

## Afghanistan

20 years ago, the panic and vengeance that ensued from 9-11 took us into a very misguided invasion of Afghanistan that was totally devoid of any real strategy. Turning Osama bin Laden into a martyr only strengthened Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. We spent the next 20 years trying to clean up the mess left by the Soviet Union with much the same tactics and results; seemingly oblivious of the reasons why Afghanistan can't be conquered with military force. Mostly because of topography and environment, Afghanistan has never been a cohesive country. Much of the culture that evolved into the Mujahadim lived in villages in the river valleys separated by high ridges in the arid foothills of the Hindu Kush. It's a fierce environment and their culture can best be described as fierce.

The invasion by the Soviet Union killed or disabled most of the the adult males, destroyed millions of homes, and, since women weren't allowed to work outside the home and had no way to support their children, the millions of uneducated homeless orphans who only knew war are now the fighters of the Taliban.

Now we've come to a point of failure reminiscent of Saigon. Both wars have been very profitable cash cows for the world's military industrial complexes, corruption took a huge portion of the money, and the 'enemy' was an amorphous loose alliance of thousands of relatively independent tribes and villages that we consolidated and inspired with a common goal to repel the invaders. The biggest differences are that the Taliban are a much more barbaric culture than almost anything in Vietnam, the general economy was much more dependent on foreign aid, and famine is just around the corner. The post war results have been quite different.

For the last twenty years, we never paid much attention to the roots of the problem, which were the systemic ignorance of much of the Afghan people, in particular the Taliban, Afghanistan's rampant corruption, and looming climate change. Some things take time. Despite 20 years of incompetent policies, wasted efforts, wasted lives, and massive corruption [both ours and theirs], we were making slow but steady progress in bringing education back to Afghanistan, including some of the Taliban. We no longer had any combat troops involved, we hadn't lost a soldier in a year and a half, it was only a tiny percentage of our military budget, and while the Afghan army, dependent on our logistics, training, reconnaissance, weaponry, and close air support would never win a war with the Taliban, they were keeping them at bay while an increasingly educated population improved their ability to prosper. As cell phones and the internet became more widespread, at least a portion of the Taliban became more civilized. Instead of learning from our mistakes and continuing to help the Afghans fight the war against ignorance with very minimal investment, we pulled the rug out from under the Afghan army and threw it all away. We threw their women to the wolves, reopened Afghanistan as a base for terrorists, and gave the Russians and Chinese access to a trillion dollar untapped resource base. About the only thing we've done that's stupider than invading Afghanistan was getting out.

We could have hamstrung the Taliban any time we wanted to for the last 20 years. All we needed to do was take some A10s and burn the poppies; the Taliban's main source of income. Drug money for guns. That we didn't reeks of serious corruption, or maybe just gross stupidity, or, most likely, both. In conjunction with burning the poppies, we could have made selling weapons to terrorists a death penalty offense and enforced it. It's one of the worst forms of treason. No need for that now with the Taliban. We just gave them more weaponry than they know what to do with.

Over the last 20 years 85 percent of the worlds opium supply came from Afghanistan. Still does. Most of our opioid epidemic is still Afghan poppies, although it's been largely replaced with Chinese and Mexican fentanyl. It's American drug money that funds the Taliban and just about every other terrorist organization.

Looking ahead; after thousands of years of a multitude of relatively isolated tribes, Afghanistan is gradually integrating with the rest of the world. Our intrusion into their lives has been a mixed bag,

some good, some bad. In the face of corruption, ignorance, religious fanaticism, war's massive destruction of infrastructure, climate change, over population, and a long term dependence on foreign aid, Afghanistan is facing dire poverty and famine. Under the hard core Taliban, there's no music, no sports, no art, no cameras, no education, and the closest thing to sport is the self righteous stoning of women to death. Without a common goal to repel the invaders, we're seeing that a grossly ignorant and incompetent central government has no way of controlling the coming anarchy.