

Moscow Reacts to US Buildup in Afghanistan

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Moscow has correctly assessed that the announced Obama troop buildup in Afghanistan has no relevance to the stated aim of combatting the 'Taliban', but rather with a new attempt by the Pentagon strategists to encircle both Russia and China on Eurasia in order to retain US global military dominance. It is not waiting for a new policy from Washington. Rather Russia is acting to secure its perimeter in Central Asia through a series of calculated geopolitical moves reminiscent of the famous Great Game of more than a Century ago. The stakes in this geopolitical power game could not be higher—the issue of world war or peace in the coming decade.

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Admiral Mike Mullen are asking Obama to double US troop presence in Afghanistan. Both Gates and Mullen said that while they're thinking about the war in Afghanistan in terms of a 3-5 year time frame, their immediate goals are 'unclear.' That's highly revealing. It is clear from the deliberate pattern over months, despite vehement protest from Pakistan's government, of US bombing attacks on villages inside Pakistan, allegedly to hit Taliban targets, that the US intends to widen the conflict to Pakistan as well. What could be the possible aim?

Militarily, adding 30,000 more US troops to Afghanistan could never secure peace in that wartorn tribal region. It has been documented that many of the groups whom the US Command labels 'Taliban' are in fact armed bands controlled by local warlords, and not ideologically close-knit Taliban cadre in any sense. By labelling them Taliban, Washington hopes to convince its NATO allies such as Germany to send their troops to fight in an unwinnable war. Afghanistan presently has an estimated 40% unemployment and some five million living below the poverty line. It has been ravaged by more than four decades of continuous war.

Adding a mere 30,000 more for a total of 60,000 US troops in Afghanistan where the current killing rate for US soldiers is running fifteen times above that in Iraq, is ludicrous. According to the official US Marine Corps counterinsurgency guidelines, to run a country-wide counterinsurgency strategy with the absolute minimum force levels required by US Army and Marine Corps doctrine, the US would need almost 655,000 troops, or an escalation roughly 600,000 troops higher than the force levels in the proposed Gates strategy. In fact the US strategy as it now appears seems to be a replay of the gradual escalation strategy the US pursued in Vietnam in the early 1960's.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, whose foreign policy guidance, as that of her husband, is virtually indistinguishable from the Bush faction's, has just convened a dinner discussion of

leading policy experts on Afghanistan and South Asia. It included Defense Secretary Gates, CENTCOM commander Gen. David Petraeus, and National Security advisor Gen. James L. Jones. It follows the appointment of former Ambassador and hawk, Richard Holbrooke as the State Department's Special South Asia Envoy.

In January 2008, more than a year ago, present National Security adviser to Obama, General James Jones headed a private Afghan Study Group which recommended drastic steps to 'revitalize' the war in Afghanistan. Revitalize a war whose goals have not even been clearly formulated? Not surprisingly, Moscow suspects another agenda is at work when Washington puts such heavy concentration strategically on the issue of the forgotten war on terror in Afghanistan, a region with no discernable direct national security implications for the United States or NATO member countries. No conceivable combination in Afghanistan, a failed state if there ever was one, could threaten a war of aggression abroad. The tribal warlords around President Karzai seem to be struggling just to maintain their heroin export flows at record levels.

Moscow's response

Not surprisingly, the Kremlin has reacted to the US plans for Central Asia.. The president of Kyrgyzstan just flew to Moscow where he received promises of debt relief and billions of dollars in aid. Bakiyev was told he would get a write off Kyrgyzstan's \$180 million debt to Russia, a \$2 billion discounted loan and \$150 million in financial aid from Russia. On the occasion, President Kurmanbek Bakiyev announced plans to close a US air base crucial to the war in Afghanistan. Kyrgyzstan has been home to the only remaining US base in the strategically crucial region to Afghanistan's north.

After the Bush Administration declared its War on Terror and announced plans to strike Afghanistan to root out the arch evil Osama bin Laden from the caves of Tora Bora in 2001, Washington secured air force basing rights in both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

At about that same time, they covertly began preparing to unleash a series of US-financed 'regime change' Color Revolutions in Georgia (The Rose Revolution, in November 2003) and Ukraine (Orange Revolution in 2004). It tried and failed in Belarus as well as Uzbekistan. A glance at a map of Eurasia makes clear the pattern of those pro-NATO efforts was to militarily encircle the territory of Russia, especially as at the time Washington believed it had the government of Kazakhstan in its pocket with military training agreements and Chevron's large oil investment in Tenghiz.

Once Washington announced in January 2007 that it would station strategic missiles and advanced radar systems in Poland and the Czech Republic to 'defend against rogue missile attack from Iran,' as I detail in my soon-to-be-released book, ***Full Spectrum Dominance: Totalitarian Democracy in the New World Order***, then-President Putin told the Munich Wehrkunde conference in February 2007 that the true target of the US 'missile defense' strategy was not Iran but Russia.

Similarly, today the US insistence Afghanistan military buildup is about Taliban, rings equally hollow. That's clearly why Moscow is acting to secure its borders from a US militarization of the entire Central Asian region. Oil and gas pipeline routes are a major consideration, including US wishes to build a natural gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to India that would deprive Russia's Gazprom of a vital component of its current gas supply.

The prime objective of the Afghan escalation however, is to draw a new 'iron curtain,' this one between the two formidable Eurasian powers with the only capacity to challenge future US global dominance: Russia and China. Should the two former rivals firm their cooperation not only in raw materials and industrial economic trade, but as well in the military cooperation sphere, as Obama campaign foreign policy adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski has stated, the combination would present a devastating threat to America's global hegemony.

Now the decision, aided with the help of generous Russian financial concessions, to abruptly cancel US Air Force landing rights at Kyrgyzstan's Manas Air Base, deals a devastating blow to US Great Game grand strategy to encircle the key powers of Eurasia—China and Russia.

When Washington tried to use its various NGO's to foment a Color Revolution in Uzbekistan in 2005, the country's not-so-democratic President, Islam Karimov, demanded the US evacuate its air bases, repatriate US Peace Corps volunteers, and most NGOs were shut down and foreign media banned. Karimov moved to firm his frayed ties with Moscow at the time. Today Washington is reported to be feverishly trying to re-establish itself in Uzbekistan, but the sudden cancellation of base rights in Kyrgyzstan deals a new devastating blow to the entire Eurasian encirclement Great Game strategy.

With the major NATO supply routes to Afghanistan going through Pakistan from the Port Karachi, and strikes on those supply lines increasing by the day, the Pentagon is eagerly searching to find alternative supply routes to the North. Militants just blew up a key bridge in Pakistan's strategic Khyber Pass.

The securing of alternate Afghan supply routes is at least the official explanation. Unofficially, it would also provide the pretext to beef up US military presence in Central Asia. Now, with loss of Manas Air Base, a gaping hole in the Washington Great Game 'Mach IV' has been left.

To further complicate Washington's strategy, Moscow is moving to firm defense cooperation ties across former Communist states in Central Asia.

A Central Asia Answer to NATO?

The announcement by Kyrgyzstan President Bakiyev that he was cancelling US basing rights came during his visit to Moscow February 4 for a summit meeting of the formerly moribund Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a security grouping comprising Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. They reportedly agreed to set up a collective rapid reaction force to 'counter military aggression, international terrorism, extremism, crime, drug-trafficking and deal with emergency situations.' Clearly the US plans for a major military buildup in Afghanistan were high on

the agenda as well.

The CSTO was established in 1992 to serve as a basis for maintaining some dialogue between Moscow and her former Soviet republics after their declared independence, Russia's so-called 'near abroad.'

Today the level of talks is taking on a quite new seriousness as US encirclement operations clearly are seen as a threat to all the Central Asian republics. The CSTO lists its major security 'threats' as Pakistan and Afghanistan. The decision to create a truly collective force with a permanent location and a united command would propel the alliance to a new level.

Russian President Medvedev announced the decision to form the collective regional CSTO Rapid Reaction Force: 'I would like to emphasise the importance of this decision to establish rapid reaction forces. It's aimed at strengthening the military capacity of our organisation.' He claimed the new response units would 'not be less powerful than those of NATO,' adding that 'the reason behind the creation of the collective forces of operative functioning is a considerable conflict potential which is accumulating in the CSTO zone.' Translated from the Russian, that means the US strategic buildup in and around Pakistan and Afghanistan.

At the same time as it hosted the CSTO summit, Russia hosted a meeting of the so-called Eurasian Economic Community in Moscow, EurAsEC. That group consists of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan as full members. EurAsEC, established in 2000, also involves Armenia, Moldova, and Ukraine which hold observer status.

They discussed establishing a \$10 billion joint assistance fund to deal with effects of the global economic crisis, as well as establishing an international hi-tech technology exchange center and implementing various innovative projects in member countries.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has captured the vulnerability of Washington's exposed hypocrisy in Afghanistan when he told the press after the Moscow summit, 'We are ready for full-fledged and equal cooperation on security in Afghanistan, including with the United States.' That of course is the last thing the Pentagon strategists wish to hear.

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