



UN Still Calls the Shots in Afghanistan

I recently had occasion to employ the “Ask a Question” technique as a way to get an acquaintance to do some serious thinking. The individual I am referring to is college-educated and friendly. He gives an impression of being concerned about what is happening to our country but, like so many other Americans, he trusts that everything will be fine in a short while.

My question went something like this: “Are you aware that our military forces in Afghanistan have served under various UN commands and that our country cannot pull out after 19 years of effort in this struggle until the UN gives its permission?”

He responded immediately: “What are you talking about? You’ve got to be kidding.” To which I answered, “No, I’m deadly serious. So give a listen to what I’m about to say — if you’re willing to hear it.” He gave me a green light.

I started with a few facts about the history of NATO, including it being a UN subsidiary labeled a “Regional Arrangement” created under Articles 51-54 of the UN Charter. Launched in 1949 as a UN subdivision and with America’s membership approved by the U.S. Senate, it began life with the U.S., Canada, and 14 European nations as founding members. Sold to all participants as a way to oppose further Soviet expansion westward, it has approximately doubled its membership over the years. One of its founding requirements says that an attack on any of its member nations shall be considered an attack on all.

Like the UN itself, NATO has a charter, but its founding document has only 16 brief articles. (The UN Charter, launched in 1945, has 111 articles.) NATO’s far fewer articles mentions the UN six times. The UN Charter from which NATO derives its existence allows creation of “Regional Arrangements.” Article 53 says that “no enforcement action shall be taken by regional agencies without authorization of the [United Nations] Security Council.” It further requires that “the Security Council shall at all times be kept fully informed of activities undertaken or in contemplation under regional arrangements.” There can be no question about the UN being NATO’s boss.

In 1950, a mere year after the creation of NATO, Communist North Korea invaded non-Communist South Korea. Citing U.S. membership in NATO, President Truman committed America’s military forces to defend South Korea. He relied on U.S. membership in the UN to send our nation into war without the Constitution’s requirement for a formal congressional declaration of war. UN oversight existed throughout the Korean struggle — which our forces were not permitted to win. The Korean War turned out to be the first war ever fought by American forces that did not result in a U.S. victory.



Written by [John F. McManus](#) on July 31, 2020

About the ongoing struggle in Afghanistan, U.S. involvement in the beleaguered country began almost immediately after the attack on New York's Twin Towers in 2001. In 2004, NATO became the officially declared overseer of the action. That placed the effort under unquestionable, but generally unacknowledged, UN control. More than 2,000 Americans have paid the ultimate price in Afghanistan, and many more have been wounded. From the originally stated goal of seeking out and punishing those responsible for the 9/11 attack, the mission has become a hit-and-miss war to protect a succession of Afghan governments from the country's militant Muslim movement known as the Taliban. The effort has been a failure, and many Americans — and others — have paid the ultimate price.

In January 2015, NATO backed away from command of the Afghanistan operation, but far from completely. The UN launched the Resolute Support Mission (RSM) described in a NATO press release as a new arrangement in which the "NATO-Afghanistan Enduring Partnership provides a framework for wider political dialogue and practical cooperation." The release stressed that "Afghans assumed full responsibility for security of their country." Unfortunately, this does not mean that the United States is free of entanglement. NATO is already using its RSM to "train, advise and assist Afghan security forces and institutions." RSM retains a military force of 17,000 troops from 39 NATO countries. The bulk of the personnel and finances to accomplish this new way of maintaining UN presence in Afghanistan comes from the United States.

There is little question that America's military could quickly defeat the Taliban if given a proper order to do so. But such an order would, under existing agreements, have to come from NATO, or the RSM, or whatever new organization is created by the UN. And NATO remains a child of its United Nations parent, while the U.S. Constitution gets ignored. At this point, my acquaintance admitted that he knew little about what I had just stated. But I wasn't finished, and I asked him if he would hear my recommendations for addressing the problem. He nodded agreement to listen further.

"Here are three steps America should take," I said. "First, withdraw from the United Nations and from its NATO subsidiary. Second, bring our forces home from Afghanistan. And third, cease electing government officials who don't obey the U.S. Constitution they have formally pledged to honor — including never going to war without a congressional declaration that would mean victory is the goal." For frosting on the cake I had just created, I cited George Washington's sage warning against "entangling alliances" and John Quincy Adams' sound proclamation that it was never America's role to search the Earth "seeking monsters to destroy." I ended my discourse stating how wonderful it would be to hear a president copy those attitudes.

My acquaintance admitted he had some studying to do. I happily offered my help.

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