

Why Are We Killing Off Our Soldiers in Afghanistan?

by Ramtanu Maitra

Aug. 19—According to official records of the Department of Defense (DoD), another 11 U.S. soldiers were killed and 109 wounded last week in Afghanistan. Some of them were killed by the Afghan “soldiers” and “police officials” whom the Americans had trained. These killings, labeled as “green on blue” (green-uniformed Afghan soldiers shooting the blue-helmeted ISAF/International Security Assistance Force personnel) or “insider killings,” as U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta calls it, are reminiscent of colonial troops being killed by the “native” soldiers trained by the colonialists.

The bottom line is that U.S. soldiers, in fact all foreign troops, are now “sitting ducks,” who could be killed at any time just for being in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, suicide rates among U.S. military personnel have also been highlighted this week, with July posting the highest monthly total since 2009.

It is evident that the Obama Administration, drawn in by its close allies, such as Britain, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, in southwest Asia, is determined to pursue its mindless policy in Afghanistan, causing more deaths of U.S. soldiers. We see here a continuation of the tragic pattern which began with the Vietnam War, made possible by the British-orchestrated assassination of President Kennedy. Thus, the United States has become, de facto, the military arm of the British imperial strategy of perpetual war. The question is, when will the United States break with this policy, which requires the removal of the current President of the United States?

Is Afghanistan on Another Planet?

At this point in time, the name of the dastardly killing game that Washington is play-

ing, is to keep it out of the U.S. Presidential election campaign. Obama is trotting out his loyalists to respond to public queries, with such inane statements as the one Defense Secretary Panetta issued today on CNN, urging Afghanistan to rigorously vet its security force recruits following the spate of attacks by Afghan soldiers and police against NATO troops.

Is Panetta suggesting that vetting of Afghanistan’s 150,000 soldiers was not done before? It is difficult to believe that the elaborate plan to train Afghan soldiers (at a reported cost of close to a million U.S. dollars per soldier) to take over security responsibilities when the foreign troops withdraw partially from Afghanistan, did not include vetting. Would the ISAF have left the U.S. and NATO soldiers to the mercy of Allah to protect them?

More realistic is what the Taliban supremo, Mullah Omar, whom the U.S./NATO troops have searched for unsuccessfully all these years, said in his Aug. 18 Eid al-Fitr message to his fellow Taliban. Omar said Afghan security forces were assisting Taliban fighters who infiltrate their ranks, kill foreign troops, and then carry their government-issued weapons back to insurgent camps. “They are able to (safely) enter bases, offices, and intelligence centers of the enemy,” he said. “Then, they easily carry out decisive and coordinated attacks, inflicting heavy losses on the enemy.”

It is unlikely that Panetta’s statement will comfort those families who have lost their sons and daughters, and other Americans who are concerned about these deaths. It is aimed at preventing them from demanding that the United States, having failed miserably in “righting what is wrong” in Afghanistan during its more than a decade’s



Taliban supremo Mullah Omar, who has escaped capture for years, in an Aug. 18 message, said that Afghan security forces were assisting Taliban fighters who infiltrate their ranks, and that they are “inflicting heavy losses on the enemy,” i.e., U.S./NATO soldiers.

stay, pull all its troops out now, and not leave these soldiers sitting there, waiting to be shot.

These insider attacks by the ISAF-trained Afghan forces are the latest demonstration of the insanity of the decade-plus-long Afghan campaign that has resolved nothing. Now that the U.S. is planning to partially withdraw, it is essential to recount some of those failures.

Increasing Death Tolls

Of concern is not just the increase in the number of suicides among U.S. soldiers, but also the rapid rise in the number of U.S. troops being killed in Afghanistan, after the decade-long ‘counterterrorism’ and ‘counterinsurgency’ campaigns conducted by 100,000-plus foreign troops. On average, ten American soldiers are losing their lives every week, and hundreds are losing their limbs. The total death toll in Afghanistan is nearing 1,700, but at the present rate of loss of life, the next ten years would see another 5,000 young Americans killed.

This “kill or be killed” policy in Afghanistan has not led to any resolution of the issues that turned Afghanistan into a killing field in the late 1990s. Distorted news reports aimed at propitiating the Administration have created a sense of numbness among those Americans whose children are not out there risking death every minute.

Patrick Bury, a former British army captain, who served in Afghanistan, in his column on the RAWA News website early this month, made the point that nothing has changed for the better, but much has changed for the worse. “Unlike other interventions in Iraq and Libya,” he wrote, “it is obvious that Afghanistan, fundamentally, is going one way, and that is down. Northern warlords are already re-arming in preparation for the coming civil war with the southern Pashtuns after NATO withdraws. ANSF troops [the Afghan National Security Force, whom the U.S./NATO trained, and some of whom have recently turned their guns on their trainers—ed.] troops occupying the ‘transitioned territories’ marked as green areas on headquarters’ maps are increasingly confined to their bases and will be more so when the West leaves. Expect a more savvy Taliban to gradually take back territories British and other nations’ blood was spilt on, as what’s left of the NATO force positions itself in a few major population centers.”

In a PBS News Hour interview Aug. 14, Defense Secretary Panetta said: “As the fighting season has progressed, we have seen an increase in enemy-initiated

attacks, though violence levels have remained consistent with past summers. We are taking the fight to the enemy. And when you’re aggressive and when you’re conducting operations against them, obviously, the number of casualties are going to increase.”

The question that PBS did not ask, but should have, was “Why, Secretary Panetta, is it that after a decade when it had been established beyond a shadow of doubt that the war has been lost, and the only recourse was to ensure the safety of the young soldiers by bringing them back home, is the U.S./NATO carrying out ‘aggressive’ actions?”

Panetta, following President Obama’s style of expressing concern while remaining determined to do nothing, had this to say: “Our enemies have attempted to undermine the trust between the coalition and Afghan forces, and, in particular, they have tried to take credit for a number of so-called green-on-blue or insider attacks that have taken place this fighting season. Make no mistake about it: I have been very concerned about these incidents—both of us have—because of the lives lost and because of the potential damage to our partnership efforts.”

The sophistry of Panetta’s statement matches those of Obama, who, on Afghanistan’s Independence Day today, authorized the message: “On behalf of President Obama and the people of the United States, I am delighted to send best wishes to the government and people of Afghanistan this August 19 as you celebrate your independence and conclude the Holy Month of Ramadan.”

Karl Gotthardt, a Canadian journalist, addressed the vacuous nature of the message, questioning what independence for Afghanistan means. “By most accounts President Karzai’s reach is not much beyond Kabul. As civilians and military personnel continue to be killed and wounded, it is difficult to fathom that there will be real independence anytime soon.”

Plus ça change...

Take the case of warlordism in Afghanistan, which had been identified by various American pundits and policymakers as the source of Afghanistan’s woes. When the U.S./NATO troops moved into Afghanistan, one would have expected that the warlords would have been tackled head-on. But, no, siree, the warlordism was allowed to continue, and to flourish. And, it indeed flourished, and this is why.

When Hamid Karzai, a Pushtun, was chosen at Bonn in 2002 to lead the Kabul regime, he did not have any support within the Pushtun population, the majority



DoD/Staff Sgt. Andrew Smith, U.S. Army

“Green on blue” (green-uniformed Afghan soldiers shooting blue-helmeted ISAF personnel) or “insider killings,” are reminiscent of colonial troops being killed by the “native” soldiers who had been trained by the imperialists. Here, a U.S. Army trainer works with Afghan Border Policemen.

ethnic group within Afghanistan, and the base of the Taliban movement. For Karzai to survive, warlords of all kinds were brought into Kabul to render support to Karzai, for pure survival reasons. One wonders what Washington’s game plan was at that time. What soon became evident, and what Patrick Bury identifies as the prevailing situation in 2012, is that Karzai’s reach is limited to Kabul, and his dependency on the warlords remain total.

U.S. Rep. John Tierney (D-Mass.), chairman of the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, in his report in June 2010, “Warlord, Inc.: Extortion and Corruption Along the U.S. Supply Chain in Afghanistan,” wrote: “At the top of the hierarchy are the well-known tribal leaders, former mujahedeen commanders, or local power brokers who command the loyalty of men beyond their ability to provide a paycheck. For these warlords, providing security to U.S. and NATO convoys is just the latest iteration of long and colorful careers in war-torn Afghanistan. Long after the United States leaves Afghanistan, and the convoy security business shuts down, these warlords will likely continue to play a major role as autonomous centers of political, economic, and military power.”

But the U.S./NATO occupation created new warlords as well. Tierney said, “other warlords are newer to the scene but have grown in strength based on their

ability to feed off U.S. and NATO security contracting, particularly the highly lucrative business niche of providing private security for the coalition supply chain. Men serve and die for these warlords for money, not tribal, ethnic, or political loyalty. In Afghan culture, this new class of warlord is undeserving of that elevated title because their power is derivative of their business function, not their political or tribal clout.”

Tierney’s report quoted an expert saying, “the partial conversion of Afghan warlords into businessmen resembles in many ways the establishment of mafia networks, which are active both in the legal and the illegal economy and are able to use force to protect their interests and possibly to expand.” Whether called “business-

men,” “commanders,” “strongmen,” “militia leaders,” or “warlords,” any individual who commands hundreds or thousands of armed men in regular combat, and operates largely outside the direct control of the central government is a competitor to the legitimacy of the state, Tierney pointed out.

Back to Square One

Meanwhile, ground reports from Afghanistan indicate that the Northern warlords, who ostensibly would like to protect the Northern Afghans, mostly of Tajik, Uzbek, and Nuristani ethnic origin, are arming themselves against a potential takeover by the Taliban when U.S./NATO troops partially withdraw. Arms are coming in from all sides, including Iran, and there are even reports of the U.S. providing these warlords with arms as well. And, herein lies a tale.

The average American, with some interest in Afghan affairs, considers the Taliban to be the second-most important reason why the United States sent so many of its soldiers there, and lost so many of them. The prime reason was, of course, Osama bin Laden. But, ten-plus years later, even the Secretary of Defense admits that the Taliban-led insurgency has gotten stronger, and the Afghan security situation weaker. As anyone would conclude, that means the Taliban outwitted, outlasted, and out-manuevered the foreign occupiers. But, there is more to it.

Now that the U.S. and NATO want to partially withdraw their troops, mostly for reasons related to domestic politics, Washington and Brussels are eager to open talks with the Taliban. There is nothing wrong in doing that, but then, why was it not done earlier, before thousands and thousands had died?

The Taliban no longer feel threatened by the foreign occupiers. They are gaining ground. American and NATO troops do not trust their fellow Afghan soldiers any longer, and are increasingly remaining confined within their safe dwellings. Under the circumstances, it was to be expected that the Taliban would raise the stakes, and they did.

Many reports have emerged that Washington is getting desperate to open up talks with the Taliban. That is understandable, with U.S. Election Day fast approaching. So far, the Obama Administration has chosen to deny it.

It is not that the Taliban do not want to talk to Washington. They always did, knowing the benefits of such talks, but they had laid out conditions. There were two conditions in particular (perhaps more conditions will be revealed when the talks actually start): Release those al-Qaeda terrorists now imprisoned at Gitmo; and stop

the drone attacks.

According to Elise Labott, CNN foreign affairs reporter, in an article, “U.S. sweetens prisoner swap offer to Taliban,” on Aug 8, reported that “in an effort to revive peace talks with the Taliban, the Obama administration has sweetened a proposed prisoner swap under which it would transfer five Taliban prisoners to Qatar in exchange for a U.S. soldier held by the Taliban, senior U.S. officials said. The new proposal involves sending all five Taliban prisoners to Qatar first, before the Taliban releases Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, the sources said.” Bergdahl’s release is an important issue, but the deal also meets one of the demands the Taliban issued publicly as the prerequisite for holding talks.

So, Washington is now preparing to hold talks with the Taliban, once the foremost enemy of Washington and Brussels, with the intent to bring them in “to share” power in Kabul, while arming the Northern warlords who would like to slaughter the Taliban!

Meanwhile, the American soldiers, going out on patrol with their trained Afghan partners, will keep praying that those Afghan soldiers were “vetted,” and that none of them is a Taliban—the friend and enemy of Washington.

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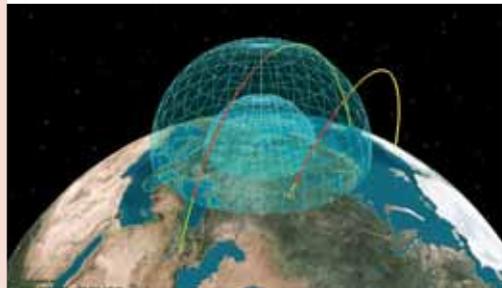
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