

## Afghanistan: The new Auschwitz

Written by Eric Walberg

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In addition to a bumper opium harvest, the US is reaping the whirlwind in Afghanistan, warns Eric Walberg

14/2/8 -- According to Gideon Polya, based on UNESCO data, the US invasion of Afghanistan has led to as many as 6.6 million unnecessary deaths.

According to Washburn University law professor Liaquat Ali Khan, the "crime of genocide applies to the intentional killings that NATO troops commit on a weekly basis in the poor villages and mute mountains of Afghanistan to destroy the Taliban." The occupation forces, which ironically include former Axis powers Germany and Japan, have created the New Auschwitz.

During a recent visit to Kabul by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Afghan President Hamid Karzai defended his rule, saying the economy and education systems had improved and there was more democratic freedom under the new constitution. "It is not right that Afghanistan was forgotten," he said. Meaning, in diplo-speak, of course, it was, except by the drug-crazed bomber pilots, who made a record-breaking 3,572 bombing raids last year, 20 times the level two years earlier. But it has popped back into the news recently with a string of gloomy reports, a series of terrifying shoot-outs in Kabul, and a high-profile NATO meeting where words were had, and not pretty ones.

The invasion -- well into its seventh year and approaching the 1979-88 Soviet nine-year occupation record -- is increasingly being compared to the ill-fated British 19th century invasions, intended to undermine Russian influence in the so-called Great Game. Ironically, the current fiasco was similarly inspired by a Western desire to undermine Russian influence, and, taking a different and as it turned out extremely risky tack, began in 1979 to massively fund Osama bin Laden and other Muslim terrorists, something the 19th century Brits were not so foolhardy as to do. The result, of course, was the 2001 invasion and occupation, at first hailed as a new chapter for the hapless Afghans, but now seen as doomed, according to that pesky string of reports.

Paddy Ashdown, the US choice as United Nations "proconsul", "superenvoy", whatever in Kabul, declared: "We are losing in Afghanistan." Quelle surprise, his appointment was vetoed by Karzai, who is desperately trying to portray himself as an independent leader of a country that has "turned the corner", despite the six million plus and the recent tiff over British military policy in the south, which Karzai claims led to the return of the Taliban. He complains that he was forced by the British to remove the governor of Helmand with disastrous consequences, and was furious that at the same time, Britain was secretly negotiating with the Taliban to set

up "retirement camps" there for possible rebel defectors.

But then what should he expect? A US citizen and UNOCAL oil executive, he was parachuted into Afghanistan when the Americans invaded in 2001 and confirmed in US-orchestrated elections three years later. Widely regarded as a US-British stooge, the "mayor of Kabul" surely remembers the fate of his pre-Taliban predecessor, Mohamed Najibullah, who spent four years in a UN basement in Kabul until liberated -- castrated and hung from a lamp-post by the Taliban in 1996.

Armed resistance to foreign occupation is growing and spreading. NATO figures show that attacks on Western and Afghan troops were up by almost a third last year, to more than 9,000 "significant actions", the highest level since the invasion. Seventy per cent of incidents took place in the southern Taliban heartland of Helmand, though the Senlis Council estimates that the Taliban now has a permanent presence in 54 per cent of Afghanistan, arguing that "the question now appears to be not if the Taliban will return to Kabul, but when." Watch out, Mr Karzai.

In addition to the 3,572 bombing raids in 2007, suicide bombings climbed to a record 140, compared to five between 2001 and 2005. The Taliban's base is increasingly the umbrella for a revived Pashtun nationalism on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistani border, as well as for jihadists and others committed to fighting foreign occupation. The UN estimates the Taliban have just 3,000 active fighters and about 7,000 part-timers, in contrast with more than 50,000 US and NATO troops. Their command structure is diffuse and when it comes to guerrilla tactics -- suicide attacks, roadside bombs, kidnapping and assassination -- the militants have become frighteningly proficient.

"Make no mistake, NATO is not winning in Afghanistan," said a report issued 30 January by the Atlantic Council of the United States, chaired by retired General James Jones, who until 2006 served as the supreme allied commander of NATO in Afghanistan. "It remains a failing state. It could become a failed state," warned the report, which called for "urgent action" to overhaul NATO strategy in coming weeks before an anticipated new offensive by Taliban insurgents in the spring.

The Afghanistan Study Group, created by the Center for the Study of the Presidency, which was also involved with the Iraq Study Group, concluded, "the United States and the international community have tried to win the struggle in Afghanistan with too few military

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forces and insufficient economic aid," and lack a clear strategy to "fill the power vacuum outside Kabul and counter the combined challenges of reconstituted Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces in Afghanistan and Pakistan, a runaway opium economy, and the stark poverty faced by most Afghans."

Whoa. Did it ever occur to these thinktankers that just maybe they can never "win"? That the US invaded Afghanistan illegally, and the Taliban, still the legitimate government there, will continue to battle on, to wait it out, no matter how many bombs and dollars the US et al throw at it?

As if these reports aren't enough for the frazzled president, on 15 January rebels attacked Kabul's swish five-star Serena Hotel, targeting the ex-pat elite in the most fortified site in the capital, killing seven guests and staff. This was no straightforward suicide bombing, but an armed attack which allowed the gunmen to carry out a shooting spree before they were stopped, the one phenomenon security agencies have no defence against. Kabul, relatively incident-free in the first two years after the removal of the Taliban, now sees regular rocket attacks, shootings, kidnappings, explosions and suicide bombings.

A few weeks after Serena, Kabul witnessed dozens of armed police laying siege to the house of Uzbek warlord and Chief of Staff to the Afghan commander-in-chief General Abdul-Rashid Dostum, in the heart of the diplomatic district, after 50 of his followers abducted political rival Akbar Bai and several others, beating them to a pulp. "This is a conspiracy by the government against General Dostum," loyalist Mohamed Alim Sayee said. "If any harm occurs to Dostum, seven to eight provinces will turn against the government." Watch out, Mr Karzai.

Major cracks are appearing every day, and not only in the statues of the Bamyán Buddha, but in impregnable fortress-NATO, the latest triggered by America's closest ally Canada. It set off the current crisis by threatening to withdraw all its troops this year unless other NATO members could be conned into deploying troops in the dangerous southern province of Kandahar, where in a brief two years, Canada lost 80 of its 2,500 troops, its highest casualty rate since native tribes were mowed down in the 19th century by the British army. This tantrum forced an emergency NATO meeting -- in Vilnius -- 7-8 February, to be followed by a summit in -- yes -- Romania in April. US generals meeting deep in Eastern Europe pushing Western Europeans to cough up troops for Central Asia. Most interesting.

Setting the stage the day before his junket to an obscure country which just happens to border

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Russia, US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates told the House Armed Services Committee that the alliance could split into countries that were "willing to fight and die to protect people's security and those who were not. You can't have some allies whose sons and daughters die in combat and other allies who are shielded from that kind of a sacrifice."

Did this blackmail work? Did Germany, Britain, Poland et al cough up? In the UK 62 per cent want all 7,800 troops withdrawn within a year. Similar polling results keep German Chancellor Angela Merkel from signing on the dotted line. She said it would send around 200 combat soldiers to north Afghanistan but no way would she bail out the Canadians. In Paris a spokesman for President Nicolas Sarkozy did not confirm reports that 700 paratroopers could go to the south. The Polish chief of the defence staff said the government is considering increasing their forces, despite being elected only last October expressly on a policy of bringing its troops home from Iraq and, presumably, Afghanistan. Only the US itself made any real effort to mollify the Canucks, agreeing to deploy 3,200 US Marines temporarily, but warning that the others must come through before the end of the year. Stay tuned.

At the love-in in Lithuania, Gates softened his undiplomatic language somewhat: "I don't think that there's a crisis, that there's a risk of failure." Which, in diplo-speak of course means there is a crisis, etc. Gates also squelched early suggestions that the US would take over command of combat operations in southern Afghanistan. "I don't think that's realistic any time soon," Gates said. Why bother? At present, an American four-star general is in overall command of the NATO mission. Americans are in command of the regional mission in eastern Afghanistan, while a Canadian is in command of the south.

"I worry that for many Europeans the missions in Iraq and Afghanistan are confused," Gates said as he flew to Munich to deliver a speech at an international security conference 10 February. "Many of them, I think, have a problem with our involvement in Iraq and project that to Afghanistan and do not understand the very different -- for them -- the very different kind of threat." But wait! The US coordinator on Iraq, David Satterfield, suggested only last month that Iraq would turn out to be America's "good war", while Afghanistan was going "bad". Can't these guys get their story straight? Which is it, Mr Gates? Is good bad? Or is bad good? Just maybe bad is bad? Is that too hard to believe?

The original aims of the US-led invasion were the capture of Mullah Omar, the Taliban leader, and Osama bin Laden, along with the destruction of Al-Qaeda. None of those aims has been achieved. Instead, the two leaders remain free, while Al-Qaeda has spread from its Afghan base into Pakistan, Iraq and elsewhere, and Afghanistan has become the heroin capital of the world. For the majority of Afghans, occupation has meant the exchange of obscurantist

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theocrats for brutal and corrupt warlords, rampant torture and insecurity, depleted uranium bombing and the 6.6 million deaths -- all thanks to Western altruism. Even the early limited gains for women and girls in some urban areas are now being reversed, offset by an explosion of rape and violence against women.

What we see is a classic case of blowback. With the decision to expand NATO and use it as its proxy in illegal invasions after the collapse of the SU -- notably Iraq, Serbia, Afghanistan and again Iraq -- instead of dissolving it, the West is merely reaping its whirlwind in the form of unending war and now internal squabbles.

"Events in Afghanistan have become a motor for the transformation of the alliance," said a senior NATO diplomat. In fact, the collapse of Afghanistan is just another domino in a long line since the "victory over Communism". "Fail" a state (remember Bill Clinton's "grow the economy"?) and what do you get? The resurgence of Pashtun nationalism in southern Afghanistan and northern Pakistan, just like in the soon-to-be republics of Kosovo and Kurdistan. Long live independent Pashtunistan!

Will NATO bombs soon be raining down on Islamabad, demanding that Pakistan allow the heroic, suffering Pashtuns to unite with their brothers in a just liberation struggle? God knows there are Pashtun guerrilla groups who, like their Kosovan and Kurd soulmates, would eagerly accept US/NATO arms and protection. After all, the US once generously equipped them with Stinger missiles in their struggle to "liberate" Afghanistan.

### Afghanistan in a nutshell

- Policies of the "international community" put immediate gains and Western interests before sustainable goals. In security, US Operation Enduring Freedom focussed solely on routing the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, while NATO forces were confined largely to Kabul. Not until 2004 was security for the country considered. The global "war against terror" is conducted by US-led Coalition Forces; the counter-insurgency war is waged by the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force; the war against drugs is led by the Afghan police.

- The lack of troops means heavy reliance on air power with its concomitant "collateral damage", a euphemism for killing civilians.

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- Instead of creating a strong national army and police force, occupiers now endorse the rearming of communities through the "auxiliary police".

- Relations with the Taliban follow the pendulum principle. All dissenters are lumped with the Taliban and policy swings between making peace with the Taliban to deporting those who dare talk to them, as the recent retirement camp scandal and deportation of German diplomats in December 2007 reveal.

- The 2004 constitution established a strong presidential system, stoking tensions in a war-torn state with tribal divisions, putting too much formal power in the hands of the winner, who has heavy responsibilities but little real authority, creating a breeding ground of nepotism and corruption. Karzai relies heavily on his Northern Alliance Tajik and Uzbek comrades, who make up 27 and 10 per cent of the population respectively, though Karzai is nominally Pashtun, the largest ethnic group. At present, Karzai really only answers to a fractious cluster of foreign donors.

- Finally there is the one flourishing industry -- opium and marijuana production. Opium production was up 34 per cent last year, 10 per cent of proceeds being tithed by the Taliban. Worse yet, it is not at all clear whether this is good or bad from a Western point of view, despite loud protestations about the evils of drugs. It is well documented that many governments in the region, not to mention the CIA, are deeply involved in both sides of the so-called war against drugs. The Taliban actually wiped out all drug production in 2000. Some critics of US foreign policy argue that the 2001 invasion was actually prompted by a distaste for this successful campaign, which led to a crisis in the European drug blackmarket.

<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2008/884/in21.htm>