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## *Afghanistan: the Miserable Performance Of The Mainstream Media*



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America's 20-year misadventure in Afghanistan is finally over. The original purpose of our use of force, to destroy al-Qaeda after September 11, was legitimate. Our goal evolved, however, into a misguided, neocolonialist attempt to impose a Western form of government on a tribal society.

The editorial boards and oped writers of our mainstream media in discussing the war, continue to cite "enduring American faith in the values of freedom and democracy" as the underlying purpose of our effort. The *New York Times*, in fact, cited the "purity of U.S.

values” such as civil rights, religious tolerance, and women’s empowerment as a justification for our occupation of Afghanistan.

Although the U.S. press praises our benighted efforts at nation building, the Soviet Union actually built more hydroelectric dams, tunnels, and bridges in Afghanistan than the United States has. This includes the Friendship Bridge that provided an exit ramp for the Afghan military. Moscow also educated about 200,000 Afghan engineers, military officers, and administrators, which allowed the Najibullah government to hang on for several years in the wake of the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. The Ghani government didn’t last for 24 hours after our withdrawal.

The *Washington Post* and the *Wall Street Journal* supported a continuation of the war in order to prevent a renewed terrorist threat to the U.S. homeland and to maintain U.S. credibility in the international arena. Numerous articles have been devoted to the statements of foreign leaders questioning U.S. credibility as if the United States no longer outspends the entire global community on its military and intelligence agencies and remains the only nation in the world that can actually project military power to all corners of the globe.

Instead of debating how the United States began this fool’s errand twenty years ago, the mainstream media is highlighting the chaos that has enveloped our defeat, as if there is an elegant way to lose a war. Instead of assessing the decision making of the Bush and Obama administrations, which led to 130,000 U.S. combatants in Afghanistan, the media are castigating President Joe Biden. But it was Biden who warned Barack Obama 12 years ago not to listen to secretaries of defense Donald Rumsfeld and Robert Gates and not to get “boxed-in” by their Pentagon. It was Obama, not Biden, who campaigned in 2007-2008 on the basis of Afghanistan as the “good war.” Rumsfeld and Gates signed the deployment orders for many of the 800,000 troops who served in Afghanistan, in a war that neither of these men believed could be won. (A separate oped will discuss the career deceit of Bob Gates.)

The mainstream media still has not acknowledged that U.S. covert military operations in Afghanistan began in the Carter administration before the Soviets made their decision to invade. Jimmy Carter’s anti-Soviet national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, deployed clandestine teams from the Central Intelligence Agency to Afghanistan in order to draw the Soviets into the country. The immediate successors to Carter and Brzezinski then armed the anti-Soviet mujahideen forces who eventually formed the leadership of the anti-American Islamic forces that returned to Kabul after 25 years. In 1979, the media

carried the lies of Brzezinski and his successors, who argued that Moscow's invasion of Afghanistan was an aggressive move to gain influence in Southwest Asia and even a warm water port on the Indian Ocean. The fact that the Kremlin was trying to prevent the spillover of Islamic fundamentalism into the Central Asia republics was downplayed by government spokesmen, politicians, and pundits.

The Taliban victory in Kabul creates problems for its neighbors, particularly Russia, Iran, Pakistan and China, but the mainstream media are filled with editorials and opeds that trumpet America's geopolitical setback. The *New York Times* bemoans our loss of influence and credibility in Central Asia, as if we ever had or even needed a role there. A major *Times* editorial heralds the victory for China in Afghanistan, but China was actually a major beneficiary of the U.S. occupation because Beijing could pursue its Belt and Road initiative in Central Asia, rather than concerning itself with violence from Afghanistan.

Pakistan presumably will find that the Taliban victory in Kabul will increase the actions of Islamist forces in Pakistan, including the Pakistan Taliban that has close ties to the Afghan Taliban. Iran was secretly cooperating with the United States and the CIA against the Taliban prior to the 9/11 attacks, but President George W. Bush's attack on the so-called "axis of evil" in 2002 ended the opportunity for improved relations with Tehran. The "axis of evil" speech, by the way, was written by Bush's chief speechwriter Michael Gerson, who has been writing opeds for the Washington Post for the past 14 years supporting U.S. militarism. Gerson also drafted Bush's second inauguration speech that called for intervention and nation building to spread democracy in the Third World.

*Post* oped writers have been particularly aggressive over the past twenty years in supporting U.S. military adventurism in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as urging efforts to contain the influence of China and Russia. In addition to Gerson's aggressive writings, the *Post* sponsors David Ignatius, the leading apologist for the CIA; Max Boot, a Russian immigrant who is willing to risk war with Russia over Ukraine; and Josh Rogin, who supports military confrontation with China in Beijing's backyard. Marc Thiessen, who was Bush's chief speech writer in 2008, joined the *Post* in 2010 and regularly trumpets the so-called successes of the Trump administration in national security policy. He even castigated Obama for ending torture and abuse. Various *Post* oped writers support greater defense spending and even modernization of a nuclear establishment that has no utilitarian use. The *Post* supported the establishment of the Space Command, which is the military-industrial complex's new pet rock.

The Greek historian Thucydides wrote 2,500 years ago that wars were fought for a combination of honor, fear, and self-interest. But American presidents and their supporters in the media understand that their constituencies want to believe in high-minded values that deal with democracy and human rights as a justification for the use of force. Democracy and human rights had nothing to do with the losing wars fought in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan over the past 50 years, but the press continues to do the bidding of the government.

Most of what is available in the media on national security emanates from official spokesmen; much of it is designed to misinform the American public. The media repeat the U.S. government's line regarding the need to confront "rogue" states, when these so-called rogue states are in fact "failed" states that are rendered inoperative with the introduction of U.S. force. Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya are examples of U.S. national security teams not knowing the difference between a rogue state and a failed state. This issue will be discussed in a forthcoming oped.

U.S. media have had much to say about the losers in America's forever wars, particularly the young servicemen and women, although little has been said about the lost lives of innocent civilians, particularly the 70,000 Afghans and Pakistanis. And virtually nothing has been said about the winners in these forever wars, particularly the leading weapons manufacturers and their stockholders. An investment of \$10,000 in the top five weapons manufacturers in 2001 would be worth \$100,000 today. And then there is the success of the military general staff: in World War II with 12 million fighting men and women, there were 7 four-star generals and admirals. Today, with 1.2 million fighting men and women, there are 44.

The rapid and complete collapse of the Afghan government we were propping up clearly demonstrates the failure of our military and intelligence forces, and our plans and policies over a twenty-year period. Biden has made the right decision to withdraw.

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