

Afghan Troops Say Taliban Are Brothers and War Is “Not Really Our Fight.”

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The world is waiting anxiously to see whether the U.S. and Afghan governments and the Taliban will agree to a [one-week truce](#) that could set the stage for a “permanent and comprehensive” ceasefire and the withdrawal of U.S. and other foreign occupation forces from Afghanistan. Could the talks be for real this time, or will they turn out to be just another political [smokescreen](#) for President Trump’s addiction to [mass murder](#) and [celebrity whack-a-mole](#)?

If the ceasefire really happens, nobody will be happier than the Afghans fighting and dying on the front lines of a war that one described to a BBC reporter as “not really our fight.” Afghan government troops and police who are suffering the worst casualties on the front lines of this war told the BBC they are not fighting out of hatred for the Taliban or loyalty to the U.S.-backed government, but out of poverty, desperation and self-preservation. In this respect, they are caught in the same excruciating predicament as millions of other people across the greater Middle East wherever the United States has turned people’s homes and communities into American “battlefields.”

In Afghanistan, U.S.-trained special operations forces conduct “[hunt and kill](#)” night raids and offensive operations in Taliban-held territory, backed by devastating U.S. airpower that kills largely [uncounted numbers](#) of resistance fighters and civilians. The U.S. dropped a post-2001 record [7,423 bombs and missiles](#) on Afghanistan in 2019.

But as BBC reporter Nanamou Steffensen explained ([listen here](#), from 11:40 to 16:50), it is lightly-armed rank-and-file Afghan soldiers and police at checkpoints and small defensive outposts across the country, not the U.S.-backed elite special operations forces, who suffer the most appalling level of casualties. President Ghani [revealed](#) in January 2019 that over 45,000 Afghan troops had been killed since he took office in September 2014, and by all accounts 2019 was [even deadlier](#).

Steffensen travelled around Afghanistan talking to Afghan soldiers and police at the checkpoints and small outposts that are the vulnerable front line of the U.S. war against the Taliban. The troops Steffensen spoke to told her they only enlisted in the army or police because they couldn’t find any other work, and that they received only one month’s training in the use of an AK-47 and an RPG before being sent to the front lines. Most are dressed only in t-shirts and slippers or traditional Afghan clothing, although a few sport bits and pieces of body armor. They live in constant fear, “expecting to be overrun at any moment.” One policeman told Steffensen, “They don’t care about us. That’s why so many of us die. It’s up to us to fight or get killed, that’s all.”

In an astonishingly cynical interview, Afghanistan's national police chief, General Khoshal Sadat, confirmed the troops' views of the low value placed on their lives by the corrupt U.S.-backed government. General Sadat is a graduate of military colleges in the U.K. and U.S. who was [court-martialed](#) under President Karzai in 2014 for illegally detaining people and betraying his country to the U.S. and U.K. President Ghani [promoted him](#) to head the national police in 2019. Steffensen asked Sadat about the effect of high casualties on morale and recruitment. "When you look at recruitment," Sadat told her, "I always think about the Afghan families and how many children they have. The good thing is there is never a shortage of fighting-age males who will be able to join the force."

In the final interview in Steffensen's report, a policeman at a checkpoint for vehicles approaching Wardak town from Taliban-held territory questioned the very purpose of the war. He told her,

"We Muslims are all brothers. We don't have a problem with each other."

"Then why are you fighting?" she asked him. He hesitated, laughed nervously and shook his head in a resigned manner.

"You know why. I know why. It's not really our fight," he said.

So why are we all fighting?

The attitudes of the Afghan troops Steffensen interviewed are shared by people fighting on both sides of America's wars. Across the "arc of instability" that now stretches five thousand miles from Afghanistan to Mali and beyond, U.S. "regime change" and "counterterrorism" wars have turned millions of people's homes and communities into American "battlefields." Like the Afghan recruits Steffensen spoke to, desperate people have joined armed groups on all sides, but for reasons that have little to do with ideology, religion or the sinister motivations assumed by Western politicians and pundits.

U.S. **Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice** [discontinued](#) the State Department's annual report on global terrorism in 2005, after it revealed that the first three years of the U.S.'s militarized "War on Terror" had predictably resulted in a global explosion of terrorism and armed resistance, the exact opposite of its stated goals. Rice's response to the report's revelations was to try to suppress public awareness of the most obvious result of the U.S.'s lawless and destabilizing wars.

Fifteen years later, the U.S. and its ever-proliferating enemies remain trapped in a cycle of violence and chaos in which acts of barbarism by one side only fuel new expansions and escalations of violence by the other side, with no end in sight. [Researchers](#) have explored how the chaotic violence and chaos of America's wars transform formerly neutral civilians in country after country into armed combatants. Consistently across many different war zones, they have found that the main reason people join armed groups is to protect themselves, their family or their community, and that fighters therefore gravitate to the strongest armed groups to gain the most protection, with little regard for ideology.

In 2015, the Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), interviewed 250 combatants from Bosnia,

Palestine (Gaza), Libya and Somalia, and published the results in [a report](#) titled The People's Perspectives: Civilians in Armed Conflict. The researchers found that,

"The most common motivation for involvement, described by interviewees in all four case studies, was the protection of self or family."

In 2017, the UN Development Program (UNDP) conducted a similar survey of 500 people who joined Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab and other armed groups in Africa. The [UNDP's report](#) was titled Journey To Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping-Point for Recruitment. Its findings confirmed those of other studies, and the combatants' responses on the precise "tipping-point" for recruitment were especially enlightening.

"A striking 71%," the report found, "pointed to 'government action', including 'killing of a family member or friend' or 'arrest of a family member or friend', as the incident that prompted them to join." The UNDP concluded, "State security-actor conduct is revealed as a prominent accelerant of recruitment, rather than the reverse."

The U.S. government is so corrupted by powerful military-industrial interests that it clearly has no interest in learning from these studies, any more than from its own long experience of illegal and catastrophic war-making. To routinely declare that "all options are on the table," including the use of military force, is a violation of the [UN Charter](#), which prohibits the threat as well as the use of force against other nations precisely because such vague, open-ended threats so predictably lead to war.

But the more clearly the American public understands the falsehood and the moral, legal and political bankruptcy of the justifications for our country's disastrous wars, the more clearly we can challenge the absurd claims of warmongering politicians whose policies offer the world only more death, destruction and chaos. Trump's blundering, murderous [Iran policy](#) is only the latest example, and, despite its catastrophic results, U.S. militarism remains [tragically bipartisan](#), with a few honorable exceptions.

When the U.S. stops killing people and bombing their homes, and the world starts helping people to support and protect themselves and their families without joining U.S.-backed armed forces or the armed groups they are fighting, then and only then will the raging conflicts that U.S. militarism has ignited across the world begin to subside.

Afghanistan is not the United States' longest war. That tragic distinction belongs to the [American Indian Wars](#), which lasted from the founding of the country until the last Apache warriors were captured in 1924. But the U.S. war in Afghanistan is the longest of the anachronistic and predictably unwinnable neoimperial wars the U.S. has fought since 1945.

As an Afghan taxi driver in Vancouver told me in 2009,

"We defeated the Persian Empire in the 18th century. We defeated the British in the 19th century. We defeated the Soviet Union in the 20th century. Now, with NATO, we are fighting 28 countries, but we will defeat them too."

I never doubted him for a minute. But why would America's leaders, in their delusions of

empire and obsession with budget-busting weapons technology, ever listen to an Afghan taxi driver?

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Featured image: U.S. Army Sgt. Christian Cisneros takes a moment to speak with his interpreter March 17, 2009, while on a dismount patrol mission near Forward Operating Base Baylough in the Zabul Province of Afghanistan. Cisneros is assigned to Company B, 1st Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment, U.S. Army Europe. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Adam Mancini/Released)

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