

THE INTERNATIONAL COALITION IN AFGHANISTAN: CERTAIN ASPECTS OF STRATEGY

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Introduction

Settlement of the situation relating to Afghanistan has been and remains one of the most urgent tasks of world politics. It is becoming increasingly clear that pacification calls for non-military methods: the counterterrorist coalition has failed. With each passing day, the war is pushing the people of Afghanistan deeper into an abyss and making any solution next to impossible.¹

The huge efforts of the international community and the coalition forces have done nothing to improve the situation; it is going from bad to worse: radical forces are regaining their positions to add an edge to the already high tension, while the militants are stepping up their terrorist activities.

The trouble broiling in Pakistan is having a negative effect on everything that is going on in Afghanistan; Hamid Karzai's corrupt and incom-

petent government has merely added to the obvious impotence of power in Kabul.²

The situation in the country is extremely unstable despite the fact that coalition forces have been stationed in the country for 9 years now. The destructive forces have stepped up their activity in the country's north (the Balkh and Kunduz provinces), as well as in other parts of the country that were recently considered "safe," which is arousing particular concern. It should be said that the Taliban has mastered fundamentally new tactics: today suicide bombers are its inalienable part.

The scores of international conferences and meetings expected to solve the Afghan problem have proven useless; there is no more or less specific plan of action either. This means that the international community has learned to live with the problem.

¹ From the speech President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov delivered at the plenary session of the Millennium Development Goals U.N. Summit, 20 September, 2010.

² See: J. Daly, "Pragmatichnaia otsenka geopoliticheskoy i strategicheskoy situatsii v Afghanistane," *Narodnoe slovo*, 10 November, 2009, pp. 1-2.

The number of civilian casualties has recently increased by 30 percent compared to 2009: according to the U.N., in the first six months of 2010, 1,200 Afghans were killed and about 2,000 wounded.³

³ From the speech of the Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan V. Norov at an international roundtable called "The

The considerable number of casualties in the ranks of the counterterrorist coalition (by early October 2010 it had lost over 2,100) has already stirred up the Western public.

State and Prospects of Ensuring Security in Afghanistan" held in Tashkent on 15 October, 2010.

Strategy and Tactics

The international academic and expert communities are actively discussing the pro et contra of the current strategy and tactics the international coalition is employing in Afghanistan. Both the supporters and the opponents are very concerned about the prospects of the NATO military operation in the country. Whether there is a military solution to the problem or whether the coalition should pull out to shift the burden of responsibility for law and order onto the Afghans remains a highly debatable issue.

Much is being said about the money to be poured into training centers (in the capital and the provinces) for the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (ANP). According to the political community, in 2013, the former will number 240 thousand and the latter reach 210 thousand, the figures for 2010 being 140 and 106 thousand, respectively. The NATO generals will have to recruit a large number of trainers in the West to staff the new centers.

Neither the military nor the politicians have a more or less clear idea of how the vast and highly trained army equipped with the latest weapons will be controlled and how the very fact of its existence will affect the Central Asian context in the long run. There is also the possibility that Osama bin Laden or Mullah Omar will gain control over these structures.

The NATO officers explain that a large army is needed to control this country with its far from simple terrain and undeveloped infrastructure; they add that its neighbors (India, Pakistan, and Iran) have large armies.

Despite its potential, the international coalition in Afghanistan does not control the entire theater of war, partly because its strategy and tactics leave much to be desired.

For example, the NATO command ignores the classical method of struggle against militants. Their fighting potential can be depleted by blocking supplies and deliveries. Neither the Taliban, nor al-Qa'eda, nor any other terrorist organization can go on fighting without regular supplies of ammunition and weapons. One cannot but wonder why the vast military contingent, special service agents, space-based and electronic monitoring systems, AWAKS planes, and other high-tech instruments used in Afghanistan and around it have failed to identify and block the supply routes?

The strategy and tactics of information war, likewise, are far from perfect: it was wrong to identify the strategic tasks and goals of future operations and make public the dates and schedule of troop withdrawal from Afghanistan. This gave the enemy a chance to spread its efforts in order to survive until the coalition's final pullout.

We all know that what was said about large-scale operations and the pullout timetable was intended for domestic use in Europe and America. After all, the European nations and Americans had been counting on the promised prompt victory in the Hindu Kush. This means that the leaders of the counterterrorist coalition are primarily guided by political considerations.

NATO spokesmen refute the fairly commonly accepted opinion that the intensity of fighting in Afghanistan is a result of the Alliance's failures. On 15 October, 2010, speaking at a conference at the French International Relations Institute in Paris, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said: "I am not in favor of suspending military operations in Afghanistan. On the contrary, I think that a continuation of military operations is a precondition for a successful reconciliation process, because victory over the Taliban will facilitate reconciliation."⁴ It is clear, however, that on many occasions the Taliban puts pressure on its own initiative.

It should be said that there is no agreement on the current situation in Afghanistan among the coalition's political and military leaders. While the former would like to see a gradual pullout of the coalition forces, the latter obviously prefer their increase. Political scientists and NATO officers cannot agree on the possible impact of the Afghan campaign on the future of the North Atlantic Alliance.

There is the opinion that the war has reached the "point of no return;" if the Alliance fails, it will lose the "confidence of its partners and respect of its enemies, while the accelerating internal disintegration might cause a split."

It seems that the war will not dent NATO: irrespective of its outcome, the Alliance will go on with its wider global partnership; it will capitalize on its Afghan experience to upgrade its battle worthiness and tactics and master high-tech military equipment.

NATO used the war to launch practical military cooperation with non-members: the ISAF is staffed with servicemen from 47 countries (only 28 of them being NATO members).

NATO is gradually involving some of the CIS and CSTO members: Azerbaijan (90 military); Armenia (40); Georgia (925); and Ukraine (15).

The counterterrorist operation in Afghanistan allows NATO to develop its partnership with the Asian and Arab-Muslim countries: today military units from Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, UAE, Jordan, etc. are fighting as part of the international coalition.

The war has allowed NATO to train its members and coordinate their war efforts; the newcomers (Albania and the Baltic countries) had to learn the hard way.

Germany has been involved in land fighting for the first time since 1945 when the Nazi regime was defeated in World War II.

The Americans are busy setting up their military bases in Afghanistan, Eastern Europe, and the CIS. In 2005, they came to Kyrgyzstan, Rumania, and Bulgaria. In 2009, they used the Pápa Air Base in Hungary for the first ever international structure, which serves as the key transportation point of strategic airlift.

This means that the war has allowed NATO to upgrade the fighting potential of the coalition forces and improve coordination of joint large-scale operations, i.e. NATO has improved its efficiency. It assumed the role of an international expeditionary force used for armed intervention and, as such, is enlarging the range of its activities.

Combating Narcotics: Where Views and Strategies Differ

There is no effective anti-narcotics strategy in the country, which has become the main source of international drug trafficking. In recent years, the Russian Federation has been insistently call-

⁴ "NATO Must Keep Military Pressure on Taliban: Rasmussen," 16 October, 2010, available at [<http://www.sabanews.net/en/news226456.htm>].

ing on the West to step up its struggle against drug trafficking from Afghanistan⁵; so far, however, the fundamentally different assessments of the threats keep cooperation at a low key. In 2009, the sides set up a joint workgroup; since then, Moscow has supplied Washington with information about 175 laboratories in Afghanistan and 34 drug dealers. Washington reciprocated with a trickle of relevant information.⁶

Since 2001, Afghanistan has increased its opium production ten-fold; it is responsible for 93-94 percent of the world's production of heroin (in 2009 alone, it exported 6.9 thousand tons).

Every year, 900 tons of opium and 375 tons of heroin cross the Afghan border; Iran consumes 80 percent of the bulk, the rest goes mainly to Europe and Russia. In the last 10 years, drugs have claimed over 1 million lives, the annual toll reaching 100 thousand (Russia alone lost 30 thousand lives).

Table

**Afghanistan's Share
in World Opium Production**

Years	Production in Afghanistan (metric tons)	World Production (metric tons)	Share of Afghan Drugs in World Production (%)
1998	2,693	4,346	62
1999	4,565	5,764	79
2000	3,276	4,691	70
2001	185	1,596	12
2002	3,400	4,491	76
2003	3,600	4,765	76
2004	4,200	4,850	87
2005	4,100	4,620	89
2006	6,100	6,610	92
2007	8,200	8,847	93
2008	7,700	8,298	93
2009	7,800	8,100	94

Source: "Afghanistan—Opium Survey 2010," United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, November 2010.

⁵ In Russia, drug addiction is a "national catastrophe;" over 2.5 million are registered as drug users; a dose of heroin can be bought for as little as \$2.5 (a bottle of vodka is much more expensive). In 2009, 120 thousand drug dealers and drug pushers were sentenced to various terms in prison (in China the figure is twice as low—60 thousand).

⁶ See: S. Iskanderov, "Afghansky opium—narkobizness ili geopolitika?" 29 June, 2010, available at [<http://www.1newsaz.com/authors/51/20100629032735857.html>].

The Americans are convinced that the total destruction of opium fields (according to experts, too expensive to be contemplated) might destabilize the situation in the country. They prefer to fight drug trafficking and big drug dealers. Russia insists on the complete destruction of opium plantations, which it believes will be much more effective than arresting drug traffickers and drug dealers.

Russia refers to America's experience in Columbia where nearly 75 percent of the cocaine plantations were defoliated from air (at a moderate cost of \$50 million). American experts, however, point out that this experiment not only failed to yield the anticipated results, it caused an increase in the export of drugs.

According to Russian experts, in Afghanistan (in the Helmand Province where nearly 60 percent of drugs are produced), opium is grown by large landowners on vast plantations rather than by peasants on their land plots, peasants only being hired to bring in the harvest. This means that special cadastre registration of the territory will help identify and liquidate the opium plantations.

The Americans, in turn, are convinced that this will deprive the peasants of their source of subsistence and push them toward the Taliban. This means that the already far from simple situation will become even worse, which will create a lot of problems for NATO.

On 9-10 June, 2010, Moscow hosted an International Forum on Drug Production in Afghanistan: A Challenge to the International Community, at which it was said that drug production was limited to 12 out of Afghanistan's 34 provinces.

According to American experts, about 3.5 million Afghan peasants earn their living from growing opium poppy.

In the first quarter of 2010, NATO carried out 56 anti-drug operations in the country and destroyed 16.3 tons of opium, 195 kg of morphia, 1.2 tons of heroin, 9.8 tons of hashish, and 10.1 tons of chemical precursors. The United States went even further: the annual subsidies of about \$500 million were increased by \$100 million to persuade Afghan farmers to switch to growing other types of crops.

Russia has developed a Rainbow-2 plan designed to put an end to drug production in Afghanistan: NATO is expected to destroy 25 percent of the poppy fields, develop energy production, and create over 2.5 million jobs. On top of this, Moscow is prepared to help restore 140 Afghan infrastructure facilities, including the Naglu electric power station and the Salang tunnel.

According to the RF Federal Drug Control Service, it is also prepared to finance training of over 300 Afghans for the Afghan Drug Police (an increase over the previous figure of 30-50 people); there are also plans to add vigor to cooperation with the CSTO.⁷

It should be said that the U.S. and NATO regard terrorists, not drug dealers, as their main enemies because Afghan drugs almost never reach the American market. In Russia, on the other hand, drug addiction has developed into a national threat. The above explains the cardinal differences between the Russian and American approaches to the aims of the anti-drug struggle in Afghanistan and to its tasks and strategies.

Russia will unlikely be able to convince the United States to destroy the poppy plantations: there are too many other unresolved security problems in Afghanistan. To succeed, Russia must step up

⁷ See: Speech by the President of the Russian Federation D. Medvedev at the International Forum on Drug Production in Afghanistan: *A Challenge to the International Community*, Moscow, 9 June, 2010, available at [<http://www.kremlin.ru/news/7996>] (see also: "Rossia predlozila mirovomu soobshchestvu kardinalnye mery protiv afghanskoy narkougrozy," *Rossiiskaya gazeta—Federalny vypusk*, 10 June, 2010, available at [<http://www.rg.ru/2010/06/10/narko.html>]); R. Weitz, "Afghanistan: Rossia prizyvaet k rasshireniiu vzaimodeystvia ODKB i NATO v dele borby s narkotikami," 18 November, 2010, available at [<http://russian.eurasianet.org/node/58443>]; Speech by Viktor Ivanov, SADC Chairman and FDCS Director, at the enlarged ambassador-level session of the Russia-NATO Council in Brussels on 24 March, 2010, available at [<http://stratgap.ru/pages/strategy/3662/3886/4391/print.stml>].

anti-drug propaganda at home and cooperate, on a much closer basis, with Afghanistan's neighbors to seal off the borders.

Regional Economic Cooperation in the Light of Economic Relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan

Stabilization in Afghanistan greatly depends on the situation in Pakistan and the further development of economic relations and trade in particular. The international community is working in this direction.

Meanwhile, Kabul and Islamabad have not yet agreed on several issues of regional politics and cannot, therefore, tap cooperation potential to the full. Today, Pakistan is Afghanistan's key trade partner; in 2009, bilateral trade turnover reached \$1.4 billion.

Pakistan exports foodstuffs, building materials, transport facilities, textiles, and agricultural, pharmaceutical, and chemical products and imports coal, ferrous and non-ferrous metals, and agricultural products from Afghanistan.

On 18 July, 2010, the two countries signed a transit trade agreement brokered by the United States. To facilitate and speed up the signing, Washington extended financial aid and publicized a 5-year program of aid to Islamabad to the tune of \$7.5 billion; the donor countries promised to increase their financial aid to Kabul.

It was expected that the two countries would open transit routes across their territories to move Afghan and Pakistani commodities to third countries; according to experts, by 2015, bilateral trade would reach \$5 billion.

Under this agreement, Afghanistan will gain access to the Pakistani Arabian Sea ports and to third countries through them; 15 trade routes will bring it to the Indian market by land.

Pakistan, in turn, will reach the Central Asian and CIS countries across the territory of Afghanistan, a promising prospect for a country whose access to the European and American markets is limited by tariff and non-tariff barriers.

The expert community, however, is very skeptical about future cooperation between the two countries and believes that ratification of the Washington-brokered agreement might take several years.

Trade and economic cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan is stalling for the following reasons:

- *First*, Islamabad is dead set against broad economic cooperation between Afghanistan and India and fears Delhi's increased pressure on Kabul. Pakistan has already de facto banned the transit of Indian goods to Afghanistan across its territory. This means that the treaty will inevitably be lopsided: while Afghanistan will move its goods to India via Pakistan, reverse transit will be banned. This will probably increase smuggling from India to Afghanistan.
- *Second*, Afghanistan, which is becoming increasingly dependent on Pakistan, will be unable to push forward its cooperation with India while Pakistan will go on raising its bilateral trade turnover with India.⁸

⁸ See: N. Zamaraeva, "Pakistan-Afghanistan: proval torgovogo tranzitnogo soglashenia: chto za etim stoit?" available at [<http://www.iimes.ru/rus/stat/2010/15-07-10b.htm>]; N.V. Galishcheva, "Iuzhnoaziatskiy vector vneshneekonomicheskoy politiki Indii," *Mirovye i natsionalnoe khozyastvo*, No. 1 (12), 2010.

- *Third*, Kabul is accusing Islamabad of subversive actions against Afghanistan; the sides are hurling accusations at each other of inadequate border control and abetting in smuggling.
- *Fourth*, America's blockade of Iran makes it hard to organize transit trade between the two countries (in the westerly direction, in particular).

The North-South routes (from the southern seas up north to Central Asia and vice versa) look more promising from the viewpoint of transit trade between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Political disagreements between Pakistan and India, as well as the United States and Iran, are one of the main factors interfering with regional trade and economic cooperation. Pakistan desperately trying to retain its control over the Afghan economy, which explains its ban on the transit of Indian goods to Afghanistan. American attempts to develop and strengthen economic cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan while keeping other countries (India and Iran in particular) out in the cold can hardly be described as effective.

Victor Korgun, a prominent Russian expert on Afghanistan, has pointed out that NATO should build up its military potential, much should be done to promote the social and economic reconstruction of Afghanistan, and the interested sides and neighbors should give a helping hand.⁹

In Lieu of a Conclusion

Obviously, the world (Russia and the United States) and regional (Iran, Pakistan, and India) actors know full well that peace and stability in Afghanistan are the main factors of global security that open up, in particular, greater possibilities for dealing with the vitally important problems of sustainable social and economic development of all the Central Asian and South Asian states.

At the same time, they all, hopefully, know that the Taliban, as a military-political structure, and its supporters in certain regional countries (mainly in Pakistan) are the main obstacle on the road to the desired aims.

For the sake of normalizing social, political, and economic life in Afghanistan, the states involved must learn to act together; they should be absolutely clear about the aims and prospects of their involvement in Afghanistan, otherwise the situation might deteriorate into irreversible negative transformations in Central and South Asia, to say nothing of Afghanistan.

⁹ See: V. Korgun, "SShA v Afghanistane," *Azia i Africa segodnia*, No. 6, 2008, p. 46.