

Authoritative Rejection of Afghanistan War

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The last time I was on Laura Flanders's GRIT tv I argued that the American public opposed the occupation of Afghanistan, but another guest — some Washington, D.C., "progressive" — argued that this had no relevance, since the American public didn't know anything about Afghanistan.

When the RAND Corporation held a forum on Afghanistan recently on Capitol Hill, Zbigniew Brzezinski claimed that it was uncontroversial that US troops had to stay in Afghanistan. I pointed him to polls of Americans, and he replied that Americans get fatigued and don't know any better.

When I spoke to a philosophy department at a university this month, a number of the professors objected to my advocacy of majority-rule on the grounds that experts often know best.

Let's set aside for a moment the ludicrous propaganda that maintains that the reason we occupy other people's countries is to impose democracy on them. Let's assume we're imposing the rule of elite experts. Even so, even on those terms, here are some possible responses to this line of thinking.

1.-While spokespeople for the U.S. military (including television news experts) are certainly the experts at war, they are not the experts at peace. If the question is one of choosing between war and peace, or deciding whether warlike or peacelike means will best reach some desired end, then why only include one type of expert opinion?

2.-While U.S. experts on war and peace could provide two different views, there are experts, including historians, from around the world whose knowledge should be utilized. And the experts on Afghanistan ought, by any understanding, to include the Afghan people. If the US public is irrelevant because it does not know Afghanistan (and somehow this is an argument for bombing the place rather than refraining from doing so), surely the Afghan public knows something about their nation. And they want the occupation ended. How can we so easily dismiss THAT expert opinion?

3.-Don't trust Afghan opinion? Want to save Afghanistan from the Afghans? Well, what about this: Howard Hart, a 25-year CIA veteran who ran operations in Afghanistan for three-and-a-half years during the Cold War, spoke at the University of Virginia yesterday and argued that the United States should withdraw from Afghanistan. He said that the original goal had supposedly been to destroy al Qaeda, which had long since left, and that creating a legitimate government (something most people and the law hold that a foreign occupation can NEVER do) would require hundreds of thousands of troops, cost "umpteen billion" dollars, and still be next to impossible. Watch three former high-ranking CIA officials say the

same thing, and a lot more worth watching, at <http://rethinkafghanistan.com>

4.-Too out-dated for you? The current U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, General Karl W. Eikenberry, who was responsible for building and training the Afghan security forces from 2002 to 2003, and who was top U.S. military commander in Afghanistan from 2005 to 2007, has told President Obama he opposes sending more troops. He argues for sending civilians to assist with agriculture and other useful projects that would give Afghans an alternative to violence. This is a direction supported by US activist groups that have visited Afghanistan and studied the problem, such as <http://jobsforafghans.org>

5.-New York Times reporter David Rohde was held hostage for seven months by the Taliban in Afghanistan, and upon release reported on what motivates Afghans to engage in violence. The reasons he provided suggested that (as with most foreign occupations in any other time or place) the occupation was motivating the violent resistance to it rather than helping to ease unrelated tensions:

“Some of the consequences of Washington’s antiterrorism policies had galvanized the Taliban. Commanders fixated on the deaths of Afghan, Iraqi and Palestinian civilians in military airstrikes, as well as the American detention of Muslim prisoners who had been held for years without being charge. . . . They said large numbers of civilians had been killed in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Palestinian territories in aerial bombings. Muslim prisoners had been physically abused and sexually humiliated in Iraq. Scores of men had been detained in Cuba and Afghanistan for up to seven years without charges. To Americans, these episodes were aberrations. To my captors, they were proof that the United States was a hypocritical and duplicitous power that flouted international law. When I told them I was an innocent civilian who should be released, they responded that the United States had held and tortured Muslims in secret detention centers for years. Commanders said they themselves had been imprisoned, their families ignorant of their fate. Why, they asked, should they treat me differently?”

6. The senior U.S. civilian diplomat in Zabul province, a former Marine Corps captain with combat experience in Iraq named Matthew Hoh, not only agrees with the U.S. Ambassador that escalating the war in Afghanistan makes no sense. He resigned in September in protest of the continued occupation. He wrote in his resignation letter:

“The U.S. and NATO presence and operations in Pashtun valleys and villages, as well as Afghan army and police units that are led and composed of non-Pashtun soldiers and police, provide an occupation force against which the insurgency is justified. In both RC East and South, I have observed that the bulk of the insurgency fights not for the white banner of the Taliban, but rather against the presence of foreign soldiers and taxes imposed by an unrepresentative government in Kabul. The United States military presence in Afghanistan greatly contributes to the legitimacy and strategic message of the Pashtun insurgency. In a like manner our backing of the Afghan government in its current form continues to distance the government from the people. . . . Our support for this kind of government, coupled with a misunderstanding of the insurgency’s true nature, reminds me horribly of our involvement with South Vietnam.”

7. A career diplomat and former Army Colonel who helped reopen the U.S. embassy in Kabul, Ann Wright, similarly resigned in protest of the invasion of Iraq in 2003. She now agrees with Hoh’s assessment on Afghanistan. It is to such authorities, who have been right

years ahead of any permissible schedule, that we should turn for guidance. Also of note, the United Nations has withdrawn much of its international staff and threatened to withdraw entirely from Afghanistan. NATO allies are scheduling the end of their participation as well.

8. U.S. President Barack Obama's national security adviser, James Jones, says there is no guarantee that sending troops to Afghanistan would accomplish anything useful, and that they could just be "swallowed up". Is the National Security Advisor's advice worthless? What about Vice President Biden who never saw a war he didn't like? He doesn't like this one and wants to move it somewhere else (like Pakistan).

9. Mikhail Gorbachev has some experience with occupations of Afghanistan. He advises withdrawal.

10. Increasingly, U.S. military veterans are advocating for withdrawal, and — in small but rapidly growing numbers — active duty soldiers (in the UK as well as the US) are refusing to comply with the illegal order to participate. If the military is an authority, are its members — rather than its top commanders alone — not a part of that authority?

11. The money to pay back the loans and the interest on those loans that are used to fund this war must come from the American people. There is no higher authority on where the American people choose to spend their money than the American people. So, at some point we must return to them as the rightful deciders.

12. Those who opposed attacking Afghanistan in the first place, including Congresswoman Barbara Lee, and those who opposed attacking Iraq as well, included long-time diplomats, historians, public commentators, journalists, bloggers, activists, politicians, and scholars. The extraordinary degree to which they got things right is routinely treated as reason to exclude them from public debate. We take as authoritative the opinions of people who are usually wrong, but censor the latest views of those who are usually right. We do this at our peril. Instead, we would be well advised to get some real news from RealNews.com: <http://tr.im/ETuV> And if we have to watch television, watch Bill Moyers who says he would support a draft if it would end these wars. Or listen to Norman Solomon, Ray McGovern, Tom Hayden, Gareth Porter, and all the valuable reports not shown on Fox or MSNBC: <http://afterdowningstreet.org/taxonomy/term/110>

13. Ought not the highest authority for non-criminals to be the law? It is illegal to invade and occupy other nations. It is illegal to target civilians. It is illegal to use depleted uranium. It is illegal to imprison people without charge or trial. It is illegal to torture. An unelected government supported by a foreign occupying army has no legitimacy. The damage we are doing to the rule of law cannot be overstated. The United Nations has warned the United States about its ongoing illegal use of drones.

14. Just ask some of the more courageous members of the Afghan Parliament, who have been locally elected. Ask Malalai Joya.

15. Ask experts on occupations and insurgencies like William Polk, who says the United States should withdraw.

16. Ask Congress, where members are speaking out for withdrawal, signing bills in support of exit plans and against escalation, and committing to voting No on any funding bills to continue the wars in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and

Iraq: <http://afterdowningstreet.org/whipwars> Even former Congressman Charlie Wilson says: Get out of Afghanistan. Even Congressman David Obey has expressed concern, and he chairs the committee that writes the checks.

17. Shouldn't reverse experts be considered as well? Those pushing to continue and escalate our wars have been endlessly wrong and indisputably dishonest. Shouldn't any elite in-the-know expert think twice before agreeing with Dick Cheney?

I'm not accepting the notion of just rule by experts. I favor majority rule, with minority rights protected, and freedom of the press made real. My point is that even on its own terms defending the wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan and Iraq as validated by experts is a miserable failure.

David Swanson is the author of the new book "Daybreak: Undoing the Imperial Presidency and Forming a More Perfect Union" by Seven Stories Press. You can order it and find out when tour will be in your town: <http://davidswanson.org/book>.

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