

U.S.-NATO Offensive Unravels in Afghanistan: The Longest Foreign War in U.S. History

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[We repost this article by Sara Flounders first published in 2010 to commemorate the 22nd anniversary of America's invasion of Afghanistan on October 7, 2001.]

The Pentagon offensive against the Afghan city of Marjah was public-relations media hype from the very first day. The sole purpose of the offensive in Marjah was to convince the U.S. population and increasingly tepid NATO allies that this imperialist war is winnable.

U.S. involvement in Afghanistan is now the longest foreign war in U.S. history, on both the air and the ground. The Pentagon described the Marjah offensive as the biggest military operation in more than eight years of occupation, but now calls it a prelude to a larger assault on the city of Kandahar.

In U.S. counterinsurgency warfare, such an offensive means dropping heavily armed troops in an area seeking to draw enemy fire. The troops then call in air support, long-range artillery fire, machine-gun fire, rockets, white phosphorous bombs and anti-personnel bombs. The latter cover the ground with bomblets that emit thousands of razor-sharp fragments.

Tens of thousands of civilians were driven from the villages of Helmand Province, and the town of Marjah was partially evacuated. But thousands of Afghans were unwilling to leave their homes and animals in the cold of winter for the hunger, instability and flimsy shelter of refugee camps. Many are too poor to leave. They ended up as targets of Pentagon weapons.

The Marjah offensive's stated goal was to introduce a ready-made, U.S.-created local regime, staffed by an Afghan puppet administration totally dependent on U.S. power. With cynical and racist arrogance, NATO commander Gen. Stanley McChrystal said, "We got a

government in a box ready to roll in.” (New York Times, Feb. 12)

Afghan Casualties Unrecorded

Throughout this war, the Pentagon and corporate media have never counted and scarcely mentioned Afghan civilian deaths, injuries and trauma from bombings, fires and destruction. Tens of thousands more die of starvation, cold and infections in crowded refugees camps, swollen cities and isolated villages.

During the U.S. offensive in Marjah, U.S. deaths in Afghanistan reached the milestone of 1,000. This total confirms that youth are paying the price of the lack of education and job opportunities in the U.S. In addition, suicides among returning soldiers now exceed combat deaths and injuries are about four times the deaths.

Gen. Barry McCaffrey at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point warned of sharp increases in U.S. troop casualties in the months ahead. “What I want to do is signal that this thing is going to be \$5 billion to \$10 billion a month and 300 to 500 killed and wounded a month by next summer. That’s what we probably should expect.” (Army Times, Jan. 7)

As the two-week offensive officially ended in Marjah, bombs exploded in one of the most secure areas of Kabul. Some reporters described it as a sophisticated and well-coordinated operation in the heavily guarded capital. A car bomb targeted housing of employees from countries connected to the occupation, apparently with the aim of undermining international support for the Afghan war.

During the offensive came the announcement on Feb. 21 that the Netherlands coalition government had fallen apart, due to heated opposition of a coalition party to keeping Dutch troops in Afghanistan. This sealed the planned withdrawal of 2,000 Dutch troops from NATO forces in Afghanistan, as of next August.

The Netherlands was the first NATO member to announce that it is quitting. The announcement was a big setback for the U.S. and NATO, and has prompted wide media speculation of other possible NATO withdrawals from the deeply unpopular war.

A Los Angeles Times editorial on Feb. 24 stated that the Dutch “withdrawal is likely to raise concerns about a fracturing of the international commitment to Afghanistan, and about the Afghan government’s ability to provide security in the long term . . . The Dutch decision should serve as a warning to the Obama administration.”

The majority of the people in almost all the NATO countries opposes the war and wants their troops out. This has become a major issue in domestic politics and elections in many countries. Canada has announced the withdrawal of its forces by the summer of 2011.

Anti-war Mood Undermines NATO Militarism

Following the Dutch announcement, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates in a speech at the National Defense University told NATO officers and officials that public and political opposition to the military had grown so great in Europe that it was directly affecting operations in Afghanistan and impeding the alliance’s broader goals.

“The demilitarization of Europe — where large swaths of the general public and political

class are averse to military force and the risks that go with it — has gone from a blessing in the 20th century to an impediment. ... Right now the alliance faces very serious, long-term, systemic problems.” (New York Times, Feb. 24)

Gates also reminded NATO officials that, not counting U.S. forces, NATO troops in Afghanistan were scheduled to increase to 50,000 this year — from 30,000 last year.

The total 43-country International Security Assistance Force, including U.S. soldiers, is presently at 140,000 troops in Afghanistan.

As journalist Rick Rozoff summed up a year ago: “The Afghan war is also the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s first armed conflict outside of Europe and its first ground war in the 60 years of its existence. It has been waged with the participation of armed units from all 26 NATO member states and 12 other European and Caucasus nations linked to NATO. ...

“The 12 European NATO partners who have sent troops in varying numbers to assist Washington and the Alliance include the continent’s five former neutral nations: Austria, Finland, Ireland, Sweden and Switzerland. The European NATO and partnership deployments count among their number troops from six former Soviet Republics — with Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine tapped for recent reinforcements and the three Baltic states ... including airbases and troop and naval deployments in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan and the Indian Ocean (where the Japanese navy has been assisting).” (rickrozoff.wordpress.com, March 25, 2009)

Military units from Australia, New Zealand, Jordan, Colombia and South Korea are also stationed in Afghanistan.

Afghans Have a Right to Resist

Despite all these occupation forces, Afghanistan has become an imperialist quagmire with no stability, no security and no end in sight.

The resistance in Afghanistan has gained ground and broad support as it becomes clear to the whole population that U.S./NATO forces have brought only racist arrogance, corruption, repression and greater poverty. While occupation forces label all resistance as terrorism and Taliban-inspired, increasingly Afghans see resistance as a right and a patriotic or religious duty. It is essential in the period ahead that the anti-war movement supports the right of the Afghan people to resist this criminal occupation and increases the effort to bring all troops home now.

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