

U.S. And NATO To Wage 15-Year War In Afghanistan And Pakistan

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On October 4 President Barack Obama and what the press characterized as his war council conducted a 30-minute video conference with Obama's Afghan opposite number, President Hamid Karzai, to discuss "a number of topics, including the strategic vision for long term US-Afghan relations, the recent Afghan parliamentary elections, and regional relations."

A statement issued by the White House later in the day added that "The two leaders agreed that they should continue routine engagements to refine a common vision and to align our efforts to support President Karzai's goal of completing transition to Afghan lead security responsibility by 2014." [1]

The conference also included Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Washington and commander of all U.S. and North Atlantic Treaty Organization forces in Afghanistan General David Petraeus and American ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry from Kabul.

October 7 will mark the advent of the tenth year of the war waged by Washington in South Asia, the longest continuous combat operations in U.S. history. By invoking its Article 5 collective military assistance clause on September 12, 2001, NATO also joined the war effort and officially took over the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in August of 2003.

There are now at least 152,000 foreign troops in Afghanistan, 120,000 under NATO command, and according to several recent statements by American and NATO officials most if not all them of them will remain there beyond the 2011 withdrawal date announced by the American administration last year.

If troops from all the major Western military powers in theater remain beyond New Year's Eve of 2014, they will be engaged in the fifteenth calendar year of the Pentagon's and NATO's war in Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan. The conflict has also allowed the expansion of American and Alliance military bases into Central Asia – Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan – and the elaboration of networks for the transit of troops, military equipment and supplies and for combat training and bombing runs from Estonia and Latvia on the Baltic Sea to Georgia on the Black Sea and Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan on the Caspian Sea as well as in several other nations from Eastern Europe to the so-called Broader Middle East including Pakistan, Kuwait, Iraq, Jordan, Diego Garcia, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Kazakhstan.

The fruitless pursuit of the ever more elusive Osama bin Laden and Mullah Mohammed Omar – as such remains the official rationale of the U.S. and the 50 military partners under

NATO's umbrella in the Afghan war zone – has not registered any progress in nine years, though thousands of Afghans and Pakistanis who had no contact with either of the evasive fugitives have been killed in overnight raids, checkpoint shootings, bombing runs and drone missile strikes. Cluster bomb fragments and depleted uranium residue will guarantee more deaths into the indefinite future.

Also on October 4, President Obama handed over his administration's latest classified report on the war in Afghanistan to Congress, in which he wrote: "We are continuing to implement the policy as described in December and do not believe further adjustments are required at this time." [2] He was referring to the decision to deploy an additional 30,000 U.S. troops, which has been accompanied by a dramatic escalation of lethal drone attacks inside Pakistan.

U.S. and NATO troop strength in Afghanistan has recently passed the 150,000 mark. Two years ago there were an estimated 34,000 U.S. troops and approximately 28,000 from other NATO nations in the country. The increase since 2008 is almost 250 percent. Recently the number of nations supplying troops for NATO's ISAF mission has also grown, with commitments secured from nations like Armenia, Georgia, Colombia, Mongolia, Malaysia, South Korea (a second time), Montenegro and Tonga. General Roger Brady, outgoing commander of U.S. Air Forces in Europe, recently stated that 39 European nations have troops assigned to NATO in Afghanistan. The amount of countries supplying military contingents for and those that have lost troops in one nation are unprecedented.

Two major milestones were reached in the last full month of the ninth year of the war on both sides of the Durand Line that separates Afghanistan and Pakistan. With 59 NATO soldiers killed in September, the combined U.S. and NATO death toll this year in Afghanistan exceeded the previous annual high of 2009, 521. As of October 4, 561 U.S. and NATO soldiers have died this year. The three months before last were the deadliest for foreign forces in the nine-year war: 103 in June, 88 in July and 79 in August.

U.S. and NATO deaths for 2009 and so far this year account for over half of the total of 2,129 killed since the beginning of the war: 1,082. The war dead include troops from 27 nations: 20 of 28 NATO member states and seven partner nations – Australia, Finland, Georgia, Jordan, New Zealand, South Korea and Sweden.

On the other side of the Khyber Pass, last month the U.S. launched the most deadly drone missile attacks inside Pakistan since they began in 2004. At least 22 unmanned aerial vehicle strikes in the nation's Federally Administered Tribal Areas caused a record amount of deaths, of alleged insurgents and civilians alike.

In May U.S. Marine Corps Brigadier General Glenn Walters announced that military drones were being diverted from Africa Command, Pacific Command and Southern Command for Central Command, which covers the Middle East, Central Asia and Afghanistan and Pakistan. Walters also said that the Pentagon's drone fleet had grown from 200 in 2001 to 6,500 at the beginning of this year and will expand to 8,000 by 2012, an increase of twenty times in slightly over a decade.

This March legal advisor to the State Department Harold Koh justified the use of missile-wielding drones for killing human targets in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and Yemen as being "consistent with [the nation's] inherent right to self-defense under...international

law.”

The Pentagon’s Quadrennial Defense Review of earlier this year confirmed that “The pilotless drones used for surveillance and attack missions in Afghanistan and Pakistan are a priority, with a goal of speeding up the purchase of new Reaper drones and expansion of Predator and Reaper drone flights through 2013.”

In May of 2009 Central Intelligence Agency Director Leon Panetta told a think tank audience in Los Angeles that deadly drones strikes were “the only game in town in terms of confronting or trying to disrupt the al Qaeda leadership,” although the overwhelming majority of attacks have not been directed against al-Qaeda targets, leaders or otherwise.

In the midst of the ongoing carnage in Pakistan, on September 29 Panetta was in the country and said “the CIA was achieving 100 percent results through the drone attacks.”

Articles in the Wall Street Journal, the Washington Post and Britain’s Sunday Telegraph last weekend documented that the Pentagon has transferred Predator and Reaper drones used in Afghanistan to the CIA to mount escalating attacks in Pakistan. As the Washington Post described the policy, “The CIA is using an arsenal of armed drones and other equipment provided by the U.S. military to secretly escalate its operations in Pakistan,” adding that the White House is in full support of the practice and that Defense Secretary Gates and CIA Director Panetta had “worked closely together to expand the effort.”

In the words of a Brookings Institution analyst, “It’s moving from using [drones] as a counterterrorism platform to an almost counterinsurgency platform,” in line with the general policy implemented by former and current U.S. and NATO top commanders Generals Stanley McChrystal and David Petraeus.

The Washington Post also disclosed that massive intensification of drone warfare “represents a significant evolution of an already controversial targeted killing program run by the CIA” which “in the past month...has been delivering what amounts to a cross-border bombing campaign in coordination with conventional military operations a few miles away.” The newspaper also pointed out that the “CIA operations come at a time when the U.S. military has opened a major phase of operations in and around Kandahar.” [3]

Regarding the last subject, what had been touted as the decisive battle for Afghanistan, an all-out assault by U.S., NATO and Afghan National Army forces against Kandahar in August, never materialized. Instead, American and NATO special forces are conducting counterinsurgency operations in the province and on the periphery of its capital. As many as 8,000 Afghan civilians have fled NATO operations in the countryside to the capital in recent days.

The integrated strategy the U.S. and NATO are pursuing is threefold: Counterinsurgency operations, including targeted assassinations, in Afghanistan’s eastern and southern provinces bordering Pakistan; an unprecedented escalation of drone missile strikes in northwestern Pakistan; and attacks by helicopter gunships in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in combination with drone strikes.

NATO helicopter gunships launched deadly back-to-back attacks in Pakistan on September 25, 26 and 27. On September 30 NATO helicopters again crossed the border into Pakistan and killed three soldiers of the Frontier Corps in the Kurram Agency of FATA. A Pakistani

security official stated that the soldiers had fired warning shots to alert the NATO helicopters that they had crossed into Pakistani territory, but that NATO forces fired two missiles at their post and shelled the area for 25 minutes.

The same government official said: "It was an unprovoked attack....NATO helicopters entered our airspace and targeted a paramilitary checkpoint, killing three soldiers and wounding three others," and that security forces had taken "suitable measures to respond to such acts of aggression, which will be known to people very soon." [4]

Attacks continued into the new month, with three U.S. drone strikes in North Waziristan on October 2 killing 18 people and wounding what the local press reported as scores. Two days later another missile strike killed four and wounded several others in the same agency. "Officials say the house [destroyed in the attack] belonged to a local resident. The death toll is expected to rise as some of the injured are reportedly in critical condition." [5]

By the same day NATO had lost 12 soldiers in fighting this month.

The reaction in Pakistan was immediate and demonstrative. Even before NATO killed three Pakistani soldiers the provincial assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly the North-West Frontier Province) unanimously condemned NATO attacks and U.S. drone strikes inside Pakistan, with ruling and opposition parties uniting to table a joint resolution which was "read out by all the leaders one by one" and which "criticised attacks of the NATO forces, terming the US drone attacks direct attacks on Pakistan's sovereignty, and demanded of the Federal Government to take solid steps to stop such attacks in future." [6]

On September 29 a general strike was staged in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, with the province's governor warning that the increasing incursions by U.S. and NATO forces represent "an attack on Pakistan's sovereignty." [7]

The next day the Pakistani government halted NATO supply trucks and oil tankers from entering Afghanistan, which policy remains in force with 160 vehicles stopped near the border on October 5.

On October 1 at least 27 NATO oil tankers were attacked and destroyed in Pakistan's southern province of Sindh, which is on the Arabian Sea and doesn't border Afghanistan. Later in the day another attack was staged in the province of Balochistan in which two NATO supply trucks were targeted by rocket fire and two people were killed.

Two days later 28 NATO oil tankers were attacked and 12 people killed in Rawalpindi in Punjab province near the nation's capital.

An estimated 70 percent of NATO supplies for the war in Afghanistan, including 40 percent of its fuel, are shipped overland through Pakistan.

Reports are currently circulating in the Swat district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (where a Pakistani military offensive displaced over 3 million civilians last year) that the U.S. and NATO plan to move into the Saidu Sharif Airport on the pretext of building a warehouse to store relief goods for victims of this summer's floods. In the words of a local official, "We have strong reservations over the role of the US as its policies have brought instability in the region and triggered violence." [8]

Not only are American and NATO military forces not leaving Afghanistan in the foreseeable

future, they are expanding their nine-year-old war into Pakistan.

Notes

- 1) Agence France-Presse, October 4, 2010
- 2) Ibid
- 3) Washington Post, October 3, 2010
- 4) Daily Times, October 1, 2010
- 5) Press TV, October 4, 2010
- 6) The Nation, September 29, 2010
- 7) Xinhua News Agency, October 1, 2010
- 8) Asian News International, October 5, 2010

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