

THE AFGHANISTAN WAR IN A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT:

Afghanistan has suffered war for thirty years: one decade fighting the Soviet Union and a regime kept in power by it, one of domestic war about what regime to have, and one against USA and a regime kept in power by it. That battle front currently has the largest amount of military forces stationed in any war zone in the world and the speech by president Obama (2009a) at West Point on 1 December 2009 told of more on their way, primarily more than 30,000 from USA, but also from such "willing" countries that can be pressured into increasing their participation. What is going on? This article takes its point of departure in the classical exhortation that one should always ask, "What is this instance of?"

Key words: Afghanistan, war, causes of war, asymmetric wars, and interventions

АПСТРАКТ:

Авганистан страда од војни веќе триесет години: една деценија борејќи се со Советскиот Сојуз и со режимот поддржан од него; една внатрешна војна во врска со тоа каков режим треба да се воспостави; и една против САД и режимот поставен од нивна страна. Овој сегашен борбен фронт се карактеризира со наголем број на вооружени сили стационирани во една воена зона во светот, а говорот на претседателот Обама на Вест Поинт на 1 декември 2009 укажа на дополнителен ангажман на уште 30 илјади војници од САД, но и од други „доброволни“ земји врз кои може да се изврши притисок за партиципација. Што се случува овде? Оваа статија за своја почетна премиса ја има класичната фраза која секој би требал да си ја постави, „за што е ова пример?“.

Клучни зборови: Авганистан, војна, причини за војна, асиметрични војни, интервенции

The Afghanistan war simultaneously belongs to the wider universe of wars and military disputes and various sub-categories of this, for instance defined by size (wars of various magnitudes and lesser cases of armed conflict), time (various periods in global history), space (for instance, continent) and type (domestic/international, symmetric/asymmetric, pre-modern/modern/postmodern). In each case, it may fit well or badly into patterns of causality (or at least statistical correlations) already established. The first section below deals with this.

Two comparisons are of particular interest: one is with other wars fought in Afghanistan, the other with US wars and military interventions in various time perspectives. These are the topics of the following two sections. The fourth section treats asymmetric wars and in particular guerilla wars.

Studying *causes* of war, with statistical correlations as criterion, is one thing; studying *motives* is another, which involves attempts at seeing the war as a result of decision making. This can be done at several levels: describing the *casus belli* proclaimed in the war propaganda, trying to find the underlying motives as secretly discussed by decision makers, or trying to find patterns in deep culture that the decision makers may not even be clearly aware of. This is done in the fifth section, after which the sixth section discusses a particular motive to have a war that is often overlooked: war for war's sake and motives behind that.

Wars and militarized disputes in general

In the literature (e.g., Harbom & Wallensteen 2009), it is customary to demand, in order to classify something as a *war*, that it has at least one participant that is a state or a state-like entity, that it lasts for more than just a few days, and that it causes at least 1,000 casualties per year (if the number is between 25 and 1,000, it is defined as a "minor armed conflict"). In these terms, we have had a war in Afghanistan since the US attack in October 2001: USA has participated all the time, it has lasted for more than eight years without interruption, and the casualties have been far above 1,000 per year. Let us now see where the Afghanistan war can be located in relation to some of the above classifications.

The *duration* of the Afghanistan war is above average; how much above depends on what we compare with. On the one hand, several (largely) domestic wars after 1945 have lasted even longer, for instance the Philippines, Myanmar, Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Congo, Peru and Colombia; almost all of them are still going on. On the other hand, few (predominantly) international wars lasted longer and almost all of them are now over: France in Indochina (1946-54) and in Algeria (1954-62); Great Britain in the Malay Peninsula (1948-61); Portugal in its African colonies (1960-75); and USA in Vietnam (c.1963-1975) and Iraq (since 2003).

The *magnitude* of this war is also above average, whether we count armed forces, casualties or refugees. Some – but not many – wars after 1945 engaged more soldiers (China until 1949, Korea, France in Indochina, France in Algeria, wars between India and Pakistan since 1947-48, USA in Indochina, Biafra, Iran *vs.* Iraq in the 1980ies, the two Gulf Wars). Very few wars created

significantly more refugees, primarily China until 1949, the division of British India in 1947/48, Bangladesh 1971-72 and the war against Iraq since 2003. While the number of *direct* casualties is surrounded by a great uncertainty, the order of magnitude so far seems to be 100,000, which is well *below* the million magnitude in China until 1949, Korea, the division of British India, Vietnam, Indonesia in 1965-66, Iran *vs.* Iraq, Biafra, Bangladesh, Rwanda, Congo and USA/Iraq since 2003), but well *above* the great majority of post-1945 wars.

The *spatial extension* of the war depends heavily on definitions. If we look at where the fighting and bombing take place, it is limited to Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan; if we look at the states involved in OEF or ISAF, the Afghan resistance faces the largest coalition since World War II.

This fact, together with the enormous differences in military technology, resources, etc., very clearly locates the war as *asymmetric*. We will return to the implications of this.

The customary distinction between *domestic wars* (fought inside one state by parties belonging to it) and *international wars* shows many clear cases, but also some that are more difficult, and Afghanistan belongs to them: domestic in 1978-79, domestic and international in 1979-89, domestic in 1990-2001 and again domestic and international since 2001. Since domestic wars and international wars tend to have different dynamics and patterns of causality, this calls for a closer analysis in the sequel.

Philosophers, historians, etc., have speculated on the causes of war for millennia. During the last couple of generations, hundreds of systematic studies with statistical methods have been carried out to test these speculations as well as more modern and coherent theories, the general idea being that if one of them has a validity that can be generalised, then we should find corresponding statistical correlations where we look for them.

By this criterion, war seems to be a highly individual phenomenon: very few theories or propositions survive this test, if we demand that the observed relationship is statistically significant (and therefore unlikely to be random), strong (accounting for more than a few per cent of the total variation of wars) and replicated (concurrently seen in several independent studies). Religion is not systematically related to wars (Russett 2000; Tuscisny 2004), so we do not need to bother about any "clash of civilizations" (Huntington 1996). Many studies KÄLLA have found that states high on democracy fight neither more nor less than those low on democracy, so we can forget the notion that democracies are particularly peaceful. International and domestic wars seem to have different causal dynamics: there is no direct correlation between them and it is only by bringing in third variables that we find at least some statistic relationships, which are furthermore both relatively weak and apparently incoherent with each other.

One of the few solidly confirmed relationships is that great powers tend to fight other states far more than smaller ones do. Another is that the more boundaries a state has, the more international wars does it tend to get involved in. A third is that the higher above the average level of military preparedness for a state of its size that a state lays, the more international

wars does it take part in. That is about it: a number of other correlations with war have been found, but they are typically non-significant, weak or non-replicated. By the first and third relationship, we should expect USA to be involved in many inter-state wars and Afghanistan in few; by the boundaries relationship, it is just the other way around, so it seems to be less heavy than the two others.

We can supplement these (non-)findings by looking in two different directions: at pairs of states or even entire systems rather than at single states, and at the internal rather than external relations of states. In the first case, we mainly find replications from the single state level. Historically, two great powers were much more likely than two minor powers to fight each other, with the combination of one major and minor power in between. The nuclear age seems to have changed this: there is not a single case of a member of the alliance system of USA at a direct war with a member of that of the USSR (the notion of "a war by proxy" is widespread but its validity is scientifically controversial). The Afghanistan war is compatible with this, neither supporting nor contradicting it.

Another couple of findings contradict the conventional belief that the balance of power is good for peace: first, if there is an approximate balance between two states, the risk of a war is much *higher* than if there is a clear discrepancy. The reason may be that the smaller state usually gives in rather than risking a war, so here Afghanistan is an exception, but not a significant one.

Second, if two states lie above the average level of military preparedness, then the risk that a militarized dispute between them escalates is highest, especially if they have had an arms race (the effects of arms races are still controversial however); it is lowest if both lie below average. The Afghanistan war is compatible with this, but no more.

Finally, great powers are essentially the only states that fight others than their neighbours (but occasionally recruit their satellites into their wars). In Afghanistan, USA has dragged in far more states than it did in Vietnam or the USSR did when invading Czechoslovakia in 1968.

One finding at the level of pairs is remarkable: whereas single democracies are neither more peaceful, nor more warlike than others, it is strongly established by several studies that two democracies do not fight *each other* (at least until now). The reasons seem to be both internal (losing rather than gaining politically by attacking another democracy) and external (common norms and mutual transparency). The conclusion is that, *if* Afghanistan had been a democracy, then it would not have been attacked (but also would hardly have provided training camps for terror groups). It might have been covertly subverted however; US authorities have done this in many democracies (for instance Iran 1953, Guatemala 1954, Greece 1967, Chile 1973 and a number of other American states), sometimes in collaboration with the military and/or secret services of these countries and sometimes with those of neighbouring countries.

One finding from the level of pairs also recurs at the system level: the higher the proportion of democratic states in a system, the more peaceful is the system (Gleditsch 1997).

During the last couple of decades, systematic research has also accumulated concerning *domestic* wars. The risk of war is particularly high in a state whose independence is young, who had a previous domestic war relatively recently and who lies *in between* being strongly autocratic and strongly democratic and is *moving* in either direction (Hegre 2001). By these relations, the risk of domestic war in Afghanistan has been, and remains, higher than average.

Wars in the history of Afghanistan

As far back as we can follow the history of what is now Afghanistan, states on this territory have alternately been invaded (from the Median and Persian empires to the Ilkhanate and Tamerlane) and been expanding regional great powers themselves. Modern Afghanistan begins in 1747 with the coronation of Ahmed Abdali of the *durrani* clan, who later marched to Delhi to support the threatened mogul there. British expansion in India soon defined a new threat to Afghanistan, manifested by the first major invasion in 1839; a bit later came the Russian expansion in Central Asia and the ensuing "Great Game" between the two. There were minor clashes with both of them and some major wars. The first ended with the British being thrown out in 1842; out of 16,500 soldiers and administrators in Kabul, one Englishman and a score of Indians survived..

The second British invasion came in 1878. After alternating Afghan and British battle victories in 1878-80, the British took over large territories, but the rest of Afghanistan remained autonomous under Amir Abdurrahman, who had to accept British responsibility for its foreign relations but managed to avoid the British resident in Kabul that had originally been demanded.

In 1919, the new Amir (later King) Amanullah Khan demanded full independence of Afghanistan, and in the third Afghan war in May through August 1919 he met British forces ten times on his own, achieved independence and regained some of the areas taken over by the British since 1880. They managed to keep some Pashtun areas in what is now north-eastern Pakistan (which remained *de facto* autonomous under the British *raj* and now Pakistan as well as an object of dispute). This resounding defeat (presented as a victory by the British) spelled the beginning of the end of the British empire in Asia: others saw that the British could be defeated and started fighting, violently or non-violently, for their own liberation.

After some initial territorial disputes, the Soviet Union now became a major trade partner and supplier of aid, and peaceful coexistence and cooperation was established between the two very different systems. This changed in the 1970ies, when King Zahir was deposed by his relative Daoud in 1973 after which Daoud was ousted by a communist coup in 1978, led by Nur Muhammad Taraki ([en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Nur_Muhammad_Taraki](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nur_Muhammad_Taraki)). His attempts at establishing a strong central government, combined with his impatience when making reforms, led to widespread resistance. After the long period of an anti-communist but Soviet-friendly government, that of Taraki was communist and pro-Soviet and the resistance consequently

anti-communist *and* anti-Soviet. The Soviet dilemma was thus between supporting him militarily or handing the country over to groups (including mujahedeen, Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda) with money and arms from USA. When Taraki asked for a military intervention in Moscow in March 1979, Kosygin and Brezhnev initially tried to dissuade him, stressing the negative repercussions this would have in Afghanistan and internationally ([http://www.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Nur Muhammad Taraki](http://www.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Nur_Muhammad_Taraki)), but USSR eventually entered in December 1979 when the dilemma had worsened. The political costs in the West included a new Cold War period, and the rising number of killed and maimed conscripts soon led to a growing popular resistance to the war in the USSR. For political reasons, the Soviet Union could not send much more than 100,000 men: enough to destroy the country and kill about one million people, but not to defeat the resistance. It learnt the same lessons as France in Algeria and USA in Vietnam: first, it takes a very overwhelming superiority in numbers (the rule of thumb is 10-20 to one) to have a chance to win a (quasi) colonial war against a guerrilla movement; second, it cannot be done with a conscript army with low motivation and many angry relatives at home. Michail Gorbachov eventually drew the consequences of the failure and loss of prestige and pulled out in 1989, leaving it to competing forces in Afghanistan to fight over the distribution of power for another decade. After the communists being eliminated, the main combatants were shifting coalitions of regional warlords, joined from 1994 by the mainly Pashtun-based Taliban (literally, "Koran students") with their peculiar reading of Islam (closest related to the Saudi *Wahhabij*) as ideological guideline.

The 1970ies had been an unsuccessful decade for USA in south Asia. Its main ally, Pakistan, had collapsed and an independent Bangladesh arose in 1971 with a major but short Indian military intervention as a midwife. Saudi Arabia demonstrated some independence in the so-called 'oil crisis' from 1973. Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia were definitely lost in 1975. The Chinese were thrown out when attacking Vietnam in 1978 "to teach it a lesson" after its invading Cambodia to topple the genocidal Pol Pot regime (which for many years remained being seen by USA as the only legitimate one), and in the same year Afghanistan got its first communist regime. The shah that USA had once imposed on Iran fell in 1979 and was succeeded by a regime with theocratic features that regarded USA as the Great Satan (and the Soviet Union as the Small Satan - it soon eliminated the Iranian left wing).

Afghanistan therefore got a more prominent place than before on the US geostrategic maps. One countermove was cooperation between CIA and its counterparts (SIS, etc.) in Pakistan to finance and arm the resistance against Taraki's internally divided regime, and even more so when the Soviet Union had been dragged in. It has been claimed that a main US aim with that support was to place the USSR in the above dilemma and make it go in and thus get weakened internationally. The US support, mainly via Pakistan, went to various groups, including Al Qaeda, who fought to topple the communist regime, whatever other differences they had. Once this was achieved after the complete Soviet withdrawal in 1989, they started fighting each other. The Taliban emerged with support from and bases in Pakistan, getting the upper hand in 1996-

97; when USA attacked in 2001, Taleban effectively ruled most of the country, although some northern warlords still resisted.

The initial US position was to try to co-opt the Taleban in order to get things done that USA wanted done. One of them was to combat the opium production and trade; the Taliban obliged with considerable success until USA attacked and Taliban started competing as opium traders with the warlords supported by USA and the Karzai family (Scott 2010). Another aim, previously attempted with the warlords, was to get a pipeline between Turkmenistan with its Stalinist-type regime and the military dictatorship under Musharraf in Pakistan. This was promised by the Taleban regime, or so the US administration believed until concluding that it could not or would not deliver.

More openly controversial was the “blowback” of the wahhabist Al Qaeda. While hostile to Shiite Iran, it shared its convictions on the infidel Satan in his different forms, fighting Serbs in Bosnia, Russians in Chechnya, the US embassy in Kenya, etc. The US response was to bomb alleged Al Qaeda bases: a civilian medical factory in Sudan and a camp in Afghanistan training people for terror actions in India, and to issue increasingly strong demands that these bases should be closed down.

The mass murders on 11 September 2001 had a vast impact. Like after Pearl Harbor in 1941, it was imperative for the US president to take swift action. Exactly what happened in New York is still clouded by considerable mystery, since both the conspiracy theory in the official report and those presented by critics of that report contain important gaps as well as manifest untruths. It was soon established – or so it seemed - that the great majority of the hijackers were Saudi Arabians and that the planning of the operation took place in Germany, but neither could be bombed. USA accused Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda as responsible and Afghanistan of providing bases for them, and demanded that it extradite him for trial. UN Security Council’s resolution 1373 of 28 September 2001 contained several demands to member states, which were asked to report on implementation within 90 days and set up a committee to monitor this and set up a work programme within 30 days. It does not explicitly authorize military means; international lawyers are divided (along predictable lines) as to whether USA needed another resolution.

The response from Kabul was fairly conciliatory: if Bin Laden was in fact in Afghanistan and if USA presented at least some *prima facie* evidence that he was guilty, Afghanistan would agree to extradite him to face trial before a *sharia* court in some third country, for instance Pakistan. USA refused to present any evidence (Osama himself only claimed responsibility in 2004, whether telling the truth or boasting) or negotiate on the Afghan offer and attacked on 4 October, long before the above deadlines had expired. It seems, however, that the attack was decided well *before* September 11: the former Pakistani Foreign Secretary, Niaz Naik, told BBC that he had been informed by senior US officials already in mid-July that there would be an attack before mid-October (Arney 2001).

USA had immediately received messages from all kinds of states that sharply condemned the massacre and expressed sympathy and offered different kinds of assistance. In particular, the NATO countries stated that this was a case of the Article 5 ("an attack on one is an attack on all") and offered immediate assistance. Yet when USA attacked, it did on its own, without any resolution from the UNSC that clearly authorized military action and without any NATO command. In both cases, we may see a shadow of the attack on Yugoslavia in 1999. There, too (and later in Iraq), it just ignored the UN when understanding that it could not get a resolution authorizing war. It also learnt that running a war through NATO was too cumbersome in several respects: too many embarrassing questions about the legality of various kinds of bombing, too many member countries that were vulnerable to anti-war popular majorities at home and/or unwilling to provide soldiers, bomb planes, bases, etc.

This war was therefore run under US command and with additional troops from "the coalition of the willing": states that accepted to be under this command, plus the remaining local warlords (soon renamed "security providers"). The operation was first named "Infinite Justice"; when friendly Moslem states objected that this could only be provided by Allah, it became "Operation Enduring Freedom", OEF. In one sense, the war was quickly won: Kabul was quickly taken and the regular Taleban troops disappeared. Getting control over the entire country and eliminating all resistance was an entirely different matter, now increasingly far from being achieved.

Like in Yugoslavia (and, later, Iraq), the United Nations soon had to be let in after all in order to provide some legitimacy. Security Council Resolution 1386 of 20 December 2001 created the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF); its mandate and chain of command were to be separate from those of OEF, and Great Britain to be the first state in charge of leading it. It has been suggested that other members of the Security Council were not unhappy to have USA face the same fate in Afghanistan as they had suffered.

On these premises, the ISAF coalition was eventually joined by about one quarter of the world's states, primarily members of NATO and other parts of the US alliance system (like Australia) and Partnership for Peace members with governments wanting NATO membership (such as Macedonia, Georgia and Sweden). These premises have gradually disappeared: in 2003, the mandate area of ISAF was enlarged from Kabul to the entire country and the previously rotating command was put under NATO (volunteer states being difficult to find), but still with non-US commanders. Since 2007, USA instead had generals of its own commanding the NATO forces, the first being Dan K. McNeill. His present successor Stanley A. McChrystal (previously organising death squads in Iraq) recently altered the rules of engagement of ISAF to include preventive attacks against suspected threats. Lawyers may still be able to see differences between OEF and ISAF, but is unlikely that the population of Afghanistan can see them, or even those between the military and civilian parts of the PRT (Provincial Reconstruction Teams) under ISAF.

So far, the present war in Afghanistan seems to fit well into their historical pattern: a great power invades the country to support some party in its internal power games which is (believed to be) sympathetic and potentially obedient, the increasing number of foreign troops, then creates a nation-wide resistance that eventually forces the great power to pull out again after doing great damage to Afghanistan and itself. The US diplomat and former marine captain Matthew Hoh resigned in October 2009 from his responsibility for the Zabul province, having concluded that it was not clear why USA should be in Afghanistan in the first place and that much of the insurgency had started *after* the arrival of US troops (BBC News, 27 October 2009)...

Wars in US history

The United States of America belongs to the states born by war, albeit partly by accident: many years of successful non-violent resistance might eventually have achieved its aims, but one group ("Minutemen") clashed with the British Army in 1775, leading to eight years of war that are now in collective memory the midwife of the nation. For more than a century, the wars were then fought to take over territory from Mexico and from many Indian nations by extermination and/or ethnic cleansing, the two exceptions being the British attack and occupation of Washington in 1812 and the Civil War in 1861-65. The Monroe doctrine *de facto* claimed the western hemisphere as a sphere of interest in 1823, but wider military ambitions were only manifested in the 1890ies: at the brink of war with Great Britain in 1895 over the boundary between Venezuela and British Guyana, invading the independent Hawaii and attacking Spain to liberate Cuba and the Philippines. The Filipinos, however, meant independence by liberation, so it took years of vast bloodshed to subdue them and create a US colony. After entering World War I on the side of the entente in 1917, thereby probably deciding its outcome, and briefly fighting against the revolution in Russia, USA withdrew from Europe and limited itself to Central America and the Caribbean, repeatedly invading states there and occupying them for a period. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, on 7 December 1941, brought USA into World War II, single-handedly defeating Japan and contributing to the defeat of Hitler in Europe, where it then took over the military intervention in Greece from the British to crush the left wing there. It is only from then on that USA plays a major role in Asia. After avoiding (open) intervention in China, it fought major wars in Korea (largely ending in *status quo ante*), Vietnam (lost), and now Iraq and Afghanistan (not yet definitely and clearly lost).

Some features are common in the history of US wars. First, in American self-perception these wars always had noble ends: the spread of civilization and Christianity, liberation (of Texas, slaves, colonies, victims of aggression, etc.), democracy (as against Fascism, Communism, Islamism), and so forth. Dissidents were always there, sometimes few and isolated and sometimes (like Vietnam) growing to a majority within a few years; in some cases (like the genocides on Indian nations) apologies have even been forthcoming a century later. There is

greater variation in the assessments of the wars made by others, ranging between gratitude and admiration at one end and condemnation as greedy and arrogant aggression at the other, all depending on what war we are talking about and whom we ask.

It is the historical mission of USA to fight Evil and war is the means to get peace. This is what president Obama (2009b) emphasized in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech in Oslo on 10 December. It inadvertently illustrated major themes in Johan Galtung's book, "US foreign policy as manifest theology" (1987, cf. Galtung 2009), where he argues that USA perpetually needs a demonized enemy, with whom one cannot negotiate (at least not until it has become absolutely clear that the war cannot be won). Republican right wing leaders, such as Sarah Palin and Newt Gingrich praised the speech, and according to the Republican strategist Bradley A. Blakeman, "The irony is that George W. Bush could have delivered the very same speech. It was truly an American president's message to the world" (Javers 2009).

For a long time, the American ethos contained its original strong anti-colonial position, which was furthermore reflected in its own behaviour, normally withdrawing within a few years (the Philippines and some Pacific territories took longer time) from countries that were invaded, sometimes keeping some military bases there. USA preferred an obedient regime in a nominally sovereign state to colonial administration. Several presidents since Theodore Roosevelt are reported to have said about some Latin American or Middle East dictator: "He is a son of a bitch, but he is our son of a bitch." Obvious losers may eventually be dropped, however, rather than supported to the bitter end, for instance Diem and later Ky/Thieu in Vietnam, Marcos in the Philippines, the shah in Iran - and perhaps Karzai tomorrow. After World War II, USA initially opposed European colonialism in Africa and Asia, but the colonial powers soon made it see (predominantly middle class) national liberation movements as "Communist", thus actually driving them into the arms of USSR, China, etc., and creating a self-fulfilling prophesy.

Fighting Evil is important to legitimize a war domestically, but is difficult to anchor in the international law, which demands a *casus belli* to be more concrete and specific and refer either to self-defence or a decision by the Security Council to use force. To get international support for a planned war, the initial war aims therefore often refer to specific violations of the international law, such as alleged weapons of mass destruction. If this fails and the war is started anyhow, the emphasis shifts to getting domestic support; for instance for a regime change.

Given this, it becomes very difficult for USA to get out of a war in any other way than by having a clear victory, treating the losers as criminals to be dealt with in judicial forms. Negotiations, compromises, etc., are seen as betrayals in the struggle against Evil and therefore avoided, at least until it has become overwhelmingly clear that the desired victory is out of reach and that a semblance of victory can only be achieved through them. Therefore, open (as distinct from clandestine) wars tend to get very long and extremely destructive to their targets (and the US economy).

Asymmetric wars

One of the puzzles concerning wars is that states or similar actors occasionally manage to defeat or deter attacks from other actors that are vastly superior, at least by narrow military counting, with very much greater military expenditures financing much bigger forces with more advanced equipment. One type of explanation may be found in the doctrine of the defender. Ancient Sparta and medieval Switzerland are the paradigmatic examples of creating a reputation of fighting so bitterly that even if the attacker won, his costs would greatly exceed his gains. Nature may help: since a small army sent in there would be defeated and a big army starve to death, Montenegro remained independent for centuries; and "General Frost" assisted in defeating invasions of Russia by Hitler, Napoleon, Charles XII and others with (by the standards of their times) giant armies..

Another explanation may lie in the *type of war*: when the attacker is forced by the weaker party to fight a war that is quite different from the one for which he has been trained and equipped, the odds may change. The term "guerrilla" was first used about the Spanish irregular and eventually fairly successful defence against Napoleon, but the phenomenon is older and there have been other names, such as "The War of the Flea", to quote the book title of a modern analyst (Taber, 1970).

The record of guerrilla warfare is mixed. At one end, we find the attempts at guerrilla tactics in Western Europe and Latin America in the 1970ies, almost all of which failed miserably to reach any of their goals (Wiberg, 1974) and with IRA in Northern Ireland, ETA in Spain, Sendero Luminoso in Peru and FARC in Colombia as the only survivors. At the other end we have the clear victories in China, Indochina (twice!), Algeria, South Yemen, Eritrea (when under Ethiopia) and the Portuguese colonies in Africa, all of them toppling domestic and/or colonial regimes. In between, we have several cases of partial success, for instance in Nepal and some African areas, where the guerrilla movements have eventually achieved being accepted as negotiation partners and sometimes transformed into legitimate civilian political parties. Some generalizations seem to be well-founded.

First, the democratic governments run very little risks. Guerilla movements there tend to attack civilians rather than soldiers, polarizing about everybody else against them, and are eventually taken care of by the police. The most successful ones in post-1945 Europe, IRA and ETA, never managed to get major support even among the minorities (Basques, Catholics) they claimed to represent, and offers to negotiate with them in some forms were linked to their prior disarmament (which IRA eventually accepted). To have any chance of success, a guerrilla movement has to convince at least a part of the population that they have a legitimate grievance and that violence is the only feasible way of addressing it. They can therefore be undercut by popular non-violent liberation movements, who achieved their aims in India, Tanganyika, Ghana and elsewhere.

Second, foreign rulers or domestic regimes backed by foreign powers run much greater risks. There have been cases of significant guerrilla movements being defeated, but they are few and due to particular circumstances. The USSR armed forces were so enormously superior that they managed to suppress post-1945 movements in Estonia and Lithuania, and even then it took several years. It took the British almost 15 years to defeat MPAAJA in the Malay Peninsula, and probably depended on its being primarily based on the Chinese minority (Taber 1970). One important factor is patriotism: Castro was more Cuban than Batista, Mao Zedong more Chinese than Chiang Kai-shek, Ho Chi Minh more Vietnamese than Bao Dai, and so forth. The more foreign troops in the country, the smaller are the chances of the ruler they support of achieving broad popular legitimacy.

The Marxist classics are Mao's "On Protracted War" (1938/1963), which repeatedly quotes Sun Tzu (1991; 2,500 years ago), and Giap's "People's War, People's Army" (1962, cf. Macdonald 1994). They have in common a very broad strategic perspective, far beyond the purely military, emphasizing the necessity of recruiting wide popular support and behaving according to that. They also agree that guerrilla tactics are temporary, until the resistance has gained sufficient strength to defeat the enemy in regular battles.

Guerrilla movements have also been successful in predominantly Moslem countries, some with a Marxist ideological basis (most notably in South Yemen), and others decidedly not: neither the mujahedeen fighting the communists in Afghanistan, nor the Taleban and others fighting the present regime. While some scholars (Taber 1970, Macdonald 1994) have attempted general analyses of the conditions of success, there has not yet been any modern Islam-based strategist producing any handbook as well-known as those by Mao and Giap (the classical analysis was made by Ibn Khaldoun 600 years ago, see Lacoste 1965).

In these respects, the resistance groups in Afghanistan seem to have some advantages. They are probably able to portray themselves as "more Afghan" (or, at the ethno-national level, "more Pashtun") than Karzai with his Californian background and US backing – and the more so, the more foreign troops are sent into the country. In spite of the Pashtun being by far the biggest group (but under 50 per cent) in the country, the fact that the Tadzhik are the biggest group in the Afghan National Army, set up by USA, Great Britain and others, is likely to strengthen the position of Taleban among the Pashtun. The many cases of air bombing killing lots of civilians are likely to strengthen them and other resistance movements everywhere in Afghanistan and Pakistan. To the extent democratic (as distinct from other kinds of) legitimacy plays a role, Karzai is likely to have a little of it in Afghanistan (whatever foreigners think he *ought* to have), originally being imposed by USA and presently ruling on the basis of heavy electoral fraud that made his main competitor Abdullah withdraw. The resistance also has time on its side: as long as it avoids complete defeat, it gets increasingly difficult for USA (not to speak of its auxiliaries) to continue a war that creates increasing domestic opposition.

Added to this, there is the purely military factor. The more than 100,000 troops that the USSR had in Afghanistan were quite insufficient. Before the attack on Iraq in 2003, top generals like Shinseki and Shalikashvili warned the US administration that it would take 500,000 men to invade *and* invade the country, but were ignored. Afghanistan is comparable to Iraq as to area and population, but its geography is far friendlier to guerrilla warfare. Even after sending in 35,000 men more and getting a few thousand from those states that have not already set a date for their withdrawal or announced that they will not increase their troops, USA does not have a chance of decisively defeating the resistance before the next presidential election campaign in 2011. Afghan leaders might echo the classical quotation from Pham Van Dong in North Vietnam: "It is up to the Americans to decide how long the war will last: five years, ten years, twenty years..."

One formula that was used in Vietnam and recurs in the debates on Afghanistan and Iraq is that USA will pull out "when the government is able to take responsibility for security in the country", which is supposed to be promoted by *increasing* ("temporarily") its military presence so as to train domestic armed forces in the military and the police. This can be made to *sound* reasonable, especially as an argument for not pulling out yet. There are several reasons to believe that it is either a chimera or a trumped-up pretext to delay the exit of allies. The level of corruption in all three governments excludes any wide popular support, so ruling is only possible by armed force – which creates resistance. The US ambassador – and the former military commander – in Afghanistan, Karl W. Eikenberry, recently warned against troop increases before Karzai shows some ability and willingness to fight the corruption (Jaffe 2009). In addition, training armed forces in an ethnically divided country may turn out to be a greater help to the resistance than to the government.

Motives: the usual suspects

The initial overview dealt with *causes* of war, revealed by corresponding statistical correlations being found where they should be found according to the causal theory. Much literature rather deals with *opportunities* and *motives*, trying to explain the decision to make war as a rational one (in some sense of that ambiguous term: Wiberg 1972), given the beliefs and aims of the decision makers. Historians tend to do this by looking at single wars and trying to find the decisive motives behind the posturing, lies and propaganda that normally surround wars. This normally has to wait, often for decades, until crucial decision makers write memoirs, official documents become declassified, etc. Even so, there are *caveats*: memories often fail, or are mendacious; lies also appear in official documents; and so forth. In addition, too much rationality may also be taken for granted: Barbara Tuchman (1984) studies several cases, from antiquity to the Vietnam War, where actors persevered in acting *against* their own stated interests. Another problem is that proclaimed as well as real war aims often shift from the

preparation of the war to its initial phase and later phases. Looked at by historians, wars tend to get so individual that it is hard to find valid generalizations about them.

Scholars on international relations sometimes take the approach of postulating national interests that states are assumed to pursue (when they do not, there is an explanation problem). The traditional examples are sovereignty, power, welfare, geostrategic positions and control over resources. They are all assumed to be defended, sought or maximised; the list can be reduced by basing one of them on some of the others.

Mercantilist speculations once assumed that wars were a way of increasing resources, but already Adam Smith countered that even if wars were won, the costs tend to be higher than the gains, normally making free trade a superior means of acquiring wealth.

Some theorizing focuses more on military aspects of geo-strategy. The classic is MacKinder (1904) who saw the "heartland" of the Eurasian continent in Central Asia as the key to dominating it and the world; this could be seen as a way to make sense of the Great Game between Great Britain and Russia. Whatever its scholarly merits, it has influenced strategic thinking for generations, first in Germany (Haushofer and others) and since World War II in USA (Sempa 2000). The influence went beyond scholars, and can be seen already in Joint Chiefs of Staff documents, such as JCS 570/2 in 1943 and 570/40 in 1945 on various types of US spheres of influence and locations of bases in the Atlantic and Pacific areas encircling Eurasia from both sides (Galtung 2005).

One problem with war is that the development of the international law has increasingly restricted the cases where it is legal, excluding most of the values above. Individual or collective self-defence is legal, if other means have been exhausted. This may extend to *pre-emptive* war - when an immediate attack is foreseen -, but not to *preventive* war aimed at incapacitating the potential adversary; nor is *revenge* a legal motive. The UN Security Council may decide on military action as means of restoring peace and international security, and has legitimised external support for armed struggle against *apartheid*. *Humanitarian intervention* has been suggested as a legal motive; this is still controversial and no military intervention with this as proclaimed aim has been sanctioned by UN.

It has been said that hypocrisy is the tribute of vice to virtue. Traditional motives to go to war have hardly disappeared, but since they have lost their legality, it is often seen as necessary to hide them behind other aims with less dubious legality. We may therefore expect that wars nowadays are prepared by even more lying than traditionally.

If we make the adventurous assumption (history being full of counter-examples) that post-war results of a victory reflect pre-war aims, then the conclusion is that military geo-strategy is still a main US concern, as witnessed by the plethora of new US bases in Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan and many other countries in all populated continents, a development that has continued from Bush to Obama (Rozoff 2010).

The resources sought by war were traditionally agricultural land, mines and trade routes (for customs incomes). During the past century, *oil and gas* has played an increasing role: one reason for the British invasion of Iraq during World War I was oil for its new war ships, and one factor behind the USSR defeating Germany was that Hitler had two diverging directions of attack: in 1942: Stalingrad and Caucasian oil. USA used to be the largest *exporter* of oil: by the "oil crisis" in 1973, it was still largely self-sufficient; today it *imports* about half of its consumption and only very high oil prices would make its reserves of tar sand and oil shale worth exploiting. For a long time, USA has managed to keep the oil pricing in dollars, thus being able to get what it wanted by printing more of these, but some states rebelled during the past decade and went over to euro or barter trade. Iraq was invaded and returned to the dollar: Libya was threatened with a new round of terror bombardment, but saved itself donating billions of dollars to Lockerbie victims despite the lack of proof that it was involved (thus isolating USA by convincing the Europeans that there was no valid *casus belli*); Venezuela suffered an attempt at coup d'état (quickly defeated by mass protests however); and Iran has heard increasingly loud military threats for years. There are recent rumours (officially denied by them) that Saudi Arabia, Russia and others have discussed leaving the dollar; if so, this would be a major catastrophe for the US economy and everybody else might fear that USA would seize by force the oil it could not afford to buy at the market, whether by occupation or by closing oil lanes so as to exclude competing buyers.

Since control of oil and gas resources or pipelines for them is not a legal war aim, in spite of being a part of the current US security doctrine, it will not be mentioned in proclamations of them, perhaps not even in secret meetings that are nevertheless recorded and will eventually be declassified. It may nevertheless seem obvious to observers.

What about the concrete case of Afghanistan and US war aims there?

Revenge is in all likelihood as powerful a motive as ever, even if it usually seen as irrational in strategic theory. The immediate demand was to get it in judicial form on Osama bin Laden when extradited (in the words of President Bush, "bring him to justice or justice to him"); whether still alive or not, he has not been located. The wider aim, to destroy the network and infrastructure of Al Qaeda, which is presented as prevention ("war on terror", recently renamed "contingency operations") rather than revenge, is still on and has had considerable success, at least in Afghanistan, where all its bases were destroyed and it is now a very minor player compared to all the others, its numbers now estimated by senior US military to be somewhere between one hundred and a few hundred. An even wider target was – and remains – Taleban, although no credible evidence has been publicly presented to the effect that the Afghanistan government was an accomplice in the September 11 attack in any other way than having provided Al Qaeda with locations.

Military geopolitics is high on the US agenda, at least if we make the bold assumption (in spite of many historical counter-examples) that results of victory reflect pre-war aims. The number of the bases referred to above now exceeds. In Afghanistan, USA quickly took over the

old major Soviet air base Bagram, which it has greatly expanded in addition to establishing several dozen more. Bases were also established in neighbouring ex-Soviet republics, although some had to be closed down again when governments found them too risky, since they also threatened Russia and China.

Natural resources are not lacking in Afghanistan in spite of its abject poverty: coal, oil, gold, silver, minerals and potential oil resources in the north (Statesman's Yearbook 1990/91). During thirty years of war, however, little of these resources have been exploited. The greatest attention has been given to the repeated *pipeline* attempts mentioned above, and the pattern of stationing of OEF troops suggests that they still have high priority. They should be seen in a wider context. Some 60 per cent of the world's proven resources of oil and gas are located in the Middle East and Central Asia, where Afghanistan forms an important link. Central Asian states might sell their fossil fuels to USA rather than China, at least if they are made politically dependent, and an Afghanistan pipeline would make the sales independent of pipelines in Russia. For India, the preferred choice has been a pipeline from Iran, but if Pakistan continues to procrastinate on this while cooperating with the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan project, India could be made more dependent on USA. And so forth.

Idealistic motives, finally, have been prominent in justifications of the war, both in USA and its followers, and seem to have had their role in affecting public opinion. USA has a strong tradition of moralizing in the public debate on foreign policy (whatever the secret councils); and in Europe and elsewhere they have a better effect on public opinion than stating openly that one takes part in the war to please USA or to avoid threats from it. Because of their important position in the public discourse, these proclaimed motives have to be taken seriously and their effects must be analysed.

Democracy has often been mentioned, sometimes under the name *regime change*, but rarely as a primary purpose in official proclamations at the beginning of wars, since regime change *per se* is not a legitimate war aim under international law. Since 1945, there has been more than a score of attempts at introducing democracy by military intervention; the last two that were clearly successful were Japan and (West) Germany immediately after their defeat in 1945. Those cases had several advantages that are entirely missing in, e.g., Iraq and Afghanistan. There were previous democratic traditions that had just been interrupted by a decade of dictatorship; the countries were ethnically homogeneous; there was a functioning state apparatus that had survived the war; and there was a capitulation that definitely ended the war and handed this apparatus over to the victor, who could then use it after some cleansing of war criminals, etc.

The *position of women* was extremely restricted under Taleban (and not much better in the areas under the warlords). Some progress was reported in the first years after 2001, but now seems to have been reversed, as seen in the acts of legislation signed by president Karzai. 28 per cent of the parliament members are women; this is almost as high as it was in the Soviet republics, and seems to be equally dictated from above, rather than the result of a democratic political process or an indication that women have some influence. How little they have is

testified by the former MP Malalai Joya (2009), who was kicked out of parliament because of her criticizing the corruption and the war crimes of the warlord MPs and ministers.

Development is often mentioned, sometimes under the ambiguous term *reconstruction*. At least three quarters of the total expenditures of the ISAF states, however, are military, and much of the civilian parts disappear due to corruption in Afghanistan or to enormous overpricing by contractors in USA and elsewhere. The Corruption Perception Index of Transparency International for 2009 puts Afghanistan as number 179 out of 180 states, lower than ever (and Iraq as 176 - occupation tends to corrupt). In one area, there has been clear success however: attendance to *primary school* is much higher than before and also includes many girls.

Human rights are also frequently mentioned. The problem with this is the impunity of the warlords Joya attacked. Even more telling are the repeated protests from president Karzai (and from his colleague in Pakistan) against USA/NATO forces indiscriminately killing civilians and even targeting them; when eight school children were executed on 26 December, he demanded that the perpetrators should be brought before an Afghan court (<http://www.jungewelt.de/2010/01-02/043.php>).

In his recent West Point speech on 1 December 2009, president Obama (2009a) in a way went back to Square One, declaring that the first and foremost task for the present and the new US troops is to combat terrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan, development being the only one of the above idealistic motives that was even briefly referred to. This may have two sides. On one hand, it may convince Americans who are scared and/or revengeful of terrorism but in increasing doubt as to whether the other motivations can justify the rising costs in dollars and casualties. On the other hand, it lets down allied governments, whose populations are less scared and have nothing to revenge, and who therefore depend more on idealistic motivations to justify their war participation before increasingly sceptic constituencies.

War for the sake of the war?

The war aims mentioned above usually do not immediately exclude each other. Some are presented in an attempt to gain international legitimacy, others to recruit allies or to achieve domestic support. Common to all of them is that they present something that is to be achieved - or can only be achieved - by *winning* the war.

Other explanations rather focus on what the state or some sub-state actor can gain by *having* a war. In his farewell speech in 1961, President Eisenhower warned of a Military-Industrial Complex, MIC; later authors have widened this to MIMAC: Military-Industrial-Media-Academic Complex. One advantage to MIMAC that has frequently been referred to is that wars legitimize higher military expenditures, which means more orders and increased profits. Another is that having a war now and then allows new weapon systems, tactics, and so forth to be tested under realistic conditions.

If we go up to the state level, there is also the hypothesis that the point of having a war, at least for a superpower candidate is *to have a war*. The argument is based on a combination of even more general theory and a number of empirical observations. The underlying theory contains the frequent postulate that states act so as to maximize *power*, or at the very least (and as an even stronger motive) to *defend their relative power positions against decline*. Another assumption is taken from Riker (1965): when a grand coalition that was necessary to win (according to the rules for winning) in a major conflict has indeed won, it tends to dissolve soon, because what is a *minimum winning coalition* has now become smaller and there is no reason to share the spoils of winning with extra members. This is what happened after the Napoleonic wars, the Crimean war, the world wars, etc. – and what should be expected to happen after the Cold War was won around 1990.

The first postulate means that USA is expected to maximize power, or at least to defend its superpower status. There are, however, several dimensions of power. *Military power* is the ability to make an adversary submit by physically destroying his resources and people. *Economic* or more generally *remunerative power* is the ability to control – positively or negatively – the resources available to another state and to achieve obedience in that way. *Normative power* is manifested by others obeying because they think that the demand is just, or at least that the powerful state has a right to make it. *Informative power* consists in affecting the access other decision makers have to information on which to base their decisions.

If we look concretely at the development of the position of USA since 1945, it has been quite different depending on what power dimension we consider. *Militarily*, it started as the strongest superpower by far, eventually got some competition from the Soviet Union, and is now again an uncontested Number One, at least if we go by military expenditures, greater than the rest of the world taken together. President Obama's budget proposal for 2010 freezes all expenses *except for* the military, which get more than at any time after World War II even when we take inflation into account.

The *economic* picture is quite different: USA has gone down from producing half to producing one fifth of the goods and services in the world; from being the greatest trading nation to becoming the third exporter after Germany and China; from being by far the biggest creditor in the world to being by far its biggest debtor (and the debt accelerates). Its *normative* position has gone from being able to mobilise two thirds majorities in the UN General Assembly to being totally, or almost totally isolated there (together with Israel) in several votes. The dominant position of US mass media is getting increasing competition in Europe, the Middle East and elsewhere.

This means that it did not matter much in 1945 how the different power dimensions were weighted together: USA was at the top of all of them. Today, however, it matters very much: if we weight military power very heavily, USA is the sole superpower and mightier than ever. If we rather give that weight to economic power instead, USA can at the very most claim to be *primus inter pares*, already smaller than the EU and with the prospect that China and India are

also bigger economies before 2050 if present trends continue. The irony of it is that the more USA spends on wars and the military, the more it undermines its economic power. President Obama (2009a) stated that the combined costs for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars have now exceeded one trillion dollars. Nobel laureate, Joseph Stiglitz (2008) added predictable future costs (veteran pensions, etc.), government costs on other budgets than the military ("emergency funds", etc.) and reached 3 trillion. If macro-economic costs, like interests on the loans to finance the war, are included, we get 4.5 trillion or (with Afghanistan added) 7 trillion, contributing significantly to the present economic mega crisis.

It is therefore crucial for the superpower status of USA that others agree to regard military power as the heaviest dimension, and increasingly so; yet this is a matter of perception and may change quickly, and the superpower status is then lost. Hence the needs for finding a new enemy after the collapse of the Soviet Union, for strengthening the military aspects of the global system, and for an occasional war to try to demonstrate the need for military clout.

It has been said that it is only the presence of another superpower that permits a great power to mobilise resources and allies enough to act as a superpower itself. Alternative enemy images have been seen in public discourse, but all had their problems: Russia (but it was not strong enough, except for its nuclear deterrent); Japan (but it is an ally); China (but it could sink the dollar overnight); Islam(ism) (but several Moslem states are allies and have lots of oil); or the Huntington (1996) formula: "the rest against the West". "War on terror" then became the winning formula, even though non-state terrorism is a relatively minor phenomenon in quantitative terms. It is of the magnitude of about one per cent whether compared with wars, genocides and other forms of state terrorism, or with all murders in the world. The formula is also weakening: since 2007, Russia and China are mentioned as "countries of concern" together with North Korea and Iran in official publications, whether under Bush or Obama.

NATO (plus some multi- or bilateral alliances in other parts of the world) is indispensable to USA because of its predominantly military character, which gives USA a dominance, it could not achieve in most other types of organisation (for instance, its veto power in the IMF was weakened when Asian states set up a fund of their own after their experiences of IMF mismanagement during the 1997 crisis). From the Riker (1965) perspective cited above, it is surprising that NATO has survived for so long after the end of the Cold War: as a coalition, it is unnecessarily big and vastly so, accounting for more than two thirds of global military expenditures (five sixths, if we add other US alliances). Three survival mechanisms have been attempted: politicization, enlargement, out-of-area operations.

Politicization of NATO appeared as a concept immediately after the Cold War; it quickly disappeared when the Europeans discovered that this meant more US influence in their affairs without more influence for them in US affairs.

Enlargement was initially prevented by the promise to Gorbachov by Western leaders that NATO would *not* expand where the Soviet Union pulled out; that promise lost any value a few

years later, when president Clinton needed the ethnic vote and started talking about Polish membership. Enlargement was then eagerly pursued, eventually almost doubling the number of members; but it now seems close to an end. Sweden and Finland may or may not join, and the main remaining candidates in the south (GUAM: Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova) all have ethnic conflicts at home and/or disputed boundaries that (at least traditionally) would exclude NATO membership.

Out-of-area operations were only hypothetically talked about when NATO was still a defensive organisation by its statutes. The first such operation was the attack on Yugoslavia in March 1999, demonstrating that USA did not stand alone in ignoring the UN. This violation of the statutes was dealt with a couple of weeks later by defining a new strategic concept at the 50th anniversary of NATO. It was probably also the *last* such NATO operation: the attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq were organised differently, presumably for the reasons mentioned above, and other military interventions (Somalia, Yemen, Colombia, the Philippines, etc.) are carried out without any reference to NATO, and predominantly as secretly as possible.

It is against this background that the notion of “war for the sake of war” should be seen: war serves to upgrade the military dimension (“there you see – it is military power that really counts”), disciplining allies (the classical formula being “this is a test of the credibility of NATO”) and frightening others by demonstrating that USA (like previous super powers) does not feel too restrained by international law when attacking. *Fighting* a war is thus a means to defend superpower status; *winning* it, or at least looking like that, is a welcome bonus. Some empirical support for the notion can be found in the fact that the wars on Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq were all decided in advance: several months *before* the two rounds in Rambouillet, several weeks *before* the 9/11 attack and almost a year *before* the UNSC debate in February 2003. The events were then used to try to legitimize the planned attack; if its target counteracted this by making concessions, the demands were escalated so as to be certainly unacceptable to it.

This process also has its problems however. Even when the war is defined as “won” (for instance in Bosnia or Kosovo); the victor becomes a hostage, since the solution imposed will not survive his military presence (unless the hostage role is taken over from NATO by EU). And when the war is not won and the resistance is still active, pulling out becomes very difficult and takes long time, as seen, for instance, in Indochina (France and later USA), Algeria (France), Afghanistan (Soviet Union and now USA) and Iraq (USA – all the others have left). Barack Obama is not the first US president to inherit an unwinnable war; so did Eisenhower in Korea and Johnson, followed by Nixon, in Vietnam; but he is the first to inherit two unwinnable wars – and in addition an economic mega crisis. Also, it was Democratic presidents who failed to pull out and Republican presidents who – at the end of the day – succeeded in doing so. The war in Afghanistan (and that in Iraq) may therefore be expected to last for a long time, and it may take a Republican president to end them.

Another problem concerns decreasing *discipline*. There were no NATO dissenters to its bombing of Republika Srpska in Bosnia in 1995, or to that of Yugoslavia in 1999, even though some members did not contribute. The war on Afghanistan in 2001 was not initially a NATO operation, so there it became a matter of counting volunteers (“willing”) rather than dissenters. The coming war on Iraq in 2003, finally, clearly split NATO, when France and Germany added themselves to China and Russia in making it clear that they would *not* support any Security Council resolution to legitimize it. This may be a contributing explanation why later military interventions have been kept non-NATO, relatively low-key and relatively secret.

Concluding comments

This article has aimed at reflecting how different the Afghanistan war may look, depending on what you compare it with. From Afghanistan point of view the war fits into an old pattern, even if it has been longer than normal, with the difference that the British, Russian and Soviet empires used to invade without dragging in satellites, whereas the American empire has dragged in a vast collection.

From American point of view, it fits into a very old pattern of seeing itself as fighting Evil, but also a post-World War II pattern of dragging in satellites in various ways. It has now passed Iraq and competes with Vietnam about being the longest war that USA has fought. It has become extremely expensive and the first one to be financed entirely by deficit spending. How long it – and the Iraq war - will last therefore depends on the patience of US tax payers, the international creditors and the nations providing troops. The present promises that both these wars will be over in 2011 seem to be based on a combination of a realistic assessment of this patience and wishful thinking.

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