

Afghanistan: Deadly Costs of a War for Profit Won by the Taliban

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As the United States and [NATO](#)'s war in Afghanistan struggles to end, most observers and commentators, at least in the West, are still either delusional enough or more likely paid enough, not to publicly recognize a basic evidence: the Taliban are in the process of winning the 20-year war, which is the United States' longest war in the country's relatively brief history.

Some at least pretend to be puzzled by this turn of events. However, all of it, or at least the final outcome, was completely predictable, almost from the start and definitely for at least a decade. When you look at the numbers, it appears that what truly kept the empire and its NATO vassals in Afghanistan was the financial imperative of the military-industrial complex, the imperative of war for profit.

Now that the war in Afghanistan is almost over, we must look at its vertiginous costs: human and financial. Numbers are abstractions that do not carry any weight in emotions. But when the matter becomes macabre war bookkeeping, the numbers become grim, atrocious and loaded with pain, as they accurately tell the story of 20 years of disproportionate and intense suffering imposed on the Afghan people by the occupiers. The tabulation of misery for Afghans will keep echoing long after the invaders, who brought mostly death and destruction, are gone.

First the number of deaths for NATO: since the invasion in 2001, more than 3,500 NATO troops have died, as well as 3,900 US contractors. This total of 7,400, not to minimize it, represents less than 5 percent of the global death toll during the 20-year war. In other words, more than 95 percent of the deaths were Afghans: either Taliban, Afghan army soldiers, or civilians. The Taliban death toll estimate stands at 51,000. Meanwhile, the NATO-trained Afghan army's death toll is currently 66,000. More than 47,000 Afghan civilians are estimated to have died in the conflict. Overall, the [Brown University Costs of War Project](#), which has been doing a stellar job at tracking the nasty war numbers, estimates that in all, between 171,000 and 176,000 people were killed in the war.

Further, the war's side effects include elevated rate of diseases due to malnutrition, lack of clean water, and vastly reduced access to health care. Despite NATO's propaganda

buzzwords about so-called nation building efforts, which in time became the pseudo mission, the life expectancy in Afghanistan is currently 52 years. Every factor correlated to a premature death, such as poverty, malnutrition, poor or no sanitation, and lack of basic health care have been closely associated with the 20-year war.

Let us now focus on the gargantuan financial costs of the war. According to the Pentagon, the US military operations in Afghanistan through two decades have cost \$1.00 trillion. According to the Brown University researchers of the Costs of War project, however, the real cost of the war in Afghanistan is a staggering \$2.26 trillion.

Over the years, many analysts and even people in the four successive US administrations, as well as military commanders, knew that the war in Afghanistan was unwinnable. In its folly, and arrogant ignorance of the historical nature of Afghanistan as “graveyard of empires,” the US [empire](#) and 38 of its vassals embarked in a delusional so-called nation building Afghan project of a massive scale. Of course, because the current empire is [Orwellian](#) in nature, just like in Iraq shortly afterward in 2003, nation building was in fact nation [wrecking](#): a perverse geopolitical strategy of [engineering failed states](#) in order to justify an endless occupation.

The four administrations: Bush, Obama, Trump and now Biden, are all guilty, but they will never be charged for the countless deaths and mayhem their policies created. As matter of fact, they will never publicly make amends and admit their monumental failures. But the answer for this lack of candid remorse might reside elsewhere. In the context of wars for profit, it hardly matters who wins or loses on the battlefields or the number of innocent people who die and are called collateral damage. This might sound cynical, but what really matters is the bottom line: the profit for the shareholders of the [military-industrial complex](#). Many investors, in the United States and elsewhere, have become incredibly wealthy from the \$2.26 trillion “invested” in the Afghanistan war by American taxpayers, largely without their approval or even their knowledge.

I wrote extensively about the Afghanistan/Pakistan war in the 12 years since we started *News Junkie Post*. In 2012, I drew an analogy with the war in Vietnam in my analysis: [“NATO is winning in Afghanistan like the United States was in Vietnam”](#). It was sarcastic but nonetheless correct. The United States had to admit publicly that it had lost the war in Vietnam in a debacle, because at the time some real reporting was still going on. I don’t think that any US administrations, and their mighty NATO allies, will ever admit that they lost their 20-year war against the Taliban. Some of us remember the US’ dramatic exit from the American embassy under siege in Saigon when it officially lost the Vietnam war. It was live, on prime time, for everybody in the world to see. This was quite a contrast from the US military vacating their sprawling Bagram base near Kabul. A few days ago an Afghan army commander described that the US military left their Bagram Air base in the middle of the night, like thieves. They simply shut down electrical power and left behind a vast amount of discarded equipment, supplies such as bottled water, and random trash.

In this de facto defeat of the US empire, isn’t it embarrassing that such a formidable military force like NATO, so advanced in terms of technology, compared to its enemy, would lose to a ragtag army equipped with Kalashnikovs and mostly, either stolen or makeshift, military equipment like home made improvised explosive devices (IED). In this completely asymmetrical warfare the little guys armed with their sheer courage, patience, and remarkable guerrilla-warfare intelligence have prevailed. The ultimate victory of the Taliban,

it has to be called that, should be a lesson for future want-to-be Goliaths, a lesson for neocolonial imperial powers that their occupation schemes do not usually end well.

What kind of arrogance and stupidity made the Orwellian Empire and its NATO associates think that they would surely beat Afghanistan's Pashtuns, considering that Alexander the Great, the British Empire, then the USSR had all failed? The same insane rationale was probably at play in the mind of Adolf Hitler when he thought he could do better than Napoleon against Russia. The near outcome of America longest war is a proof that with organization, skills and pure will power, fighting for one's land and culture against a foreign occupation can make a people unbeatable. There's no doubt in my mind that from now on, nobody will dare to invade the land of the Pashtuns.

At its peak, during the Obama/Biden administration, the United States had 100,000 troops on the ground in Afghanistan. Now many of them must realize that they went there for nothing. Or even worse, maybe they came back home with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and without a leg or an arm. President Biden has already pushed back the deadline for a complete withdrawal of the US troops from May 1 to September 11, 2021. There are still around 7,000 allied troops in Afghanistan, half of them Americans. Let us hope that the nefarious and powerful military-industrial complex doesn't find a way to whisper in Biden's ear that the US military should just stay a little bit longer, or maybe install a CIA drone base in Pakistan. While the US and NATO cannot claim victory, they can still wrongly claim "Mission Accomplished" and leave entirely. The sooner the better for a land they wrecked.

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