



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on May 10, 2016

Continuation of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan Called “Recipe for Disaster”

The role of U.S. special forces in Afghanistan, who are technically considered to be consultants rather than combatants, has caused confusion among some troops concerning exactly what their role is. A recently declassified (but heavily redacted) Pentagon report quoted a statement from an unnamed soldier serving in Afghanistan who said of the U.S. role in the country: “It’s not a strategy and, in fact, it’s a recipe for disaster in that kind of kinetic environment.”



Reuters, which broke the story, cited the unnamed soldier’s further comments that his unit, whose mission was supposedly to advise and assist Afghan forces without engaging in combat, asked its commanders three times to clarify the rules governing their mission.

Their answer: “Sadly, the only sounds audible were the sounds of crickets ... though those were hard to hear over the gunfire.”

“‘How far do you want to go?’ is not a proper response to ‘How far do you want us to go?’” Reuters quoted one special forces member as saying, in a report investigating the U.S. air strikes on a hospital in Kunduz last year.

A *New York Times* report on May 8 quoted a statement about that hospital bombing from Brigadier General Charles Cleveland, spokesman for the American command in Afghanistan, noting that the fall of Kunduz (on September 28, 2015) “was clearly a desperate situation.” The soldiers, said the general, recognized that “if we don’t really provide some very strong suggestion, direction, whatever you call it — if we don’t get engaged with this quickly — we’re going to have a much larger issue.”

The *Times* cited statements made to military investigators by Green Berets who had fought in Kunduz during the four-day battle to begin securing the city. The report stated that the investigators’ main purpose was not to examine that battle, but the tragic strike on the hospital that occurred during the course of it. According to those statements, these Green Berets, on the morning of October 3, in the heat of battle, called in the air strike that killed 42 people at a hospital in Kunduz run by Doctors Without Borders. The bombing and deaths prompted an international outcry and disciplinary action against 16 military personnel.

The investigation found that those in the AC-130 gunship who had fired on the hospital had mistakenly thought that they were hitting the Taliban’s command center located in Afghanistan’s National Directorate of Security (N.D.S.) building.

While the *Times* article focused on what was legitimately described as a “tragic error” in the headline, this incident was but a small part of a years-long U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan that makes such tragic episodes likely, if not inevitable.

Reuters quoted a statement from General Cleveland in which he described a “lack of understanding in



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the West” about the U.S. and NATO role in Afghanistan, but denied that there was confusion among troops over their mission.

Cleveland said that more than 9,000 U.S. soldiers were “retrained” on the rules of engagement following missteps in Kunduz, in an effort to reduce future misunderstandings.

Reuters reported that critics say the confusion about the U.S. role stems from political expediency, because U.S. leaders are determined to portray the Afghan operation as designed mainly to help local forces fight for themselves. “The rules of engagement are trapped in the jaws of political confusion about the mission,” an unnamed senior Western official told Reuters.

“Nobody in Western capitals seems willing to admit that Afghanistan is a worsening war zone and ... that their troops are still battling out a combat mission on a daily basis,” added the official.

Reuters reported that about 10,000 U.S. troops are in Afghanistan, divided between the NATO train-and-assist mission called Operation Resolute Support and a separate U.S.-only operation against terrorist groups that include al-Qaeda and ISIS, but not the Taliban. An article in Wikipedia lists troop counts for other NATO members participating in Operation Resolute Support, but they are all far lower than the U.S. contribution of 6,800, with Georgia, Germany, Italy, Romania, Turkey, and the United Kingdom contributing from about 500 to 870 troops each.

The UN Security Council unanimously adopted Security Council Resolution 2189 in December 2014 in support of the international mission in Afghanistan. Many people do not realize that NATO is a “regional arrangement” of the UN under Articles 52-54 of the UN Charter. (For a better understanding of NATO’s relationship with the UN, read [“NATO: The UN’s Military Arm.”](#))

U.S. troops were first sent to Afghanistan in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Since the al-Qaeda terrorists who engineered the attack had operated from a safe haven in Afghanistan provided by that nation’s Taliban rulers, this was seen by most as a legitimate and necessary part of our nation’s defense. However, the manner in which this was done, as well as the excessive length of our presence there, raised considerable objection from constitutionalist Americans who opposed a continuation of our nation’s ongoing interventionist foreign policy.

Perhaps our nation’s most vocal and outspoken political leader who objected to much of our nation’s policies regarding Afghanistan was former Representative Ron Paul (R-Texas). Shortly after the 9/11 attacks, Paul said in a statement that while we should indeed pursue those guilty of attacking the United States, the method he favored was a tool the framers of the Constitution provided to Congress — to grant letters of marque and reprisals, in order to narrow the retaliation to only the guilty parties.

Our government opted for another strategy and launched an invasion of Afghanistan, which Paul reluctantly voted for, because he believed that some action was necessary and there were no other options available. The invasions removed the Taliban from power in the nation’s capital, but they remained a force in other areas of the country.

The next year, on May 21, 2002, Paul spoke on the House floor and said that we did not need to occupy Afghanistan because we had defeated those who attacked us and that the American people were not served by an extended occupation of the country.

By 2009, when our forces remained in the country, Paul gave a talk in which he noted that the war in Afghanistan had lasted twice as long as World War II and with no end in sight ... has been one of the longest conflicts in which our country has ever been involved.”



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In response to an Obama administration increase of U.S. troops in Afghanistan to 68,000, Paul said:

I get quite annoyed at this very narrow line of questioning. I have other questions. We overthrew the Taliban government in 2001 with less than 10,000 American troops. Why does it now seem that the more troops we send, the worse things get? If the Soviets bankrupted themselves in Afghanistan with troop levels of 100,000 and were eventually forced to leave in humiliating defeat, why are we determined to follow their example? Most importantly, what is there to be gained from all this? We've invested billions of dollars and thousands of precious lives — for what?

A thorough summary of Paul's opposition to our nation's involvement in Afghanistan can be found [here](#).

Now, seven years after Paul asked what is to be gained by continuing to pour our troops and money into the never-ending war in Afghanistan, we are still as involved as ever, if on a smaller scale. But as history has demonstrated, small involvements tend to escalate into larger involvements, whether in Vietnam, Afghanistan, or Iraq.

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