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[www.afgazad.com](http://www.afgazad.com)

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## Afghanistan overdoses on military bases

By Nick Turse

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The size of Afghanistan, at 652,230 square kilometers, makes it slightly larger than the fledging nation of South Sudan, just smaller than the US state of Texas. The latter holds 203 military bases within its borders. That's high for a US state, but nothing compared with Afghanistan.

New figures provided by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) joint command suggest that Afghanistan is one of the most heavily garrisoned nations on the planet. Given its size and population, it is likely the most thoroughly militarized country in the world.

Recently, TomDispatch.com revealed there are approximately 550 ISAF combat outposts (COPs), forward operating bases (FOBs) and patrol bases in Afghanistan. Added to this are 200 more ISAF checkpoints. And when you count various logistical, administrative, and support facilities - such as ammunition storage facilities, barracks, equipment depots and training centers - the grand total of all foreign military installations, according to a military spokesman, tops out at around 1,500.

That, however, is only about one third of the story.

According to ISAF, military posts manned by the Afghan National Security Forces dwarf the number of ISAF outposts in the country. Counting COPs, FOBs, patrol bases, checkpoints and other types of logistics and support facilities, the total number of Afghan bases currently sits at about 2,700. Essentially, a country the size of Texas is home to 4,200 military installations, foreign and domestic.

All of this means that Afghanistan, the 41st largest nation in terms of area - with a population of around 30 million - is nearly as heavily garrisoned as the third-largest country, the United States, which is ten times more populous and has roughly 4,450 bases spread across 9.8 million square kilometers.

For many reasons, the value of such country-to-country comparisons is limited, not in the least due to the fact the United States government is not battling an insurgency within its borders. The number of Afghan bases does, however, call into serious question the efficacy of heavy military garrisoning.

Even with 4,200 bases set up to secure the country, along with close to 80,000 troops from the most technologically sophisticated and well-funded military on the planet (with assistance from 40,000 personnel from other powerful armies) and an allied indigenous force of around 350,000 soldiers and police, the Afghan War has dragged on for more than a decade. All that military might has been unable to decisively defeat a rag-tag, minority insurgency of limited popularity.

Military bases have clearly not been the answer to defeating Afghanistan's insurgents and yet, according to US military contracting documents examined by Asia Times Online, plans continue for constructing, expanding, and upgrading bases for the foreseeable future.

Documents released last month point to a massive building boom, including plans to construct:

A base for Afghan troops in Kabul Province,

New facilities for the ANA's 3rd Brigade, 215th Corps at Camp Shorabak in Helmand Province,

Barracks, warehouses and administration facilities for the ANA's 203rd Corps in Paktiya province, New infrastructure at ANA training centers at Camp Shorabak in Helmand Province and a Regional Military Training Center at Gamberi, Laghman Province, Multiple border police stations west of Kabul, An ANA garrison in Parwan Province, New ANA facilities at Camp Hero in Kandahar Province, and An unspecified number of refueling and rearming sites for the Afghan Air Force in Ghazni Province, among other projects.

There appears to be no end to the construction boom in Afghanistan but the reasons why are vague, at best. If the current inventory of 4,200 military installations isn't enough to pacify the country, one wonders just how many outposts ISAF and the Afghan security forces believe it will take to build their way to victory.