

# The Afghanistan Fiasco and the Decline and Fall of the American Military

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Region: [Asia](#)

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In-depth Report: [AFGHANISTAN](#)

*A devastating investigative report was [published](#) in the Washington Post on December 9<sup>th</sup>. Dubbed the “Afghanistan Papers” in a nod to the Vietnam War’s famous “Pentagon Papers,” the report relied on thousands of documents to similarly expose how the US government at the presidential level across three administrations, acting in collaboration with the military brass and civilian bureaucracy, deliberately and systematically lied repeatedly to the public and media about the situation in Afghanistan.*

*Officials from the Bush, Obama and Trump administrations have all surged additional troops into Afghanistan while also regularly overstating the “success” that the United States was attaining in stabilizing and democratizing the country. While they were lying, the senior officers and government officials understood clearly that the war was, in fact, unwinnable.*

The story should have been featured all across the US as Afghanistan continues to kill Americans and much larger numbers of Afghans while also draining billions of dollars from the United States Treasury, but the mainstream media was largely unresponsive, preferring to cover the impeachment saga.

Rather more responsive were the families of Army Chief Warrant Officer Second Class David C. Knadle, 33, of Tarrant, Texas, and Chief Warrant Officer Second Class Kirk T. Fuchigami Jr., 25, of Keaau, Hawaii. Both were killed in a helicopter crash on November 20<sup>th</sup> in Afghanistan’s Logar province while assisting troops on the ground, [according to a Pentagon press release](#). They were participating in what was characteristically dubbed Operation Freedom’s Sentinel. Both men were assigned to the 1st Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division in Fort Hood, Texas. The Taliban took credit for the downing of the chopper, but the Army is still investigating the cause.

Knadle and Fuchigami are only the most recent of the more than 2,400 American service members who have been killed in Afghanistan since October 2001, together with 20,589 wounded and an estimated 110,000 Afghan dead. In the wake of the *Post*’s report, Daniel Ellsberg, who leaked the Pentagon Papers in 1974, [told](#) a CNN reporter that the Pentagon and Afghanistan Papers exposed the same governmental dysfunction: “The presidents and the generals had a pretty realistic view of what they were up against, which they did not want to admit to the American people.”

*The New Republic* [observes how](#)

“The documents are an indictment not only of one aspect of American foreign policy, but also of the US’s entire policymaking apparatus. They reveal a bipartisan consensus to lie about what was actually happening in Afghanistan: chronic waste and chronic corruption, one ill-conceived development scheme after another, resulting in a near-unmitigated failure to bring peace and prosperity to the country. Both parties had reason to engage in the cover-up. For the Bush administration, Afghanistan was a key component in the war on terror. For the Obama administration, Afghanistan was the ‘good war’ that stood in contrast to the nightmare in Iraq.”

The Afghan War’s true costs have never been precisely calculated, though they certainly exceed \$1 trillion and counting. The documents relied upon for the *Post* report include more than 2,000 pages of confidential interviews with people who played a direct role in the war, including soldiers and diplomats, as well as civilian aid workers and Afghan officials. Many of the interviews were initially carried out by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR). The *Post* divided the interviews and supporting documentation into subject categories that demonstrate how the situation in Afghanistan began to deteriorate as soon as the United States followed up on its rapid invasion with a plan for nation building. Resorting to the usual American expedient, the occupiers flooded the country with money, which meant that the only thing blooming on the thin soil was corruption, apart from the poppies that have made Afghanistan the world’s leading supplier of opium.

One contractor who was involved in nation building described how he was required to spend \$3 million daily for projects in an Afghan district roughly the size of a US county. He asked a visiting congressman if he could be authorized to spend that much money in the US [“\[The lawmaker\] said hell no. ‘Well, sir, that’s what you just obligated us to spend and I’m doing it for communities that live in mud huts with no windows.’”](#)

In another interview the report cites Lieutenant General Douglas Lute, the White House Afghan war czar during the Bush and Obama administrations, who told the interviewers in 2015. [“We were devoid of a fundamental understanding of Afghanistan — we didn’t know what we were doing,”](#) later adding [“What are we trying to do here? We didn’t have the foggiest notion of what we were undertaking.”](#)

Army Colonel Bob Crowley, who served in Kabul in 2013-4, described how at headquarters [“Every data point was altered to present the best picture possible,”](#) adding also how [“Surveys, for instance, were totally unreliable but reinforced that everything we were doing was right and we became a self-licking ice cream cone.”](#)

Part of the problem with Afghanistan was the rotation of American soldiers in and then out after one year or less, just as they were learning about the country and the problems they faced. It has led to the joke that the United States has not fought an eighteen-year war in Afghanistan: it has fought a one-year war eighteen times.

The *Post* investigative report coincides with an interesting deconstruction [of the US military and how it operates](#). David Swanson of [World BEYOND War](#) provides a lengthy review of West Point Professor Tim Bakken’s new book *The Cost of Loyalty: Dishonesty, Hubris, and Failure in the US Military*. Per Swanson, the book “traces a path of corruption, barbarism, violence, and unaccountability that makes its way from the United States’ military academies (West Point, Annapolis, Colorado Springs) to the top ranks of the US military and US governmental policy, and from there into a broader US culture that, in turn, supports the

subculture of the military and its leaders. The US Congress and presidents have ceded tremendous power to generals. The State Department and even the US Institute of Peace are subservient to the military. The corporate media and the public help maintain this arrangement with their eagerness to denounce anyone who opposes the generals. Even opposing giving free weapons to Ukraine is now quasi-treasonous.”

Bakken even disputes the widely held view that the military academies have high academic standards. He describes how the “system” pays to get potential athletes and accepts students nominated by congressmen commensurate with donations made to fund re-election campaigns. Swanson sums it up by observing how the academies offer “a community college-level education only with more hazing, violence, and tamping down of curiosity. West Point takes soldiers and declares them to be professors, which works roughly as well as declaring them to be relief workers or nation builders or peace keepers. The school parks ambulances nearby in preparation for violent rituals. Boxing is a required subject. Women are five times more likely to be sexually assaulted at the three military academies than at other US universities.”

Bakken concludes that appreciating the fundamental structural flaws in the US armed forces “leads to a clearer understanding of the deficiencies in the military and how America can lose wars.” In fact, he does not even seek to identify a war that the United States has won since World War 2 in spite of the country being nearly constantly engaged in conflict.

Together the Bakken book and the Afghanistan Papers reveal just how much the American people have been brainwashed by their leaders into believing a perpetual warfare national narrative that is more fiction than fact. Donald Trump may have actually appreciated that the voters were tired of the wars and was elected on that basis, but he has completely failed to deliver on his promise to retrench. It suggests that America will remain in Afghanistan for the foreseeable future and the inevitable next war, wherever it might be, will be another failure, no matter who is elected in 2020.

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