

# افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نپاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد  
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

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

[afgazad@gmail.com](mailto:afgazad@gmail.com)

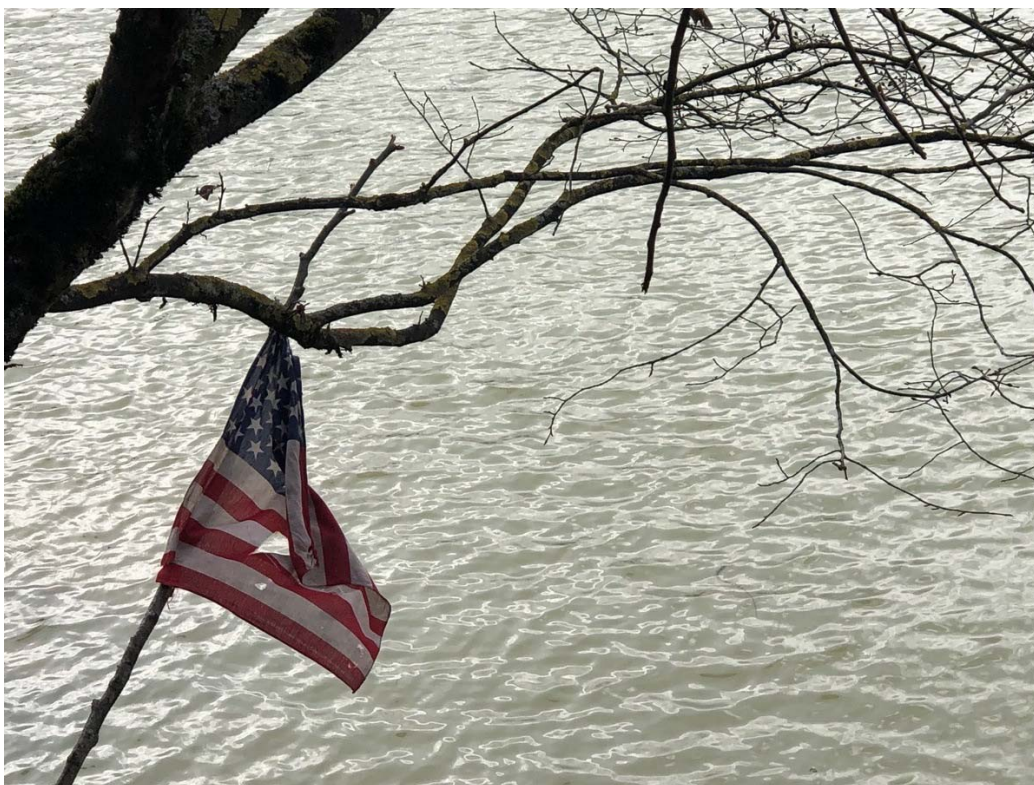
European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

BY MELVIN GOODMAN

04.03.2021

## *Biden's Quandary: Proxy Wars and Endless Wars*



Photograph by Nathaniel St. Clair

From the end of the Second World War until the administration of Ronald Reagan, there were very few American battlefield deaths in the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, and Southwest Asia. Since the administration of George H.W. Bush, however, most American battlefield deaths have taken place in those regions. The turning point took place in 1979 with the Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Last week, President Joe Biden punctuated his charge that “America is back” by authorizing a military strike along the Syrian-Iraqi border against two Iranian-backed militias and Iranian convoys of military equipment destined for delivery to Hezbollah forces in Syria and Lebanon. The military action, though modest and probably justifiable, demonstrates the unfortunate position the United States has put itself in. Such a tit-for-tat sequence of attacks is inevitable because we have stationed our military throughout the region, creating confrontations where none need exist. If President Biden cannot find a way to move beyond military and security policy in the greater Middle East, he will join the long list of recent presidents who have ignored our overly militarized presence in the region and have paid insufficient attention to diplomatic and economic initiatives.

Since the early 1980s, the United States has conducted a series of interventions and wars in the Middle East that have essentially evolved into one long war. The Reagan administration deployed Marines in Lebanon to pull Israeli chestnuts out of a fire that the Israeli government of Menachem Begin had lit. The tragic consequences that ensued included loss of life in the bombing of the U.S. embassy and the Marine barracks in Beirut. There was sufficient intelligence identifying the roles of Syria and Iran in the attacks, but the Reagan administration chose to walk away from Lebanon and create a distraction with the invasion of Grenada in the Caribbean.

George H.W. Bush is credited with fighting a successful war against Iraq in the 1990s (Desert Storm), although Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev had convinced Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein that he needed to withdraw his forces from Kuwait to prevent the U.S. use of force. It is rarely mentioned that this war could, and should, have been avoided. Instead, pundits and even historians praise the conduct of Desert Storm. Writing about the war, however, Bush himself recorded in his diary that “it hasn’t been a clean end.”

George W. Bush is responsible for the worst strategic decision in U.S. history with the invasion of Iraq in 2003, beginning the destabilization of the region that continues to this day and deepening the briar patch for U.S. policy. U.S. credibility has never recovered internationally from the political lies and the intelligence deceit leading up to the war. Bush’s initial decision to use force in Afghanistan in 2001 had been a major success, achieving the withdrawal of both the Taliban government and al Qaeda forces. Instead of turning over the keys to a new Afghan government and withdrawing U.S. forces, however, Bush expanded our presence to over 125,000 forces. He thus repeated the mistakes made by the Soviet Union in the 1980s.

Donald Trump's commitment to stop the endless wars in the Middle East was a major promise of his campaign for the presidency in 2016, and he made some steps in that direction. Nevertheless, small numbers of U.S. forces remain in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. Iran is a problem for U.S. interests, but not a genuine threat. Trump's bellicose advisers (e.g., Mike Pompeo, John Bolton) ensured that the Department of Defense and the Pentagon played a leading role in the Middle East. In terms of the militarization of national security policy, Trump and Secretary of State Pompeo even discussed the formation of an "Arab NATO."

Joe Biden professed a desire to limit the use of military power only to defend vital U.S. national security interests. Like too many previous presidents, however, he has resorted to force early in his administration, presumably to establish his national security bonafides. His decision to use force in the proxy war with Iran over Syria and Iraq could compromise the leading and perhaps only legitimate national security concern in the region—the renewal of the Iran nuclear accord, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Biden has brought back every major actor from the Obama administration who was responsible for negotiating the JCPOA in 2015. This list includes CIA Director William Burns, who was the initial point of contact with the Iranian government; White House environmental tsar John Kerry, who was the key negotiator as secretary of state; National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, who was Kerry's aide-de-camp in the negotiations; and Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, who was a key nuclear disarmament advisor to Kerry. Moreover, Biden has ignored the protests from the Israeli lobby and has named Robert Malley, a genuine progressive when it comes to U.S. policy toward the Middle East, to be the special emissary to Iran. All of the pieces are in place for a successful negotiation if "events" don't get in the way.

At the outset of his administration, Biden charged Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin with conducting a strategic review of the U.S. military footprint around the world. There are ample opportunities to reduce this footprint in view of the excessively large U.S. military installations in Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and Sudan. Military aid should also be examined in view of the outrageously large amounts of assistance that go to the authoritarian government in Egypt and the prosperous Israeli government, which should not be receiving any U.S. military assistance totally gratis.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken should be conducting a complementary assessment to find ways to disengage from the growing Sunni-Shia proxy wars throughout the greater Middle East. The move to limit arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates,

which are partly responsible for the humanitarian nightmare in the Yemen, is a good place to start. The Biden administration's decision to give the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman a pass despite his leading role in the horrific killing of Saudi dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi does not auger well for any significant change in U.S. policy toward the corrupt monarchies in the region.

Biden does not need a new grand strategy for the greater Middle East, but his national security position must go beyond "America is Back," and seek to balance retrenchment and assertiveness in support of global hegemony. Our bloated defense budgets and overextended deployments should be reexamined. We should be focusing on reducing spending, bases and troop deployments.

Our leading role in oil and natural gas production points to less dependence on Persian Gulf states, and our proclamations of promoting democracy in the Middle East are laughable. Afghanistan has never been strategically consequential, and our role in too many proxy wars can only compromise the pursuit of our one genuine strategic interest—the denuclearization in Iran.

If we truly want to be a global leader, our focus should be on climate change and public health—not the pursuit of monsters in the Middle East. In view of our obsession with nuclear weapons since Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we shouldn't permit proxy and endless wars to detract from making sure that Iran doesn't develop nuclear weapons.

*Melvin A. Goodman is a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy and a professor of government at Johns Hopkins University. A former CIA analyst, Goodman is the author of [Failure of Intelligence: The Decline and Fall of the CIA](#) and [National Insecurity: The Cost of American Militarism](#), and [A Whistleblower at the CIA](#). His most recent book is "American Carnage: The Wars of Donald Trump" (Opus Publishing), and he is the author of the forthcoming "The Dangerous National Security State" (2020)." Goodman is the national security columnist for [counterpunch.org](#).*

*CounterPunch 03.03.2021*