strategy. NATO's naval mission to the Indian Ocean in September coincided with another major initiative by Washington. The newly created Africa Command (AFRICOM) of the US military, reflecting the long-term strategic value of Africa, is poised to begin its initial operations in October. "For any security system in the Asia-Pacific (US, Japan and Australia), India remains the prize catch. Equally, without India, NATO's partnerships in the Indian Ocean region would remain inherently weak. (Asia Times, October 5, 2007)

The above came shortly after the Malabar 07-2 naval exercises in the Bay of Bengal, described by the official US armed forces newspaper as follows:

"The ongoing naval exercise called 'Malabar Exercise' between five nations in the coast of Bay of Bengal including United States, India, Australia, Japan and Singapore...More than 20,000 naval personnel from five countries kicked off Exercise Malabar off the coast of India on Wednesday. "The United States will be represented by the aircraft carriers USS Nimitz and USS Kitty Hawk; guided-missile cruisers USS Cowpens and USS Princeton; guided-missile destroyers USS Curtis Wilbur, USS Mustin, USS John Paul Jones, USS Chafee and USS Higgins; and various aircraft." (Stars and Stripes, September 7, 2007)

Below are excerpts from the Indian press at the time.

"Days ahead of the crucial multi-nation naval exercise in the Bay Bengal, top defence officials from Japan, Australia and US are visiting New Delhi for talks with the Defence Ministry to identify areas of mutual interest and chalk out plans for further military cooperation." (Indian Express, August 22, 2007)

"The five-nation Malabar war games are being conducted on rules and procedures compliant with the requirements of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, Indian naval and air force officers disclosed in interviews aboard the aircraft carrier today. "The Malabar 07-02 war games, now into the fourth day, have raised concerns in Beijing of an emerging 'Asian Nato.'" (Calcutta Telegraph, September 8, 2007)

Two months earlier noted Indian journalist Siddharth Varadarajan had observed:

"Two weeks before the July 2005 nuclear deal, India and the U.S. signed a 'New Framework for the Defence Relationship,' which envisaged an action plan ranging from joint exercises, collaboration in multinational operations, 'expand[ing] interaction with other nations' (i.e. U.S. allies such as Japan and Australia), enhancing capabilities to combat the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, collaboration in missile defence, and so on. "For the true purpose behind the aircraft carrier's [the nuclear-armed American aircraft-carrier USS Nimitz's] 'landmark visit' is to anaesthetise the Indian public to the

Pentagon's decade-long plans for logistics access and 'interoperability' with the Indian military, thereby smoothening India's eventual participation in U.S.-led 'structures of cooperative vigilance' in the wider Asian region." (The Hindu, July 5, 2007)

Immediately after the above-mentioned Malibar exercise, India was invited for the first time to the annual US-NATO Red Flag war games, held that year in Alaska.

Here are comments from Indian press services:

"Red Flag will take India even closer to NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) countries...." (Press Trust of India, October 6, 2007)

"Red Flag, an advanced aerial combat training exercise, has been hosted at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, and the Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska, since 1975. "It is meant to train pilots from the US, NATO and other allied countries for real combat situations. This includes the use of 'enemy' hardware and live ammunition for bombing exercises. "As for the NATO procedures, the Indian armed forces adopted them for the first time during the five-nation Malabar-2007 war games in September, the biggest to be held in the Bay of Bengal....The NATO procedures were extended to other sectors of the exercise as well in areas like anti-submarine warfare drills and aerial offensive and defence manoeuvres." (Indo-Asian News Service, November 26, 2007)

To end and pull together many of the strands examined above, here is another analysis by M K Bhadrakumar from a feature entitled "NATO reaches into the Indian Ocean":

"US officials are on record that Africom and NATO envisage an institutional linkup in the downstream. The overall US strategy is to incrementally bring NATO into Africa so that its future role in the Indian Ocean (and Middle East) region as the instrument of US global security agenda becomes optimal. For the strategy to succeed in the Indian Ocean, however, NATO will need to align three key littoral states - India, Sri Lanka and Singapore.

"NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe, General John Craddock, acknowledged that the mission furthers the alliance's ambition to become a global political organization. "By acting with lightning speed and without publicity, NATO surely created a *fait accompli*. NATO's naval deployment in the Indian Ocean region is a historic move and a milestone in the alliance's transformation. Even at the height of the Cold War, the alliance didn't have a presence in the Indian Ocean. Such deployments almost always tend to be open-ended.

"In 2007, a NATO naval force visited Seychelles in the Indian Ocean and Somalia and conducted exercises in the Indian Ocean and then re-entered the Mediterranean via the Red Sea in end-September. "[T]he Indian warship will eventually have to work in tandem with the NATO naval force. This will be the first time that the Indian armed forces will be working shoulder-to-shoulder with NATO forces in actual operations in territorial or international waters. "The operations hold the potential to shift India's ties with NATO to a qualitatively new level."

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