

# Nine Years of US Presence in Afghanistan: What Next?

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October 7 will see the 9th anniversary of the beginning of the US bombings over the territory of Afghanistan. I happened to be in the neighboring Pakistan on those days, and therefore I could witness the reaction of the local population to the bombings. No one in Pakistan seemed to be sympathetic with them. Even a young man, a refugee from Afghanistan in Peshawar, who had been brutalized by the Taliban while living in his motherland, said. "Well, I was disobedient, and therefore I was punished. But why are the Americans punishing the Taliban who have never done anything against them?"

The problem at that time seemed black and white. The Taliban allegedly gave refuge to Osama bin Laden and other leaders of what was conceived to be Al-Qaeda. But never at that time or even later did any accusations against the Taliban that they were supporting global terrorism arise. The refuge given to Osama bin Laden (himself a creation of US Special Forces in 1980s) was only due to the Pashtun tradition of never giving away whoever asks for protection.

The next accusation against the Taliban read, "Afghanistan is the centre of global drug trade".

Yes, it is, and it had been before the Taliban. But that radical Islamist movement was the only force that ever succeeded in bringing the poppy cultivation and opium production to the lowest levels in history. After 2001, when the Americans started their campaign, the opium production swiftly returned to the pre-Taliban level, and very soon exceeded it. Now, as UN reports show, the level has dropped by 50 percent compared to 2009, but it is still several times higher than it was at the Taliban time.

Another claim by the US authorities at the beginning of the campaign read that the campaign will lower the level of terrorist threat in the US and the West in general. Well, just a couple of days ago the US State Department issued a warning for American citizens to avoid visiting such tourist attractions as the Eiffel Tower, the Tower of London, the Alexanderplatz in Berlin, etc. Does it really mean that the terrorist threat has been reduced?

More so, the 'war against terrorism' is spreading over the neighboring Pakistan. At present, it is limited to air strikes and drone attacks, but since the Pakistani civilian government seems to be unable to deal with the terrorists in the border regions, the possibility of the involvement of land forces seems more than real. US media have already reported that the concentration of US troops in the Eastern regions of Afghanistan seems to indicate that some kind of operation on Pakistani soil is imminent.

At the same time, the US media have found a personality whom they portray as a 'real Afghan hero'. This is a 32-year-old Afghan colonel Abdul Razziq from the Afghan border force. Everyone knows that he is a drug dealer, that he presides over a vast corruption network, but no one seems to give any notice to these facts. What makes him attractive in the American eyes is the fact that he is a staunch Taliban opponent, and that the territory under his control has seen the least number of attacks against American forces.

Just yesterday, US President Barack Obama had a telephone conversation with Hamid Karzai. Obama reiterated that despite all difficulties, the US remain committed to the noble cause they pursue in Afghanistan, and the two leaders agreed to align efforts to secure the transition of security responsibilities to Afghan forces by 2014. This appears to be three years later than the previously announced date of US troops' withdrawal in 2011. But does it really matter? The US has shown its complete impotence in solving any single problem they targeted at the beginning of the campaign. The so called Afghan security forces, loyal to President Karzai while the NATO ISAF is still there, can pretend that they are controlling something in the country, but after the inevitable withdrawal of foreign troops (whether it occurs in 2011 or 2014), nothing will be left of their present bravado.

So, the real question is, are we going to witness another round of the Big Game in Afghanistan, that no foreign superpower succeeded in winning over the last 150 years or more?

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