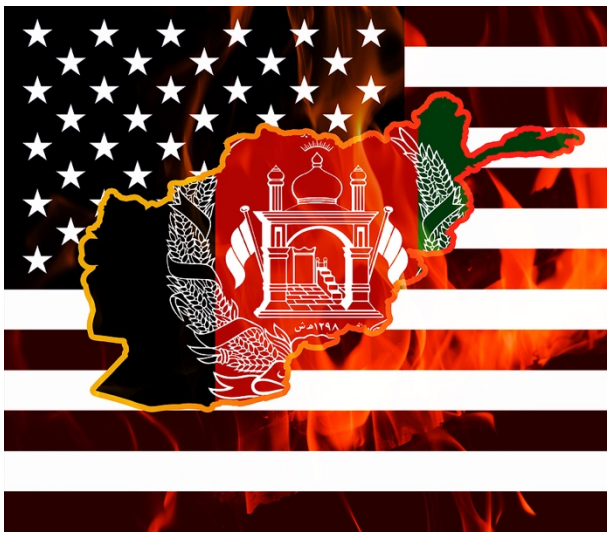
The Impact of the Biden Administration's Afghan Blitzkrieg Withdrawal Strategy

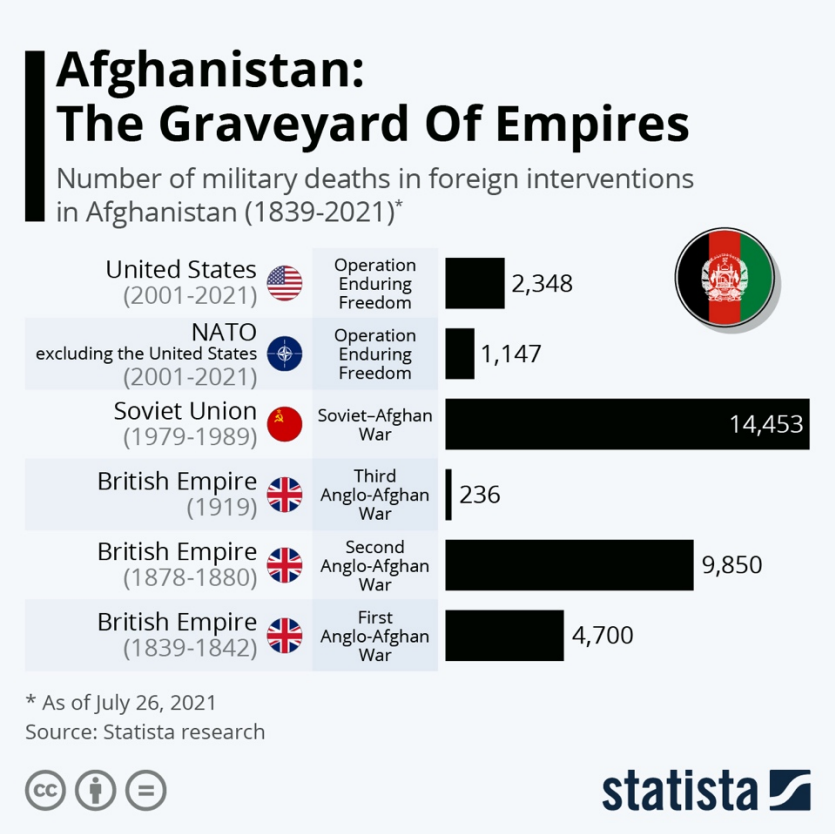


September 11, 2021

“The Graveyard of Empires” : Joe Biden Adds a Chapter to Afghanistan’s Historical Role

08/24/2021

By Kenneth Maxwell



The British House of Lords is an odd anachronism. It has been part ly but imperfectly reformed. There are now “life peers.”

Yet the House of Lords has almost as many members as the central committee of the Chinese Communist Party. It has in effect become a comfortable rest home for former but now redundant political place holders, retired military chiefs, bishops of the Church of England, as well as the few hereditary peers of the realm who remain.

But on occasion it can provide a forum for searing criticism of those who hold with real power. And it did so last week when a special session of Parliament was recalled on Wednesday 18th of August to deal with US President Joe Biden’s self-created crisis in Kabul.

Lord Hammond, that is baron Hammond of Runnymede (which is where 800 years ago King John sealed the Magna Carta, the first symbolic step on the road to democracy), who is better known as Philip Hammond, the former conservative defence and foreign secretary and chancellor of the exchequer, where he was known as "spreadsheet Phil,"and a man not known for hyperbolic statements, called Joe Biden's decision: "a catastrophic failure of western policy, and more particularly, US policy…"

Baroness Manningham-Buller, as the deputy head of MI5 had flown to Washington DC with the head of MI6, and the head of GCHQ, in the immediate aftermath of the attacks of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 9/11. It was an occasion she told their lordships when "the world wanted to support America." As the 20th anniversary of 9/11 approaches the opposite is the case.

Baroness Manningham-Buller headed MI5 between 2002 and 2007 and was an intelligence officer for 33 years. She specialised in counter terrorism. She had been the liaison in Washington with the American intelligence community at the time of the first Gulf War.

She warned that Biden's abandonment of Afghanistan would have two consequences: "First there is inspiration. This Taliban victory and its rout of Western forces, as it appears, will inspire, and embolden those who wish to promote Jihad against the West. Secondly, the border with Pakistan is porous, and its government is supportive of the Taliban. There is plenty of room to recruit, plot, and grow a new generation of terrorists."

She was not alone. Lord West, that is Baron West of Spithead, former admiral Alan West, former First Sea Lord, who had seen service in the Falklands and Iraq, was more specific. He warned that "in recent months it has become clear that a large number of Islamic fighters of various persuasions, including al-Qaeda, Daesh, and the Chechens, had joined the Taliban."

In the House of Commons, with the chamber full for the first time since the beginning of the pandemic, Boris Johnson, just back in Downing Street from holiday at his family compound in West Somerset, and Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, very well-tanned just back from his extended beach holiday at an exclusive luxury boutique hotel on the Greek Island of Crete, cut very lonely figures, attacked most insistently by conservatives from their own back benches.

The former prime minister, Theresa May, asked Boris Johnson: "Was our intelligence so poor…did we just believe we had to follow the United States…"

Tom Tugendhat, the conservative chair of the House of Commons foreign affairs committee, and an Afghan war veteran, in a very powerful speech, called it "Britain's biggest foreign policy disaster since Suez."

He concluded: "This doesn't need to be defeat, but right now it damn well feels like it is."

And it was not just in Britain. Armin Laschet, Angela Merkel's choice to succeed her as next German chancellor, called Biden's decision the "the biggest debacle NATO has suffered since its founding."

And that is precisely the point.

The invasion and occupation and war in Afghanistan was a NATO operation, involving over the past 20 years since the terrorist attacks on the United States on 9/11, the deployment of the troops from over 50 NATO members and associated nations. It was the "endless deployment of U.S. forces in overseas conflicts" which Joe Biden claimed was the justification for his unilateral action in pulling the US out of Afghanistan without any consultation with his allies

The war was he said, "not in the national interest." This was not true. The Afghan invasion was a collective engagement in support of the United States. And in the end Biden forgot this.

And the consequences of his forgetting will be with us all for years to come.

Biden has in fact returned America to its pre-WW2 isolationist roots. It seemed an easy option for an old Senate hand, used to deal making in the backrooms of the Congress. And it was a politically driven decision with an eye on domestic politics.

The overall concept of ending America's "endless wars" is not unpopular in the United States. Biden was right about this.

But its implementation of his decision has been utterly disastrous.

Above all it has undermined the role America had played over the last nine decades of American hegemony and the achievements of the Second World War and America's post war engagement in the reconstruction of war-ravaged Europe and Asia, and Washington's key leadership role in the construction of the network of post-war international organisations.

But isolationism and nativism and nationalistic paranoia had never gone. The "paranoid" style has a deep history in U.S. popular culture as the American Columbia University historian, Richard Hofstadter, explained long ago. And the enemies are already identified.

Hofstadter observed that: "It is ironic that the United States should have been founded by intellectuals, for throughout most of our political history the intellectual has been for the most part either an outsider, a servant or a scapegoat."

And he added: "There has always been in our national experience a type of mind which elevates hatred into a kind of creed; for this mind group hatreds take a place in politics similar to class struggle in some other modern societies." Regrettable this is what we have seen over the last years in America.

President Joe Biden had now put more nails into the coffin of American international engagement and has set the world on a very dangerous new course at a time of increasing international instability and the challenges of powerful authoritarian and aggressive adversaries who will relish Biden's calamitous unilateral decision and are sure to take advantage of the opportunities it offers them.

Not in Afghanistan in all probability if the new authoritarians have any sense. But on the broader international scene where the tectonic plates are already shifting. It has become a platitude that Afghanistan is the "graveyard of empires." President Biden has now entered into the role which Afghanistan has played in world history.

Source for the featured graphic:

https://www.statista.com/chart/25400/military-deaths-in-foreign-interventions-in-afghanistan/

The Afghanistan Intervention: A Predictable Disaster

08/08/2021
By Kenneth Maxwell

In October 6th, 2001, l wrote a column for the pioneering Brazilian website "NO: Notícia e opinião."

It was shortly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in New York City and on the Pentagon in Washington D.C. I was living in New York City at the time. President George W. Bush had by then already initiated the American intervention in Afghanistan where the Taliban ruled and had harbored the principal bases of Al-Qaida and Osama Bin-Laden, the Saudi Arabian mastermind of the 9/11 plot.

My column was entitled "Trap and Blank Check" ("armadilha e cheque em branco").

It recalled the disasters of earlier foreign interventions in Afghanistan, and in particular the First Afghan War between 1839 and 1842. The British general Sir John Keane had led a 20,000 strong Anglo-Indian "Army of the Indus" into Afghanistan with catastrophic consequences.

Only one medical officer survived, his fellow soldiers all having been massacred along the 144 km retreat from Kabul. He reached the British forces besieged at the fortress of Jalalabad on the back of a bedraggled and forlorn donkey. The “NO: Notícias e opinião” website was lost.

But fortuitously l had re-published the column in my book “Mais Malandros” published in Brazil in 2002, so at least it survives in print.

Jalalabad is an ancient fortified city in the northeast of Afghanistan which guards the road which links Kabul to the Indian subcontinent via the notorious Khyber Pass.

In 1954 while an army cadet as a schoolboy l learned to shoot at Jalalabad. My Jalalabad, however, was a red walled replica of the original fortress in Afghanistan. It stood near the center of the town of Taunton in Somerset, England, overlooking Vivery Park, and was then the headquarters of the Somerset Light Infantry.

The unit of cadets to which l belonged at school was affiliated with the Somerset Light Infantry so we went there each week to use the rifle range for our target practice inside the Taunton's Fort Jalalabad.

The British army is today entirely voluntary. Conscription was ended in 1959.

The Somerset Light Infantry was amalgamated into other units of the army in the late 1950s. The barracks at Jalalabad in Taunton was sold off and converted into apartments.

But l remembered that the ceremonial saches were awarded to the regiment for their service defending Jalalabad in Afghanistan over the long winter of 1842 before an “army of retribution” was dispatched from British India and besieged Kabul and destroyed the city’s ancient grand bazar.

35 years later the British repeated the error again in the Second Afghan War between 1878 and 1880. It was then that the Indian born General Frederick “Bobs” Roberts, later one of the great British Imperial Generals, sent his notorious telegram to the British viceroy of India requesting “reinforcements, tea, and sugar.”

It was because of the British resistance in Jalalabad in 1842, defended by the men of the the predecessor of the Somerset light infantry, that the British retained some honour at all out of the first disastrous Afghan campaign. The young Queen Victoria determined that the Somerset Light Infantry should be known henceforth as “Prince Albert’s Own” in honor of her beloved German husband.

The regiment was also to adopt “Jalalabad” as their coat of arms, and the blue sashes used on ceremonial occasions were to be substituted by sashes of Royal Red.

These we wore in 1954. The imitation Jalalabad fortress in Taunton was also constructed as a worthy memorial.

One of the lessons the British learnt in Afghanistan in the nineteenth century was that “influence” in Afghanistan was preferable to “occupation.”

It was in many ways the origin of the doctrine of “indirect governance,” or “indirect rule.” Afghanistan was the “locus classicus” of the “great game” when the great powers fought a “shadow war” for geopolitical advantages in ill comprehended, distant, inhospitable, and dangerous locations, with little success.

Intervention, betrayal, massacre, and vengeance, were the eternal realty among those desolate mountain passes over the centuries.

As they are today.

In the end this "shadow game" was never worth the effort.

Foreigners who invade Afghanistan will eventually unite the different tribes and ethnic groups against them, since they may hate each other, but in the end they hate the infidel even more.

Soviet Russia forgot this lesson in the 1980s.

Osma bin-Laden was hoping that the Americans would also forget this lesson in 2001.

Which President George W. Bush, and the Americans, and subsequently America's NATO allies, also collectively forgot out of anger, hubris, or historical amnesia, or on the Europeans part to please the Americans.

Following America's lead many of them, Britain under the prime minister Tony Blair (though not all, France, Belgium and Germany in particular) even went on to expand their military intervention into Iraq and with equally disastrous consequences.

Meanwhile the intervention in Afghanistan went on for another twenty bloody and fruitless years. Osma bin-Laden was eventually tracked down and killed in Pakistan during the Obama administration.

But by then as a direct result of the intervention in Iraq the fundamentalist "Islamic state" had taken over large swaths of Iraq and Syria and another bitter campaign was being waged in Iraq to dislodge them

After 2001 other nations had joined the American forces in Afghanistan, but In August 2003 the American intervention was converted into a NATO led and UN mandated force in Afghanistan, the "International security assistance force" (ISAF).

At its height this involved 130,000 troops from 50 NATO nations and partner counties from Albania, to Australia, to Denmark, but above all from the US, the UK, and Germany. In this period the Afghan National army was built up from virtually nothing to 352,000 soldiers.

This was the first deployment of NATO outside the Euro-Atlantic region and was the most ambitious and demanding task in NATO's history.

The Americans spent well over US$ 778 billion between October 2001 and September 2019 in Afghanistan.

In addition, US$ 44 billion was spent by the US State Department and the agency for international development. Some estimates put the figure at US$ 978 billion spent in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Many contractors are also paid.

The US has lost 2,300 killed and 20,660 injured in action since 2001.

Britain is estimated to have spent more than £37 billion and has lost 444 soldiers killed, the largest number of deaths occurring in 2009 and 2010.

The Germans have spent €16 to €29 billion though the government says that it has spent €7 billion. The Germans have lost 60 killed and 245 injured in action.

It has been the bloodiest deployment of the Bundeswehr in German post war history.

The final 1,300 German were withdrawn from Afghanistan in January.

In Britain and in Germany the soldiers who were deployed to Afghanistan almost all now think that it was a wasted effort and sacrifice.

If the Americans go all other NATO partners must go to.

President Joe Biden's unilateral decision to withdraw U.S. forces from Afghanistan 20 years after the initial intervention on the ground of American armed forces there, and to preemptively end yet another of the America's "endless wars" and without any consultation with the allies who had been dragged into these out-of-area NATO military operations, threatens another disastrous repetition in 2021 of the disaster of the early 1840s Jalalabad.

Those in Afghanistan who assisted America and its western allies will be massacred (as has already begun) by the Taliban insurgents who have seized much of the countryside and two regional capitals and are behaving with well-practiced and predictable brutality.

If President Donald Trump is accused of attacking NATO, President Joe Biden has certainly succeeded in driving a very ugly nail into NATO's Afghan coffin.

The consequences will be enormously damaging to the alliance and they are barely being recognized amid the global covid pandemic.

Though the tens of thousands of soldiers from all nationalities who have fought in Afghanistan over the last 20 years, and the relatives of those who have been injured, and most especially those who have died, will never forget or forgive the fate of their loved ones in these disastrously misconceived and mismanaged and preemptively begun and preemptively ended "wars of choice."

On my visits to the Fort Jalalabad in Taunton as an army cadet l was responsible for checking out the rifles and ammunition from the Duty Sargent and returning the rifles at the end of the practice session. He was always very friendly as my uncle had for many years been the much beloved regimental Sargent-Major of the Somerset Light Infantry, the highest non-commissioned rank.

As l signed in the rifles after one session he placed his very large hand over the document.

Never he said sign a blank cheque: “Anyone can write in anything in the blank space and you alone would be responsible” he said.

Indeed, l had left a lot of blank space between the list of rifles and my signature.

It was a lesson l never forgot. President George Bush signed a blank cheque in 2001, history has filled in the void, and President Biden in 2021 has dishonored it.

And for the man who served as Vice-President to President Obama and who highlighted the importance of the “good war,” forgetting is not an option.

Checking Out of Hotel Afghanistan: A Look Back at the Russian Departure

08/23/2021
By Ambassador (ret) Jon D. Glassman

Thirty two years ago, January 30, 1989, ten American diplomats and U.S. Marine Security Guards, including I, the US Charge d’Affaires, departed Kabul as 120 thousand Soviet troops evacuated the country across its northern border. We were ordered out by the incoming Bush Administration for fear that we would be massacred in error by mujahidin rebels expected to storm the Afghan capital after Soviet departure.

Sharing the belief that the fall of the Soviet-backed Afghan regime of Najibullah was imminent, I told the New Delhi press that the Afghan quasi-Communists would collapse in six months. This, however, did not occur for three years until mujahidin forces took the capital in 1992, decisively empowered by the collapse of the Soviet Union, its military and food supply chain, and its financial support of the client regime.

Najibullah, a brutal former Secret Police director, fled to the UN compound from whence he was extracted and hung in 1996 by Taliban forces mobilized by Pakistan to end the chaos of mujahidin coalition rule.

The expected and genuine outcome of the Soviet evacuation is relevant now as we cope with the debacle of US evacuation and withdrawal.

The Soviets and their Afghan partners took extreme measures in the last days of large-scale Russian presence to buttress their respective post-withdrawal positions vis-à-vis the mujahidin resistance, neighboring Pakistan, and, most importantly, each other.

Measures that the Soviets and their clients undertook will not, and cannot, be repeated now, nor could any post-withdrawal arrangement that might eventually ensue be undone by the collapse of the United States, as occurred with the Soviet Union.

Yet, it is worthwhile to recapitulate the extraordinary effort the Russians and their Kabul allies put into guaranteeing their post-withdrawal equities. As we contemplate new and more modest U.S. involvement in Afghanistan in the future, we might want to consider whether we will achieve better results than the aggressive Soviets, notwithstanding the greater resilience of our polity.

On August 17, 1988, a C130 aircraft carrying Pakistani President Zia ul Haq, Pakistan JCS Chairman General Akhtar Abdur Rehman, my good friend US Ambassador Arnie Raphel, and US

Defense Attache BG Herbert Wassom crashed in Bahjawalpur, Pakistan. Immediately, speculation arose that the Soviets had assassinated President Zia, the linchpin of Afghan mujahidin resistance.

Indeed, Soviet Ambassador in Kabul Nikolay Yegorychev, former First Secretary of the Moscow Communist Party, told me a few weeks earlier that some "Pakistani patriot" would likely shoot down a U.S. resupply flight into the neighboring country unless the US stopped its provision of Stinger anti-aircraft missiles to the mujahidin.

But only hours after the crash, Ambassador Yegorychev called on me–in his one and only visit to the U.S. Embassy —to claim that the Soviet Union had nothing to do with the Zia crash. When reminded about his Stinger statement and questioned about Afghan regime involvement, Yegorychev said he could say nothing about the Afghans, implying by failure to deny that the Najibullah government may have been responsible.

Even if this were the case, the embedded Soviet presence in the Afghan intelligence apparat made Russian complicity at some level an inescapable assumption. Whoever had the lead, red and green tracer fire arced across the sky that night as interested parties in Kabul celebrated the demise of their arch-enemy Zia ul Haq.

On November 2, 1988, returning from a diplomatic lunch to the U.S. Embassy, I encountered a large trailer truck carrying what appeared to be a ballistic missile. Judging from its dimensions, it was clear that this was something much bigger than a FROG tactical missile.

Shortly, thereafter, overhead imagery confirmed that the Soviets had deployed SCUD medium-range missiles to Kabul and began firing them with immense roars against putative mujahidin concentrations in the direction of Pakistan.

This was clearly a warning to Pakistan to stand back as the Russians departed.

During these months, there were also reports that the Soviets were upgrading their bombing volume at selected points in Afghanistan, using for the first-time Tu22 Blinder/Backfire medium bombers.

On one occasion, a member of our Afghan national Embassy staff went to the approaches of the Salang Tunnel, a chokepoint on the resupply road from the Soviet Union, and found widespread areas containing many dead civilians–suggesting that these bombers may have been delivering wide-area, fuel air explosives to maximize indiscriminate kill.

Again, the message was: do not obstruct the regime lifeline or there will be hell to pay.

While these military measures were being applied, a new Soviet Ambassador, Yuliy Vorontsov, formerly deputy to Ambassador Anatoliy Dobrynin in Washington, was dispatched to Kabul. Vorontsov proclaimed to the press that Soviet troop withdrawal was not a certainty and was dependent on the creation of political conditions that would guarantee stability according to the Soviet vision.

It was surely hoped that the U.S. and Pakistanis would deliver a political arrangement that would favor Moscow's post-withdrawal permanent influence

What confounded the Soviet plan was that the US Embassy, through the development of widespread contact and other efforts, knew with certainty that Soviet withdrawal preparations were proceeding, notwithstanding Vorontsov's posturing. Additionally, the Ambassadors of the Soviet Warsaw Pact allies, all nominally Communists but admiring American ideals, briefed me in detail on Soviet plans as soon as they were told by the Russians–often before they reported to their own capitals.

Later, when Yuliy Vorontsov returned to Washington as Russian Federation Ambassador, he told me that the Soviets had also tried to reach a political deal with elements of the mujahidin to guarantee Russian interests.

Vorontsov said he had arranged a meeting with Afghan Tajik resistance leader Ahmed Shah Massoud (assassinated by an al Qaeda suicide bomber in 2001) but the meeting did not take place because its site was bombed by Najibullah's Afghan Air Force, fearing a Russian sellout.

The Soviets tried but could not achieve a favorable political accommodation.

This meander through the history of the Russian withdrawal leads to the conclusion that, notwithstanding willingness to undertake extreme military and political moves, the Afghan problem evaded facile solutions by the Soviets and Najibullah regime.

When I lived in Kabul, I walked through the city for hours unguarded and alone every weekend without weapons, body armor or rescue capability—no protection needed. My street conversations in Dari and Russian were tolerated by the Soviets and their clients. But there was an additional element.

During these walks, I sometimes heard praise for President Reagan even from Afghan Communist soldiers. This impunity for US personnel and latent support, even among our enemies, was possible because the US was perceived as aligned with Afghan national values. The Soviets were the hated outside infidels that America was helping to expel.

Regrettably we assumed the Soviets' mantle with our focus on train and equip and counterinsurgency over the last twenty years.

Dr. Jon Glassman is a consultant on defense and strategic matters residing in Washington, DC.

Dr. Glassman holds a MA, Certificate of the Russian Institute, and PhD from Columbia University in Public Law and Government. He is the author of Arms for the Arabs: The Soviet Union and War in the Middle East published by Johns Hopkins University Press, was the Department of State Chair at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces, and served as faculty adjunct/Council on Foreign Relations International Affairs Fellow at the Harvard Program on Science and International Affairs.

A career diplomat, Dr. Glassman worked at American Embassies in Madrid, Moscow, Havana, Mexico City, Kabul, and Asuncion (Paraguay). He was Charge d'Affaires (Chief of Mission) in Afghanistan during the final two years of the Russian presence and was the US Ambassador in the first three years of Paraguay's transition out of military rule.

In Washington, Dr. Glassman served in the White House as Deputy National Security Advisor and Assistant to the Vice President, Senior Member of the Secretary of State's Policy Planning Staff (for East Asia and Latin America), Senior Advisor of the President's Special Representative for Central American Negotiations, and Director of Australia and New Zealand Affairs.

Dr. Glassman also served in the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, was Special Assistant to the Secretary of State's Advisor on Soviet Affairs, and participated in multiple US-Russian arms control negotiations.

After retirement from the State Department, Dr. Glassman served from 1998 to 2013 as Vice President for International Business Development and Director for Government Policy for the Electronic Systems sector ($7.5 billion annual revenue) of the Northrop Grumman Corporation. This business unit produces radar, electro-optical, and command-and-control systems.

Northrop Grumman awarded Dr. Glassman the highest company recognition—the Chairman's Award for Excellence—for work supporting liberation of company hostages in Colombia. During his government career, he was awarded the Presidential Meritorious Service Award and three Department of State Superior Honor Awards.

Dr. Glassman was also an earlier contributor to Second Line of Defence and who. saw from the outset the value of an independent team working assessments of the evolution of the military and of global developments.

The featured photo is from the following source:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_withdrawal_from_Afghanistan

The Biden Afghan Departure: Historical Images and Memories

08/21/2021
By Robbin Laird

The Biden Administration decision to withdraw from Afghanistan and removing the U.S. military and support for the Afghan Air Force has been followed by a rapid takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban.

Such an historic event generates images for the living and for future generations.

The most viewed image in the United States is the parallel to the escape from Saigon.

The pairing of images of the escape from Saigon and from Kabul does obscure a significant difference in how this happened.

With regard to the Saigon events, it was generated by the Democratic Congress pulling the money from the executive branch which was working with the South Vietnamese forces.

This time the Democratic executive branch made unilateral decisions about withdrawing and acted on their plans.

It was an executive branched "planned" withdrawal.

But for European allies, the images are differently historically.

For the French, the historic images are also built on their post-war military engagements, ranging from Indochina to North Africa.

I discussed this with French native and co-founder of *Second Line of Defense*, Murielle Delaporte. Delaporte is the editor of *Opérationnels SLDS*, a Paris-based defence quarterly she founded in 2009.

Question: What images come to the various generations in France with regard to the entrapment of civilians, and the contested withdrawal from Afghanistan by the Americans?

Murielle Delaporte: For my parents' generation, the images of Dien Bien Phu (1954) are vivid. Here the French government negotiated with the enemy while the French Army was fighting for its life.

The French military had asked for help from the United States, but were left in large part abandoned to their own fate.

The parallel with Kabul's fall today is striking in the sense that it highlights the gap – or even antinomy – between the political logic of negotiating and the military logic of fighting.

Announcing in advance that you are leaving on a very specific day is already giving ammunition to the enemy.

And drives a significant sense of betrayal and resentment from the veterans has to be felt under such circumstances.

The second image which is shared by my parent's generation and the first segment of the post-war generation is the Suez Crisis (1956).

Here the British and the French worked with the Israelis against the Egyptian takeover of the Suez Canal.

Again, the United States not only did not come to the aid of the two allies but took the side of the Egyptians and the Soviet Union and enhanced a sense of U.S unilateral decision making – as well as great power order feared during the Cold War – with little consideration for allies.

The nuclear program already underway in France was indeed accelerated in response to this event.

These historical events reinforced the French Gaullist instincts to promote independence from the Americans, which can be seen today in the Macron government.

The current Biden Administration approach certainly will reinforce these historical images and experiences.

Question: This certainly will as well reinforce for the British and the French of having an independent nuclear deterrent?

Murielle Delaporte: It is already the case, but it might deepen the commitments.

The current French government is deeply committed to this capability, but it might help in keeping public commitment to protect French independence.

I would add that the Vietnamese experience involved a significant problem of trying to protect those Vietnamese who worked with us as well.

And the Algerian War which followed and the civil war had a key impact on French identity as well.

With the conflict in Algeria, the challenge of saving those who worked with us against the Algerian nationalist forces was a significant one.

For the military, the Indochinese experience and the sense of helplessness to prevent the abandonment of those who fought along the side of the French military have been a determinant factor and a painful memory[1]

Indeed, to this day, the question of the Algerian engagement remains deeply seared in French historical memory and is part of the ongoing very sensitive debate about Islam, immigration and France.

The Americans from this point of view were more able to bring about some form of collective healing over Vietnam, in particular through movies trying to explain what the war was all about (Platoon, The Dear Hunter, Apocaypse Now…).

In France, except for Pierre Schoenderffer, there were no cinematographic production (or debate for that matter) allowing to turn the page early on and in an appeased manner on traumatic military engagements, like Indochina and Algeria.

The Americans have faced with both Iraq and Afghanistan a significant challenge of coming to terms with their historical responsibility of the fate of those who worked with them against their opponents in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

And this follows a decades long war against "global terrorism" which is entering a new phase.

Question: The French clearly fought in Afghanistan and have led the fight in Africa against Islamic terrorists.

Images from Mali must come to mind for the current French generation as well. How do you see that?

Murielle Delaporte: They might, but it could play both ways: the spillover effects from the impacts throughout the region of the return of the Taliban will probably feed the arguments of those pressuring for a withdrawal of the French forces from the G5 Sahel countries (Mali, Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso and Mauritania), where the Barkhane Operation is already being re-defined.

On the other hand, the renewed fear of international terrorism fed from the old Afghan safe haven could have the opposite influence supporting the counter-argument about the need to keep the battle against terror in the front lines,

[1] On this very issue, see in particular the writings of Hélie de Saint Marc.

Featured Photo: This combination photo was found in the following source: https://www.dawn.com/news/1640817

What Went Wrong in Afghanistan? The Perspective of Paul Bracken

09/05/2021

By Yale Insights

Recently, *Yale Insight*s conducted an interview with Dr. Paul Bracken, Professor Emeritus of Management, with regard to what one might call the Afghan Blitzkrieg strategy of the Biden Administration.

Q: When did things go wrong for the U.S. in Afghanistan?

Dr. Bracken: Things went badly in Afghanistan six months after we went in.

By early 2002, the U.S. military victory was followed by years of setbacks and failure to build a non-corrupt regime in Kabul.

This has been the pattern in the whole U.S. democracy-building effort in the Middle East. Libya, Sudan, Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and even Egypt—it's a record of democracy building unblemished by success.

Q: Was there a better way for the U.S. to exit?

Dr. Bracken: There were four ways to lose this war, ranging from an "acceptable loss" to an unacceptable, humiliating defeat.

The U.S. found the worst possible way to lose in Afghanistan.

The four ways were:

1. A withdrawal over eight months negotiated with the Taliban, backed up with threat of massive U.S. air strikes if they violate the agreement. The time is used to get out Afghans in sensitive positions, NGOs, U.S. citizens. One key issue here is to hold multiple airports, like Bagram. This would be an acceptable way to lose.
2. Kick the can down the road to a future president by investing huge new training programs for the Afghan army. This wouldn't have worked because that army would desert, but it would be over a much longer time frame. It would avoid the sudden collapse we saw. It's somewhere between an acceptable and unacceptable way to lose.
3. CIA supports other insurgent groups to attack the Taliban and throw them back—as a cover for a rushed exit. It starts a civil war in Afghanistan on purpose to cover the U.S. departure. It is an unacceptable way for the U.S. to lose.
4. Decide to leave and treat the decision as a matter of high policy and statecraft—but don't focus on implementation. Treat it as a tactical detail, left to field commanders. Assume the briefings you get accurately reflect conditions in the field.

Option number four is what the U.S. actually did in Afghanistan, leading to the precipitous collapse of an army that wasn't getting paid and had no patriotic loyalty to the corrupt regime.

This is the worst way to lose; it's unacceptable.

For management students, the lesson is that there's a huge difference between the world that headquarters lives in, and the world of people actually doing the work in the field.

You must visit the field and understand their problems.

Headquarters is a very dangerous place to run an organization.

Environmental scanning is really all about breaking out of a headquarters mindset.

If our actions in Afghanistan are indicative of U.S. competence in future crises, the world is in serious trouble.

Q: How does the return of the Taliban change the region?

Dr. Bracken: The Taliban win makes the region far more dangerous because it removes the United States physically from the scene.

When Iran signed the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (commonly known as the Iran Nuclear Deal), it really didn't need an atomic bomb.

After the JCPOA was revoked by the United States in 2018, Iran enriched uranium to bargain with the West on sanctions relief.

But Iran likely does need the bomb now because it's surrounded by India, Pakistan, Israel, and China, all of whom have it. Then there's the very dangerous situation in Pakistan, the world's fastest-growing nuclear arsenal.

In larger terms, the collapse of the U.S. venture in Afghanistan weakens the notion of "the West" as the leading model of world order.

It's evident now that we're well into a polycentric world of nationalism, which is also a multipolar nuclear system.

This article was published by Yale Insights on August 27, 2021.

The War in Afghanistan Is What Happens When McKinsey Types Run Everything

08/31/2021

By Tyler Durden

Editor's Note: This article was brought to our attention by Bill Buckey, who has significant Afghan experience and highlights one of the many aspects of how the war was fought, managed and exited that have created an historical failure of monumental proportions and with long-lasting consequences.

According to the author of the article:

"Yet, with the collapse of the Afghan army, now we see an example of what happens when a military is too dependent on contractors, and that support system is removed (which adversaries could do to the U.S. military if they pursue certain strategies.) It turns out that the cost of not being able to repair your own equipment is losing wars.

"More fundamentally, the people who are in charge of the governing institutions in our society are simply divorced from the underlying logistics of what makes them work. Everything, from

the Boeing 737 Max to the opioid epidemic to the waste inside most big corporations to war, has been McKinsey-ified. And it's all covered up with moral outrage, partisanship and culture warring, public relations, and management wisdom bullshit."

For the rest of the article, see the following:

https://www.zerohedge.com/geopolitical/war-afghanistan-what-happens-when-mckinsey-types-run-everything

The Impact of the Biden Administration's Afghan Blitzkrieg Withdrawal Strategy on the Way Ahead for the U.S. Military

09/05/2021
By Robbin Laird

I am currently in France and am taking advantage of my time in Europe to discuss the impact in the near to mid-term of the Biden Administration's Afghan Blitzkrieg Withdrawal Strategy.

In these discussions, I am focusing on assessments of how this strategy impacts allied interests and shaping a way ahead.

The claim made by Secretary Blinken is that getting out of Afghanistan rapidly will provide a key to better positioning the United States for the great power competition.

I will examine this proposition in discussions with European, Middle Eastern and Asian colleagues over the next few weeks and report back on those conversations.

But in this article, I would like to focus on the impact of the Afghan Blitzkrieg Withdrawal Strategy on the U.S. military as it engages in a strategic shift from the land wars to a focus on great power competition.

I have focused on this shift for a number of years, and have spent a great deal of time with allied and U.S. militaries on the challenge of making this transition. It is as much of a strategic shock as it is a strategic transition in that a generation of offices have really grown up in the Middle Eastern land wars, and the experiences and skill sets learned in those wars are only partially transferred to the new strategic situation.

We have highlighted a way to do this in terms of "harvest the best, and leave the rest," a characterization proferred by Ed Timperlake.

The first key impact starts with the question of the legacy of the land wars.

Nearly a million Americans served in Afghanistan along with thousands of allied soldiers and officers.

Because this was a lengthy engagement, characterized as stability operations and nation building, those soldiers and officers trained and worked with Afghans closely to shape a way ahead, because that is the very heart of managed transition.

Then suddenly those relationships are cut by the U.S. leadership leaving those soldiers and officers in the position of having to confront the loss, death, torture, or relocation of those very persons with whom they worked for a "new" Afghanistan.

A key element of military service is honor.

This disruption and the way it is done is not in the best traditions of military honor for sure.

And a generation of officers and soldiers cannot be thrown into a political memory hole and simply asked to march forward.

The Western militaries are voluntary forces. Citizens need to want to serve, and doing so with honor to the values of their countries.

It is difficult to see how the nature of the withdrawal does not create a major set of problems for the military going forward.

The second major impact is with regard to shaping a military strategy going forward.

The Obama Administration promised a Pacific pivot which largely did not happen because of the demands from CENTCOM and the Middle East, including the rise of ISIS and the Syrian civil war.

In fact, it might be remembered that President Biden was Vice President Biden during the period of fighting the "good war" in Afghanistan.

The military focus was on counter-insurgency, nation building and that most ambiguous of terms, stability operations.

Shifting from this skill set to preparing for full spectrum crisis management and the high-end fight is significant.

Indeed, I wrote a book published this year exactly on this challenge.

How will this happen?

Will the U.S. shape a new counter-terrorism strategy in the Middle East which significantly reduces demand on U.S. forces?

If not, then frankly, the demand side is beyond what the U.S. military can provide for a strategic shift.

A third major impact flows from the second.

CENTCOM's credibility is seriously in doubt given its performance over many years in the outcome – a failed Afghan military capability.

And with that comes the question of why the U.S. Army is in any leadership role for preparing for full spectrum crisis management and the high-end fight?

The strategic shift prioritizes air and naval forces, and those land forces which can support crisis management which is largely about the USMC and its transition to the high-end fight.

A fourth major impact is precisely the question of crisis management.

In addressing the strategic shift, my colleague Dr. Paul Bracken has focused on the central role of escalation management, inclusive of the nuclear weapons elements. I have focused on full spectrum crisis management and have underscored the importance of reshaping civilian capabilities to be able actually to use an agile military force able to respond to and provide for escalation control

The play out of the Afghan withdrawal was hardly a text book case in how to do escalation control or crisis management.

As Dr. Bracken has put it: "If our actions in Afghanistan are indicative of U.S. competence in future crises, the world is in serious trouble."

A fifth major impact is in working with allies.

It is clear that for the U.S. military either in the Pacific or in Europe, that working closely with allies is the foundation for a credible crisis management or deterrence strategy.

And working with allies means changing how the United States military integrates with allies and partners to shape a distributed force.

Or put more bluntly, the United States is not in a position to compete with multiple authoritarian powers and to prevail without changing how the U.S. military works with allies.

This is being done on the military level, but the experience of the "runs of August" is not a reinforcing experience

If one would take just one caes: In June 2021, President Biden launches a new Atlantic Charter.

In July,2021, Sec Def Austin signs a new carrier agreement with the UK.

And in August?

In short, the U.S. military faces a number of challenges flowing from the Blitzkrieg withdrawal strategy.

How will these challenges be addressed and met?

Central Asia: From Pax Americana to Pox Americana?

08/30/2021

By James Durso

The fall of the American client government in Afghanistan has thrust Central Asia onto the front line between the rest of the world and what has been called a "cradle of jihad."

U.S. engagement with Central Asia has typically been sporadic and transactional, but the fall of Kabul may force Washington to pay sustained attention to the region.

In 2002, the U.S. Department of State published "United States Strategy for Central Asia 2019-2025: Advancing Sovereignty and Economic Prosperity." The strategy's goal was to support local "sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity" which would have been considerably easier without a jihadist regime in Kabul.

The U.S. must continue to engage with Central Asia in the wake of the Afghanistan debacle, but the local interlocutors will be thinking *You did this*.

The first order of business is to ensure that the upcoming political transitions go smoothly. In October, Uzbekistan will conduct a presidential election and the incumbent, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, is expected to win handily. In Tajikistan, President Emomali Rahmon is positioning his son, Rustam, as his successor. Both countries border on Afghanistan and will be buffeted by refugee flows and economic downturns, so the order of the day should be "steady as she goes."

Next, ensure policy supports local economies which have been buffeted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Due to the pandemic, Central Asian economies contracted by 2.1% on 2020, what the International Monetary Fund calls a "sizable turnabout after a year of strong growth in 2019 (4.8 percent)."

The U.S. departure will require increased security expenditures by local governments to deal with threats from Afghanistan. If the Taliban increases drug smuggling to raise money, local governments will have to spend more while dealing with the threats posed by organized crime networks that are cooperating with the Islamists in Kabul.

If the Taliban cannot enforce a rough stability in Afghanistan, Central Asia- South Asia trade won't fully develop, Central Asia will be reliant on paths controlled or influenced by Moscow and China, and the region will never get reliable access to the large Indian market. Likewise, plans for regional infrastructure improvements will be at risk.

Also at risk are local exports to Afghanistan which, in in 2019, imported over $600 million in vegetables, over $700 million in fuels, and sizeable amounts of chemicals and metals. The economic impact to the region will be across many business sectors, so the near-term prognosis will be reduced export income but increased security expenditures.

The U.S. can strengthen local economies and institutions by targeting its assistance efforts to anti-corruption agencies, tax collection, the judiciary and court administrators, independent regulatory agencies, and the adoption of international standards in finance, banking, and insurance, all of which will ensure the region stays attractive to investors.

Also, the U.S. can help local governments build resilience by providing alternate financing to China's Belt and Road Initiative, though U.S. opposition to development bank financing for most fossil fuel projects will cede that portfolio to China and Russia.

The U.S. social engineering project is looking tattered after Afghanistan, so it should focus on strengthening local economies and governance institutions, not engaging with "civil society" which is a soft power program to empower the local political opposition until it delivers Washington's preferred candidate. Economics and those boring ISO standards are less exciting for local diplomats than adopting their local pet activist but that is what pursing the national interest looks like.

An improving economy and effective administration will put more money in local pockets, improve service delivery by governments, raise citizens' expectations of government performance and accountability and, ultimately, enhance the legitimacy of governing institutions.

Third, the security cooperation will become more complex as the local powers, Russia and China, pursue their interests unconstrained by U.S. concerns. Russia may focus on shoring up its influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus, but the NATO retreat will allow China to open an uncontested path to Iran (and the Persian Gulf) via Afghanistan, nicely complementing the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor, which gives Beijing access to the Arabian Sea.

In a message to the region, Russia announced that it and China would work to counter terrorism and drug trafficking from Afghanistan and "preventing spread of instability to neighbouring regions." That message may resonate with people in Central Asia as regional polls indicate that "Russia enjoys evident dominance in public opinion, China is in a relatively well-regarded second place, and the U.S. comes in decidedly last." And the prevalence of Russian language media will ensure Moscow's message gets through.

The U.S. got the first taste of the new order in June when Russian president Vladimir Putin vetoed the presence of U.S. troops in Central Asia, forcing Washington to rely on bases in the Persian Gulf to fly to Afghanistan.

In August, troops from Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan held drills in Tajikistan, and Moscow announced it was "ready to deliver weapons and equipment to Central Asian allies that border Afghanistan" and at "at special low prices." On the other hand, in July Putin suggested the U.S. and Russia coordinate actions in Afghanistan and he offered the U.S. the use of Russian military bases in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, but the U.S. has yet to respond.

However the U.S. and Russia cooperate, Moscow will take the opportunity to integrate all of Central Asia into the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Eurasian Economic Union, unless the West can give them a better offer – and not make it sound like a threat. And though China appears to be eclipsing Russia economically in the region, they will cooperate to create a Central Asian exclusion zone, to the detriment of the U.S. and Europe.

The U.S. recently tried to get Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to accept several thousand Afghan refugees while they underwent security screening. The locals refused, no doubt because they remember it took Washington up to eight years to find new homes for Uighur detainees at the Guantanamo Bay detention camp after they were declared "No longer enemy combatants."

The Central Asian states will maintain cordial relations with the U.S. but may be reluctant to draw too close to the retreating U.S. as Washington is far, far away and Russia and China (and the Taliban) are local realities.

For example, Tashkent has maintained contact with the Taliban and has been open about it since the August 2018 talks that encouraged an Afghan peace process.

Washington should use the C5+1 mechanism to coordinate a regional response to the Taliban regime that respects local political and economic interests, and to eventually bring Kabul into regional deliberations.

The challenge for the U.S. in what is already being called a "post-American Central Asia" will be to exercise restraint and empathy as it negotiates in a space where it can no longer rely on the old *modus operandi*, "So let it be written, so let it be done."

James Durso (@james_durso) is a regular commentator on foreign policy and national security matters. Mr. Durso served in the U.S. Navy for 20 years and has worked in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq.

U.S. Bases in Central Asia: Where Will They Go?

05/05/2021

By James Durso

The U.S. is attempting to evacuate its troops and contractors from Afghanistan by 11 September 2021, the 20th anniversary of the al-Qaeda attacks.

American officials say they will keep the ability to collect intelligence and strike against terrorist threats to the U.S. by locating facilities and equipment in nearby countries.

Negotiations to locate American military and intelligence units in Afghanistan's Central Asian neighbors will be difficult.

The neighbors will have to live with an Afghanistan in which the Taliban assume a larger role, probably within the country's governing institutions, and hosting foreign forces will complicate bilateral relations.

So, what's in it for them?

Of the five Central Asian countries only two are likely fits for U.S. designs, so let's eliminate the outliers.

Kazakhstan has good relations with the U.S., and many airfields, but a mission to Afghanistan requires a lengthy overflight of another Central Asian country, Iran, or China. The country also has a busy airspace, a downside for the U.S. is concerned as its aerial operations may not stay secret.

As Kazakhstan borders Russia the presence of U.S. military and intelligence units will raise regional tensions and set Nur-Sultan between Moscow and Washington. A better approach for the U.S. is to increase economic engagement with Kazakhstan to give it room to flex between the big powers. U.S. investment has lagged that of China, which has notched up 55 projects worth $27.6 billion, half in oil and natural gas.

If Washington is serious about its new Central Asia Investment Partnership with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan we may see a region that attracts investment and, with it, interest by other governments in local sovereignty and economic prosperity, marquee goals of the United States Strategy for Central Asia 2019-2025.

Turkmenistan has an almost 500 mile border with Afghanistan but the natural gas-rich country follows a policy of "permanent neutrality" which has been recognized by a UN special resolution, so it is unavailable.

The Kyrgyz Republic hosted a "transit center" at Manas International Airport from 2001 to 2014 that was used to support U.S. operations in Afghanistan. But relations were fraught with allegations of irregularities in U.S. fuel contracting, the killing of a local civilian, and rumors of fuel dumping. U.S.-Kyrgyz relations may have improved in the interim but Bishkek may steer clear of openly cooperating with the U.S.

That leaves Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, both of which border Afghanistan, which avoids third-country overflight to targets in Afghanistan.

Uzbekistan's relations with the U.S. have improved since the election of the reforming president Shavkat Mirziyoyev. The country participates in U.S.-sponsored military training and counterdrug efforts, but its official policy is to not join military blocs, host foreign military bases, or deploy its troops abroad.

Uzbekistan has modern airfields at Tashkent and Navoi, but Tashkent is the capital city airport and Manas is an international cargo hub, so they both lack anonymity. The U.S. previously used the military airfield at Karshi-Khanabad in 2001-2005 but will be reluctant to return after numerous reports of illnesses due to environmental pollution. The Termez airport is near the border with and is used by Germany to resupply its contingent in Afghanistan but it's a big step from hosting cargo flights to hosting American spying and riding.

The border with Afghanistan is short – only 89 miles – and is fortified and patrolled to deter smugglers which makes it hard for foreign forces to operate unilaterally.

Tajikistan obviously believes in being a friend to all as it hosts military bases of Russia, China, and India. Iran and Tajikistan have discussed joint measures against "against terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking and organized crime," and they recently announced a military cooperation agreement. The country is a major drug trafficking corridor and a U.S. presence could enhance ongoing counternarcotic measures in Tajikistan and Afghanistan, but the field may be too crowded with opposing intelligence services for Washington's comfort.

The border with Afghanistan is an infiltrator's dream – sparse and over 800 miles long – but well used by alert smugglers, and the Russians, Chinese, and Indians are likely watching it.

Uzbekistan understands "good fences make good neighbors" but also has actively participated in developing Afghan by building a rail line from Hairatan on the Uzbekistan-Afghanistan border to Mazar-i-Sharif, training young Afghans through the Educational Center for Training Afghan Citizens in Termez, and exporting electricity to Afghanistan at a reduced price.

Tashkent hosted a Taliban delegation in 2018 and encouraged negotiations with the Kabul government, and may want to avoid facilitating belligerency against the Taliban.

Tajikistan, which doesn't have Uzbekistan's resources, is securing itself by seeking foreign patrons and may be amenable to a U.S. offer as it seeks American financial aid and a counterweight to Russia, China, and India.

These objects of America's attentions will have to consider Washington's notoriously short attention span, and the fact that a commitment by the executive branch doesn't commit the U.S. Congress, which can adjust the foreign policy by control of the appropriations process or by legislation mandating economic sanctions of individuals, organizations, and countries.

The increase in Chinese investment in the region via the Belt and Road Initiative has exposed Central Asia to Beijing's approach to interstate relations via infrastructure. China may not try to checkmate the U.S. move to local facilities, but it offers an alternative model of engagement. Beijing is a tough negotiator and makes its policy preferences clear but its goal is to invest in changed physical infrastructure, while the U.S. is perceived as wanting to change society. The latter is a sensitive issue as Central Asia is finally free of some else's empires: first Persian, then Russian, and latterly Soviet.

One of the more vexing issues is the effect of U.S. military flight operations in the region.

Will the local governments have any control over the timing and targets of the U.S. activity?

Or a veto?

Then there's the matter of sharing the intelligence collected with the hosts.

And the status of forces agreement that governs the law that applies to foreign military, foreign civilians, and contractors.

Local governments will want to avoid military operations that may cause civil aviation carriers transiting the region to reroute as this will cost them overflight fees. Then there's the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) warning about Afghanistan: "EXERCISE EXTREME CAUTION WHEN FLYING INTO, OUT OF, WITHIN, OR OVER THE KABUL FLIGHT INFORMATION REGION." (Yes, the FAA communicates in all caps.) Will the extension of U.S. military operations into their territory increase extend the risk to civil aviation?

The Central Asian sky looks pretty uncrowded but there's little room to maneuver. Afghan airspace to the south is hazardous and Russia to the north usually limits overflight rights to one airline per country, so any restrictions on civil aviation will narrow the East-West funnel, possibly causing shippers to seek other routes or modes of transport. In other words, its money out of someone's pocket.

Its time for "Let's Make a Deal" as Washington attempts to hang onto its presence in the region and stays focused on eliminating Afghanistan as a terror threat to the U.S. – even though the 9/11 operation was planned in Hamburg, Germany.

There's no local animosity towards the U.S. (though the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks previously showed the Americans the door) but it's obvious that Washington's prognostications of success in Afghanistan were just talk. And China has shown it's possible to do a deal with a practical big power that doesn't include mandated social engineering.

Though China and Russia have a better image than the U.S., America can make headway by ensuring its latest military enterprise doesn't damage local economic prospects or make host nations targets for reprisals by Afghan-based extremists, while respecting local culture and sovereignty.

Can the U.S. deliver when it's on the back foot?

The Impact of the Biden Afghan Withdrawal on Global Dynamics: The Perspective of Paul Bracken

08/22/2021

By Robbin Laird

Recently, I talked with Dr. Paul Bracken, the noted strategist and nuclear weapons expert, with regard to how he saw the near to mid-term consequences of the Biden Afghan withdrawal and the swift seizure of Afghanistan by the Taliban.

For Bracken, one key takeaway is that this would accelerate further global polycentrism and reduce the ability of the United States to lead global coalitions. Given that the major threat is the global conflict between authoritarian and liberal democratic powers, the role of the United States is not only reduced but the threats to the liberal democracies are enhanced as well.

According to Bracken: "What we are seeing is an acceleration of polycentric nationalism. Everybody's relating to everybody else, nervously of trying to keep the balance, and very reluctant to join rigid blocks a la the Cold War because they want to preserve their independence.

"This situation leads to significant distrust of alliances and enhances the desire to want to have something they can fall back on in the very worst case, which would be nuclear weapons.

"If we take the case of a low hanging fruit with regard to nuclear weapons proliferation, namely Iran, we shall see renewed emphasis to become a nuclear power. They didn't need a nuclear weapon when Obama came into office. They could calculate that the U.S. together with Israel was not going to hit them. Israel was not going to hit them because it doesn't have the wherewithal to do it. And the U.S. was not on board.

"My view has been that they wanted to negotiate the money that we owe them more than get a bomb. I think that can be reevaluated now, that the neighborhood has in some sense gotten more dangerous. But in addition, the number of nuclear weapons Pakistan is getting each year is getting quite high, like in the hundreds. So the region is getting more dangerous."

"Merely to hold your own against Pakistan, India, Russia, Israel, and the United States, Iran will increasingly need the bomb."

"I bet if I ran a war game with people from DoD and CIA playing Iran, they would opt to go nuclear, i.e. to acquire nuclear missiles than can at least cover Israel and Europe."

With accelerated polycentrism, we see both a reduced U.S. role in shaping global coalitions, and a growth in how the key liberal democratic nations approach managing their security and defense relationships with each other.

Of course, the Untied States remains an important nation, but we're not a superpower. We're not the global guarantor of the West.

We're in a period of time where authoritarian leaders will interpret what we're doing and the allies are doing, or partners are doing, and could frequently be wrong.

Our allies will be making calculations about what we'll do, and they could be frequently wrong.

And we will be making calculations about adversaries and allies alike which could be significantly wrong.

And the intelligence performance in Afghanistan is certainly not a reassuring corrective to meeting this challenge.

Bracken underscored that such developments making shaping an appropriate an effective military force for the United States and its allies is increasingly challenging.

As Bracken put it: "The authoritarians, Russia and China, could make a move.

"They could do that and make a big mistake.

"The potential for convoluted, complex scenarios that take you close to war goes up quite a bit.

"Why?

"Not only because of the evolution of technologies, but because there are just so many decision-making centers.

"To manage the way ahead, will require a generation of military thinkers, which the Afghan experience certainly has demonstrated are in short supply."

He then discussed a very specific aspect of the military competition which gets harder with the widening of conflict points and of the evolution of technology.

"I've been really worried about this whole ISR buildup in the following way. It can tell you if the Chinese are moving missiles around and the Russians are too.

"But it's like looking through the problem through a straw, as the intel people say.

"It's highly dependent on SIGINT which the decision maker is only getting the signals that the algorithms sort through and present to him. And it's really short-term.

"It gives little or no insight about where the country's sentiments, the leadership of the country's sentiments are going."

The Afghan situation and the way it was done have reduced the credibility of U.S. decision making in the eyes of allies and adversaries.

It's not an event in and of itself.

It's within an acceleration of global disaggregation and re-aggregation.

And it doesn't make the U.S. a non-player.

We're still an important player.

But now we have to see some skillsets we haven't seen for a while in how to actually use what power assets we've got.

Strategic Deterrence has to be Forceful at this Most Dangerous Time

08/21/2021

By Ed Timperlake

Douglas Herz, a fellow American Thinker writer, asks an extremely profound question going forward after the evolving Afghan Taliban horrific defeat of America ever being allowed by an American President and his National Security team:

Why was Bagram Air Base closed?

Biden closed Bagram Air Base on July 5, opening the way for the Taliban to take over Afghanistan.

The Taliban respect American airpower.

They know all too well that a U.S. aircraft killed Qassem Soleimani, the "Shadow Commander" of Iranian forces in the Middle East, and also precipitated the fall of ISIS by decapitating its leadership.

U.S. airpower in Afghanistan is projected from Bagram Air Base, located 40 miles north of Kabul.

President Donald Trump had been using this strategic American asset as leverage during his negotiations with the Taliban.

Douglas Herz is spot on.

It was both a tactical and strategic horrendous decision that must be addressed and corrected right now on a global deterrence scale. America with the Biden Administration's total ignorance of the value of airpower cannot let such a foolish mistake symbolically stand.

So far the danger to America is emerging direct actionable terrorism against us coming from a now well-equipped sanctuary for mortal enemies.

The proven feckless Biden team has allowed proven murderous fanatics to have the means and perhaps opportunities sooner rather than later to strike at everything we hold dear about our Constitutional rights as American's to live under President Roosevelt's Famous Four Freedoms; the freedom of speech, the freedom of worship, the freedom from want, and the freedom from fear.

However, as many will continue to discuss the specific events in allowing a well-equipped base for the Taliban to exist, the profoundly symbolic issue of our disgraceful defeat will transcend just combat battlefield actions in central Asia.

That is why removing airpower that mitigated and specifically kept in check Taliban battlefield military gains makes me very concerned that our enemies armed with Nuclear warheads on ICBMs will see America weakened and paralyzed by inept judgment and leadership.

This is now the most dangerous time in our history.

The Cold war proved to this day that America always have to be vigilant to be ready for a strategic strike of enemy action, a full-on ICBM Nuc strike, however that possibility has always been correctly tempered by our Navy and Air Force Strategic Triad, our Boomer subs on station 24/7, Minuteman Missile Silos ever ready and USAF Strategic bombers.

Russia and China long ago resolved the question of striking America. Chairman Mao called the U.S. "a paper tiger" but then Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev reportedly said, "the paper tiger has nuclear teeth".

Unfortunately, on the great intangible of stalwart and fortitude strategic thinking by a U.S. President, then Senator Biden proved to be a foolish foolish man.

Speaking in 2006, Biden described North Korea as a "paper tiger" that lacked the capacity to directly cause harm to America.

He was so wrong.

Fortunately, so far, American Air and Sea Power in both the Atlantic and Pacific, along with constant practice war fighting exercise partnerships with our allies, have both the means to deter and if events present the opportunity to fight and win.

Right now in a conventional battle against the current tactical military capabilities of the Peoples Republic of China or President Putin's Russia America and our allies can still fight and win.

The message must go forward from the White House to both our friends and adversaries of stalwart clear eyed U.S. resolve to deter China and Russia with strategic force if necessary and fight and thus win conventionally if needed.

If the land war centric team running the U.S. National Security (both SecDef and Chair JCS are Army Four star Generals, one retired and one active duty) were so ignorant to let a fellow Army General strip airpower out of the battle when it was most needed. their combat judgment has proven to be suspect and wanting.

Navy Admirals and Air Force Generals in both the Atlantic and Pacific know how to fight and win, however it is up to the National Command authority to have their back if war breaks out.

A message of "do not even try" delivered with credibility, must be in play right now before any potential enemy sniffs feckless weakness.

The global media must drive home the simple question: is America leadership willing and capable to defend ourselves and protect our friends?

As the late UK Prime Minister "Iron Lady" Margaret Thatcher once quipped "do not go wobbly."

President Biden cannot hide out by symbolically going wobbly in his Delaware home.

My point transcends partisan politics, at the water's edge in the nuclear age, we are all Americans together.

How Biden Broke NATO

08/21/2021

By The Wall Street Journal Editorial Board

Remember when candidate Joe Biden said America "needs a leader the world respects"? Apparently President Biden forgot. Of the many consequences of his misbegotten Afghanistan withdrawal, one of the more serious is the way it has damaged America's relationships with its allies, especially in Europe.

Afghanistan was an operation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and America's NATO allies have invested significant blood and treasure in the conflict. That includes tens of thousands of troops over 20 years, more than 1,100 of whom were killed, and billions of dollars spent on the military operation and reconstruction effort.

This was a fulfillment of their obligations after the Sept. 11 terror attack led to the first invocation of the mutual self-defense clause in NATO's founding treaty. European allies also have a stake in preventing a nation of nearly 40 million people from collapsing into a failed state that could trigger more mass migration to Europe, or become a new breeding ground for terrorism.

Yet everything about Mr. Biden's Afghan withdrawal has been a slap to those allies. They didn't want the U.S. to leave, but he did. The botched execution has left them scrambling to airlift out thousands of their citizens and thousands more Afghan translators and others who assisted each nation's war effort.

And the snubs keep coming from Washington. In his Monday speech, Mr. Biden made only a glancing reference to NATO and none to America's European allies in his account of the conflict. U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson reportedly had to wait a day and a half after requesting a call with the President to get Mr. Biden on the phone.

No wonder European leaders are apoplectic.

For the rest of the article, see the following:

https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-joe-biden-broke-nato-allies-boris-johnson-angela-merkel-emmanuel-macron-11629406300?mod=hp_trending_now_opn_pos1

The Future of Afghanistan: The Perspective of Olivier Aziparte in 2010

09/04/2018

By Olivier Azpitarte

In an article published on December 1, 2010, the core questions were posed about the way ahead in Afghanistan which should have led to the United States to changing significantly its engagement in the endless war.

These questions are as pertinent then as they are now.

Why do US officials expect a different answer in 2018 or 2019 or 2020 than we have already been given nearly a decade earlier?

That article follows:

Will The Afghan National Army (ANA) Be Able to Sustain Itself Once Western Troops Depart?

Olivier Azpitarte is a former Foreign Legion officer and his findings based on one of his trips to Afghanistan in 2010.

Since the announcement by the French former Minister of Defence Hervé Morin about the start of withdrawal of French troops from Afghanistan in 2011, the issue of the evaluation of Afghan security forces is more relevant than ever.

Foremost among the concerns are the maintenance, logistics and troop support.

Will these native troops be able to sustain themselves after the withdrawal of Western troops?

On the occasion of a one-week stay in July 2010 in the main base of the Afghan National Army near Kabul, we had the opportunity to see several battalions in training and operation.

Here is our report.

Outsourcing Maintenance

The Pol-e-Sharki camp is located on the outskirts of Kabul on the Jalalabad road.

Dozens of Afghan battalions – the "kandaks" in Dari – are permanently stationed there. North on the Shamali plain, hundreds of peeled hectares extend in the foothills of the Koh-e-Safi massif: the place called Deh Sabz is the main field of the "kandak factory".

This summer, the pace of production is a battalion (around 700 men) every fortnight. Units cross and follow each other, to quickly instruct the future mass army of the Karzai government.

They no longer carry the Kalashnikov assault rifle, as it was still the case across the country in 2008, but the M16, and as handgun, a Beretta. The troops ride in brand new Ford Ranger pick-ups or "reconditioned" U.S. Humvees: sand painting has been replaced by a coarse camouflage, the most important being not to be confused with the insurgents.

Across the country, American troops remain the preferred targets of rebel bombs.

All these vehicles, we are told, are maintained and repaired by a civilian company. Western and Afghan employees would be working within this sector of outsourced maintenance. On the shooting target range, they wear with discipline sand-colored American boots, pixilated fatigues, Kevlar helmets and modern body armor.

With some individual adjustments: one prefers leather sandals, and another has the kevlar helmet backwards. "It allows me to place my rifle better," he says. His instructors bow to the cardboard he shows in support: everything is right on target. So be it.

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Unpaid soldiers

At the rear of a Ford Ranger, four recently incorporated Afghans are tossed towards an area where they are supposed to show up in response to a fictitious ambush. That is their initial instruction, which must come to an end within weeks.

One of them, aged 18, shares with spontaneity. "I have not received pay for the past two months," he says, half-amused, half annoyed. Laying on the ground moments later, under orders from an instructor who tries to make a good impression, the soldier shouts: *"Bam bam bam bam bam bam … I would have liked to shoot, but we do not have blank ammunition for the exercise "* Is he still in good spirits anyway? He does not answer yes or no, a grunt escapes his mouth.

However, his determination to fight at gunpoint is firm: *"I'm not afraid to go into battle, I am even eager to be there,"* he says with an attitude steeped in masculinity.

A tradition in Afghanistan.

Little arrangements regarding jerrycans…

Starting at dawn towards the valley of Tagab.

A logistics company of the Afghan army (a "coy") leaves to supply kitchen wood to two Afghan outposts. Their food supply, unlike the Western troops, is local. And their method of cooking, traditional: from large pots on the fire. In the convoy, Ford Ranger pick-ups and Humwees armed in a respectable way surround gleaming trucks with a payload of 7 tons and bearing the International brand. There are also three French armored vehicles: on board, armed militaries of the "Train" (i.e. the French Army logisticians) on a mentoring mission with their Afghan counterparts for a period of six months.

Journey without mishap until the first battle station, situated on parallel 42: the "hornet's nest" controlled by supporters of the Tagab Valley begins at this point, but no incidents to report. Lieutenant Jérémie [the French army requires that the civilian press keeps the anonymity of its members in Afghanistan, NDLA] still displays astonishment. This officer of the 2nd material Regiment is the chief of the convoy's French elements.

He receives a message sent trough his interpreter: the Afghan part of the convoy, he learns, has restarted without his knowledge towards the second position on the parallel 51, further north, and in the heart of the insurgent area. The Afghan convoy commander estimated that the risks of being attacked were lowered significantly by not being accompanied by French armored

vehicles. His calculation paid off: not even one harassing fire punctuated his one and a half round trip. On the position of latitude 42, the French find time a bit long.

The mood is philosophical: *"After all, they are at home, it is their country, we're just guests",* a French logistician interjects.

Another one is more upset: *"When they need us, they know where to find us, but beyond that, they do not even bother to be courteous."* This sentencing was a little tough but did not take long to prove true: the French Lieutenant just received a second message through his interpreter that makes his blood boil.

He gathers his ten men on the field and addresses them in an unfussy style: *"The Mouchkil* [the problem, NDLA] *today is what? The Mouchkil is that they are almost dry on some vehicles. In one of them, they have less than a quarter tank. It means that we will go to Kabul on the way back and we will run out of fuel. So, as usual, we will give them a jerrycan. I'm sorry but that's the way it is."*

According to their own smart calculations, the Afghan logisticians manage to systematically be given fuel by the French under duress: unless they remain stranded and fear a possible roadside bombing, the options are scarce. That's worth an explanation between French and Afghan command. We observe the scene from a distance: the Afghani tempers, smiles effectively and the "case" is resolved.

The return convoy starts off, rolls a bit, and 60 kilometers from Kabul, stops. Cans are unloaded from the French tanks by Afghanis. Chief Warrant Officer Yves, a noncommissioned officer of the 515th regiment of the train, looks on, perplexed.

He comments: *"For them, everything that can be set aside is worth taking. It is even common for a tanker of the Afghan army to never reach its destination. The crew disappears for two weeks, and then returns to the kandak, where it is immediately reinstated, after one of their secret arrangements, as if nothing had happened."*

It must be said that fuel is a very sought after good, because the difficult supply makes it very expensive.

Corruption, which is so often the subject of debate at the political level, sometimes undermining the diplomatic relations between the U.S. and the Karzaï administration, thus also affects, not surprisingly, the army ranks … *"It is morally reprehensible,"* moderates the Sergeant-Chef Hervé of the 515th Regiment of the Train*," but humanly understandable: the price of fuel on the black market in Kabul is very high."* Certainly.

"Time to fill their pockets"

Back in Paris.

We meet Johan Freckhaus, a French expert on Afghan issues.

A former Massoud comrade, a former team member of the presidential campaign of the candidate Abdullah [1], he prefers to blame large scale political mistakes rather than individuals.

"*Corruption in Afghanistan is not based on a group of bad people that we could identify and replace. What a good excuse: we would do an admirable job unfortunately marred by a shameless native administration!*

The truth is that the centralized and authoritarian system that we have put in place [at the loya jirga – traditional constituent assembly – in 2003, NDLA] *with the help of an emigrant, urban and progressive Afghan elite, is unsuited to the fundamentally rural, conservative and religious country.*

This system has no chance of survival and, by using force to impose itself, it only creates rejection, as indeed before him Prince Daoud's "republic" in the '70s and the Communists' "democracy" in the 80's.

The more resentment, the less hope and the more Afghans are in the moment, in search of quick profits.

Today, there are foreigners and money; it's time to fill their pockets for the future of the family, the future education of the children, even exile if the Taliban was to be back soon! "

"The strategy of 'always more': an illusion"

Beyond the feelings collected during this report, the issue raised by Johan Freckhaus about the Afghan army is more fundamental:

"*There is indeed an insurgency in Afghanistan because you have 30 000 or 40 000 rebel fighters – according to allied military intelligence – backed by millions of Afghan civilians, in growing numbers, who feed them, house them, transport them, protect them, give them information and so on. These civilians are doing it foremost to drive foreign troops out of the country and in rejection of the system we are trying to impose, but do not want the return to power of the mullahs either. Withdrawing our troops is therefore the right strategy to effectively drive a wedge between the rebels and their supporters.*

This famous momentum, this magic moment where the power relationship can be reversed, will come from fair and complete withdrawal of foreign forces, because then the fate of the country will return to its population. Then the Afghan security forces, as they exist today, would very well be capable, with the help of villagers, of chasing away those rebels on motorcycles mainly armed with Kalashnikovs and rocket launchers, whose most lethal know-how is simply to trigger explosives remotely. The strategy of "always more" prevalent until today for the Afghan security forces is a dangerous illusion: more troops, more money, more power to the central government, all of this is counter-productive, it fuels the insurgency!

We are building oversized security forces in Afghanistan that the country is far from being able to afford. We imagine a police state, supported from abroad, which would subject the population

to the decisions of Kabul. We imagine building in a few years, for one of the poorest countries in the world, an army that could successfully maintain in power a hyper-centralized system. This is not sustainable."

Let's remember, for the record, that the Afghan government, which now has 140, 000 military and 109, 000 police officers, aims at a 240,000 military and 240,000 police officers force [2]. And that is for a country of about 20 million inhabitants.

In comparison, France, for a population three times larger, has fewer than 170,000 military personnel (ground and air) and 265 000 gendarmes and police officers.

Exiting the conflict "from the top"

Organizational and strategy matters are also emerging: shouldn't the Afghan army enhance its defense functions rather than the control of areas by a mass infantry?

Focus on heavy melee and support weapons, such as tanks, artillery, engineering, and its vital functions such as maintenance, logistics and supporting the troops, rather than recruiting legions of brave men left and right?

In addition to the French military logisticians mentors belonging to the "Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams" that we followed, several thousand of troops, French and from other nations under the NATO banner, already participate in the Epidote mission, within "Embedded Training Teams" in educating and mentoring in the logistics, artillery, cavalry and engineers fields.

An action plan from the U.S. military has set up an effective system of payment for the Afghan army in 2010 although, as we leaned through our story, progress still needs to be made. No partnership initiative has yet emerged internally, to our knowledge, in the areas of maintenance.

Those practical considerations are essential but certainly not sufficient for exiting the conflict "from the top".

The geostrategic explorations still deserve to be discussed elsewhere [3].

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Footnotes & references

[1] Present in the second round of Afghan presidential elections in 2009, before withdrawing his candidacy due to suspicions of electoral fraud.

[2] http://fr.rian.ru/world/20101003/187552455.html

[3] Johan Freckhaus wanted to add about this matter during our interview:

"Our mistake is that of stubbornness.

We'd do better to finally propose a more relevant, decentralized and distributed political system, and to give up the poison of "strategic partnership" to return to the historical neutrality – which has always been the stability of Afghanistan – rather than wanting to create over time a "new man" who would adapt to what we wish for his country, who would obey the President "in all that he will order" provided that that President is favorable to us.

Finally, we only give the Afghans a choice to be with us or against us. And unfortunately, we must note that they are increasingly likely to be on the side of our enemies."

The featured photo shows U.S. soldiers kneeling during a memorial ceremony for Capt. Daniel Whitten and Pvt. First Class Zachary Lovejoy at the Remote Sweeney FOB in Zabul province, southern Afghanistan, February 8, 2010.

https://www.businessinsider.com/photos-of-15-years-of-us-war-in-afghanistan-2016-10/

Remembering Massoud

09/14/2011

As Americans observe the day 10 years ago when terrorists in hijacked planes attacked New York and the Pentagon, the people of northern Afghanistan remember what for them was a greater tragedy two days earlier on Sept. 9, 2001. It was then that two agents of Al Qaeda posing as journalists detonated a bomb hidden in a television camera during an interview with Mr. Massoud, killing him instantly.

For his closest aides, who first tried to keep his death secret, fearing the truth would sink the besieged Northern Alliance for good, the collapse of the World Trade Center towers was a sign of hope. They instinctively saw a nexus in the two acts — though one has never been proved — and knew that the Americans would soon be on their way.

"I sort of woke up out of this shock I had been in since Sept. 9," Abdullah Abdullah, the Northern Alliance's former foreign minister, recalled about hearing the news of the attacks in New York. "It automatically came to my mind that out of this tragedy, there might be an opening."

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/11/world/asia/11massoud.html?ref=todayspaper&pagewanted=print

Earlier we had an opportunity to discuss with Johan Feckhaus, a former French military officer and an advisor of Massoud about the way ahead in Afghanistan.

In our interviews with Freckhaus he connects two broad points.

First, the light footprint followed by the Bush Administration after 9/11 was the right strategy. The piling on of foreign troops has stirred up a hornets nest of Taliban activity who are using the large scale foreign presence as a recruiting issue. The point simply put is that Afghans distrust foreign motives and the large number of troops.

And the foreign troops are backing a centralized government, which is out of sync of broader Afghan national aspirations and objectives. Certainly, recent events in the Middle East suggest that building up the power of the Presidency, as a focus of Western activity might well be counterproductive for political progress. In a recent speech to the Kuwait National Assembly, on 22 February 2011, the UK Prime Minister admitted: "For decades, some have argued that stability required highly controlling regimes (...). [We] faced a choice between our interests and our values. And to be honest, we should acknowledge that sometimes we have made such calculations in the past. But I say that is a false choice."

Johan Freckhaus also suggested an interesting lesson from history that might just work — a Swiss "neutrality" model from the time of Napoleon. His observations in his own words are extremely interesting. The West can work with Russia, Pakistan and others to shape a neutrality treaty and can assist where appropriate in countering foreign fighters like Al Qaeda and the Taliban seeking to penetrate Afghan territory. But the West needs to leave security to the provinces, and work with a much smaller central government tasked with dispensing aid to the provinces, control of the Army and collecting taxes. But the provinces cannot, nor need, manage large police forces.

In the earlier interview, Olivier underscored the following remarks by Johan:

There is indeed an insurgency in Afghanistan because you have 30 000 or 40 000 rebel fighters – according to allied military intelligence – backed by millions of Afghan civilians, in growing numbers, who feed them, house them, transport them, protect them, give them information and so on. These civilians are doing it foremost to drive foreign troops out of the country and in rejection of the system we are trying to impose, but do not want the return to power of the mullahs either.

Withdrawing our troops is therefore the right strategy to effectively drive a wedge between the rebels and their supporters. This famous momentum, this magic moment where the power relationship can be reversed, will come from fair and complete withdrawal of foreign forces, because then the fate of the country will return to its population. Then the Afghan security forces, as they exist today, would very well be capable, with the help of villagers, of chasing away those rebels on motorcycles mainly armed with Kalashnikovs and rocket launchers, whose most lethal know-how is simply to trigger explosives remotely.

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We imagine building in a few years, for one of the poorest countries in the world, an army that could successfully maintain in power a hyper-centralized system. This is not sustainable." Let's remember, for the record, that the Afghan government, which now has 140, 000 military and 109, 000 police officers, aims at a 240,000 military and 240,000 police officers force. And that is for a country of about 20 million inhabitants. In comparison, France, for a population three times larger, has fewer than 170,000 military personnel (ground and air) and 265 000 gendarmes and police officers.

https://www.sldinfo.com/rethinking-the-afghan-engagement/