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The U.S.-led NATO occupation has formally ended its 13-year combat mission in Afghanistan. The move leaves Afghan forces in charge of security, though more than 17,000 foreign troops will remain. This includes more than 10,000 U.S. troops, who will continue to see a combat role despite the nominal change. Last month, President Obama secretly extended the U.S. role in Afghanistan to ensure American troops will have a direct role in fighting, along with jets, bombers and drones. The transition follows the deadliest year in Afghanistan since 2001. According to the United Nations, almost 3,200 Afghan civilians have been killed. More than 5,000 members of the Afghan security forces have also died, the highest toll in 13 years of fighting with the Taliban. We are joined by two guests: Kathy Kelly, co-coordinator of Voices for Creative Nonviolence, a campaign to end U.S. military and economic warfare; and Matthieu Aikins, a Kabul-based journalist whose recent report for Rolling Stone magazine is "Afghanistan: The Making of a Narco State."

AMY GOODMAN: The U.S.-led coalition in Afghanistan officially concluded its combat mission on Sunday, 13 years after it started in 2001, ending the longest war in U.S. history. The commander of the International Security Assistance Force, or ISAF, General John Campbell, announced the end of formal combat operations.

GEN. JOHN CAMPBELL: Today marks the end of an era and the beginning of a new one. Today NATO completes its combat mission, a 13-year endeavor filled with significant achievements and branded by tremendous sacrifice, especially by the thousands of coalition and Afghan army and police wounded and fallen who gave so much to build a better future for this war-torn land.

AMY GOODMAN: But the war is not over. The Obama administration said earlier this month it would leave a residual U.S. force of about 11,000 troops in Afghanistan for at least the first months of 2015 to assist Afghan security forces under the mission known as Resolute Support. And last month President Obama secretly extended the U.S. role in Afghanistan. According to *The New York Times*, he signed a classified order that ensures American troops will have a direct role in fighting. The order reportedly enables American jets, bombers and drones to bolster Afghan troops on combat missions. Under certain circumstances, it would apparently authorize U.S. airstrikes to support Afghan military operations throughout the country. Afghanistan's new president, Ashraf Ghani, who took office in September, has also backed an expanded U.S. military role.

This comes as 2014 marked the deadliest in Afghanistan since 2001. The United Nations reports nearly 3,200 Afghan civilians were killed in the intensifying war with the Taliban, a 20 percent rise from 2013. The national army and police also suffered record losses this year, with more than 4,600 killed.

For more, we're joined by two guests. Kathy Kelly is with us in studio, co-coordinator of Voices for Creative Nonviolence, a campaign to end U.S. military and economic warfare. She returned from Kabul last month and is heading soon to prison over a drone protest in Missouri. She recently wrote an [article](#) headlined "Obama Extends War in Afghanistan: The implications for U.S. democracy aren't reassuring."

And Matt Aikins also joins us, a journalist based in Kabul. He's joining us from Halifax, Nova Scotia, in Canada. Aikins is currently a Schell fellow at The Nation Institute. His recent [report](#) for *Rolling Stone* magazine is headlined "Afghanistan: The Making of a Narco State."

We welcome you both to *Democracy Now!* Kathy Kelly, you were just in Afghanistan. What is the significance of saying the formal war is over, but in fact the formal war continues with U.S. troops fighting?

KATHY KELLY: Well, I think the United States doesn't want to acknowledge that what went on over the last 13 years, at a cost of \$1 trillion, has been not only a defeat, but, as one British commentator said, also a disgrace. I mean, the extent of spending, \$80 billion under the Obama administration, that fueled corruption, that did not improve the lives of people in Afghanistan in any measurable way, ought never, ever to be held up as some kind of a success story. But I think the United States wants to walk away from responsibilities within Afghanistan, certainly doesn't talk about paying reparations.

AMY GOODMAN: Matt Aikins, talk about officially what this means. You have lived in Afghanistan for a long time covering it. How is this seen in Afghanistan?

MATTHIEU AIKINS: Well, the scene in Afghanistan really isn't going to change today. The war continues, by any measure. You have 11,000 U.S. troops with new combat authorities. You

have rising levels of violence. You have the highest-ever casualties both for Afghan security forces and civilians. So in no sense but the semantic can this war be said to be over. And if we have the end of—the formal end of a war, that means the beginning of an informal war, which is troubling indeed, as Kathy says.

AMY GOODMAN: On Thursday, President Obama addressed troops gathered for Christmas dinner at a Marine Corps base in Hawaii. He spoke about the end of the U.S. combat mission in Afghanistan.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA: We have been in continuous war now for almost 13 years, over 13 years. And next week, we will be ending our combat mission in Afghanistan. Obviously, because of the extraordinary service of the men and women in the American armed forces, Afghanistan has a chance to rebuild its own country. We are safer. It's not going to be a source of terrorist attacks again. And we still have some very difficult missions around the world, including in Iraq. We still have folks in Afghanistan helping Afghan security forces.

AMY GOODMAN: The outgoing defense secretary, Chuck Hagel, spoke earlier this month, talking about the United States keeping an additional 1,000 troops in Afghanistan on top of the nearly 10,000 already committed to remain beyond this year. He announced the move during a visit to Afghanistan.

DEFENSE SECRETARY CHUCK HAGEL: President Obama has provided U.S. military commanders the flexibility, the flexibility to manage any temporary force shortfalls that we might experience for a few months, as we allow for coalition troops to arrive in theater. This will mean a delayed withdrawal of up to 1,000 U.S. troops, so that up to 10,800 troops, rather than 9,800, could remain in Afghanistan through the end of this year and for the first few months next year.

AMY GOODMAN: Hagel said the change is temporary and won't change the long-term timeline for withdrawing troops. The announcement came amidst a surge in Taliban attacks over the past several months. And the new president of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani, Kathy Kelly, has lifted former President Karzai's ban on night raids. The significance of this?

KATHY KELLY: Well, using the night raids, which is their means of surprising the Taliban by bursting into homes at 3:30 in the morning, by arresting people, possibly disappearing them over a period of months or possibly longer, is a despised tactic. It's a way, many say, to recruit more people to either tolerate or support the Taliban.

But the decision on the part of Ashraf Ghani shows a willingness to continue cooperating with the corruption of the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan. He, I think, has tried to make some changes, for instance, in going after corrupt figures within the Kabul Bank, but why is he so reluctant to disobey any orders from the United States or disobey the desires of the United States? Well, I think we see that even Britain now is saying that they had seen themselves as being in a subordinate roll to the United States and now look back with a great deal of remorse on the disgrace that the war has brought on Britain.

AMY GOODMAN: Matt Aikins, what has been the result of this war? We won't say "with its end," but at this sort of point, 13 years in, what has been the effect on Afghanistan?

MATTHIEU AIKINS: Well, getting back to the last point about President Ghani's cooperation with the U.S. military, one of the results has been an extremely dependent state, perhaps the most aid-dependent large state in history. And so, the Afghan government can't possibly pay for its budget expenditures. It can't pay for the overlarge army and police force that we've created for it. It's billions of dollars in excess of its revenues. So, there really is no choice—I think President Ghani recognizes that—but to cooperate with the U.S. military, because the government would collapse very swiftly if international support were withdrawn.

On a number of other indicators, you have mixed results. In the cities, in places like Kabul, there's been significant development. Education has been a success story. But if you travel outside of the capital, which [inaudible] increasingly do because of the rising insecurity, you'll find that there's things like child malnutrition, food insecurity, growing opium production, which we'll talk about in a minute, I guess, and just an increased level of violence and insecurity that paints a very stark divide between the urban and rural parts of the country.

AMY GOODMAN: And what about women's rights, Matt?

MATTHIEU AIKINS: Well, women's rights have made a lot of gains in urban areas, places like

Kabul, especially symbolic ones. But the fact of the matter is, is that in rural areas, particularly ones afflicted by insecurity in the south, there hasn't been a lot of change. And in any case, this change isn't going to come at the barrel of a gun. It's not going to come in conditions of insecurity.

The question now is whether the gains that have been made in urban areas are going to be rolled back, if there's going to be—not just for women's rights, but for things like free speech, for things like the rule of law, corruption, human rights abuses by the Afghan security forces, whether these are going to be areas where we're going to see, you know, a retreat in progress, especially as the mission there becomes one that's primarily focused on counterterrorism and military goals. So there needs to be pressure, not just from the administration, but from all voices in Afghanistan, to make sure that those hard-fought gains, gains that were hard-fought not just by the internationals, but mostly by the Afghan people themselves, aren't lost.

AMY GOODMAN: The significance of the Pakistani military and the role it plays now in Afghanistan? After the Army Public School massacre by the Taliban earlier this month in Peshawar, the Pakistani prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, pledged solidarity with his Afghan neighbor in fighting terrorism. The attack in Peshawar killed 152 people, including 133 children.

PRIME MINISTER NAWAZ SHARIF: [translated] Pakistan will not tolerate these militant elements on its territory. If our territory is used for any activities against Afghanistan, we will deal with it very strongly, and we'll take tough action against those elements. In the same way, if anything like this happens on the Afghan side, they will also deal with it in a strong manner. After General Raheel's visit to Kabul, they have carried out an operation in the region.

AMY GOODMAN: Matt Aikins, if you can talk about the effect—what's going to happen with the Pakistani military's relationship in Afghanistan with the military and with the Taliban?

MATTHIEU AIKINS: Well, you have to remember that we've seen this kind of rhetoric from the government before after similar shocking incidents. There was an attack in 2011 against the Pakistani naval base in Karachi by the Taliban, attack against the general headquarters in 2009. There was the whole incident of the Lal Masjid siege in 2007, the assassination of Benazir Bhutto. And after, you know, each one of these sort of watershed so-called moments, you've seen the same kind of rhetoric, that there's no more—there's going to be no more

distinction between good and bad Taliban, we're going to go after their sanctuaries in the tribal areas, we're not going to support militants in Afghanistan.

But the fact of the matter is, is that the relationship, the complex relationship, between the Pakistani state and various militant groups are tied to much deeper strategic and structural interests of the military, of Pakistan's central government. So, it remains to be seen whether this actually represents some sort of fundamental shift. And certainly, one incident isn't going to—isn't going to solve it. There's been plenty of massacres in Pakistan of children, of innocents. And this is not going to change their calculations all of a sudden.

Peace Activist Kathy Kelly Heads to Prison for Protesting U.S. Drone War

Peace activist Kathy Kelly is about to begin a three-month prison sentence for protesting the U.S. drone war at a military base in Missouri earlier this year. Kelly, along with another activist, was arrested after offering bread and an indictment against drone warfare. Kelly is the co-coordinator of Voices for Creative Nonviolence, a campaign to end U.S. military and economic warfare.

AMY GOODMAN: Kathy Kelly, in addition to U.S. troops staying, 11,000 troops staying, and participating not only in Operation Resolute Support, but fighting themselves directly, they'll be supported by bombers, drones. You participated in a drone strike, and you're headed home to Chicago, then to prison. Talk about this drone strike and why you chose to get arrested.

KATHY KELLY: Well, I think it's a good time to be very uncompromising with regard to the United States' wars. These wars are murderous. The wars are killing civilians, as has been happening in the United States' wars since World War II. Now 90 percent of the people killed in wars are civilians. And this is true certainly with the drone strikes. The Reprieve organization has said that for every one person who is selected as a target for assassination, 28 civilians are

killed. And even just three nights ago, there was another targeted assassination in which they hit two homes in the Logar province, and six people were wounded, four people were killed, all of them civilians.

And so, I crossed a line at Whiteman Air Force Base. A squadron operates weaponized drones over Afghanistan. Afghanistan has been an epicenter of drone warfare. And a good symbol for people in Afghanistan is breaking bread. I carried a loaf of bread and a letter, wanting to talk to the commandant. We thought it was important to know how many people were killed by Whiteman Air Force Base on that day.

AMY GOODMAN: Where is Whiteman?

KATHY KELLY: That's in Knob Noster, Missouri.

AMY GOODMAN: And what's its relationship with Afghanistan?

KATHY KELLY: Well, the weaponized drones are flown—once they're airborne, they're operated entirely by people in United States Air National Guard bases and air bases. And so, Whiteman Air Force Base won't disclose, neither will the CIA disclose, information about the results of these killings, but this is what people in the United States need to know. We have a First Amendment right to seek redress of grievance. And having been in Afghanistan, living with young people who are too frightened to go back to visit their own relatives, who see for themselves a future that could be a prolonged, exacerbated warfare, there is a grievance, and we wanted to bring that to the commandant at that particular base.

AMY GOODMAN: I said you participated in a strike; I meant to say in a drone protest. So, exactly what was the action you engaged in?

KATHY KELLY: Well, I think I stepped one or two steps over a line. And—

AMY GOODMAN: Holding a loaf of bread and an indictment?

KATHY KELLY: And so the military prosecutor said, "Your Honor, Ms. Kelly is in grave need, great need, of rehabilitation." But I think it's a—this is an important time to connect these oppressive issues. You know, while we're spending \$1 trillion on warfare in Afghanistan and looking at another \$120 billion that will be spent—the Pentagon wants \$57 billion for this year alone—we're squandering needed resources. We're undermining the possibility of solving extremely serious problems that we're moving into.

AMY GOODMAN: How long will you be going to prison for?

KATHY KELLY: Three months.

AMY GOODMAN: Where?

KATHY KELLY: Well, I don't know yet. The Bureau of Prisons will tell me where I'm to be put, probably at the end of January.

AMY GOODMAN: How many times have you gone to prison for protesting war?

KATHY KELLY: Well, this will be my third time in a federal—well, no, fourth time in a federal prison. And I've been jailed in various county jails and other kinds of lockups more times than I can count.

AMY GOODMAN: Kathy Kelly, I want to thank you very much for being with us—

KATHY KELLY: Thank you, Amy.

AMY GOODMAN: —co-coordinator of Voices for Creative Nonviolence, a campaign to end U.S. military and economic warfare, just returned from Kabul, Afghanistan. We'll link your recent [piece](#), "Obama Extends War in Afghanistan: The implications for U.S. democracy aren't reassuring." And, Matt Aikins, please stay with us. I want to talk about your latest [piece](#) looking at Afghanistan; the piece is "Afghanistan: The Making of a Narco State." Stay with us.