

# Biden Lies (Again) as He Covertly Continues the U.S. Forever War Against the Afghan People

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Global Research, January 19, 2022

[CovertAction Magazine](#)

Region: [Asia, USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#)

In-depth Report: [AFGHANISTAN](#)

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*Over the past few months, U.S. lawmakers, the Afghan government, and the international community have called on Washington to stop strangling the Afghan economy as its people continue to suffer from a U.S.-created humanitarian crisis. On December 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Biden administration effectively rejected those calls, [opting](#) instead for [half-measures](#) that will do little to counter the effects of stringent [economic sanctions](#) imposed on the Taliban or to improve the material well-being of the Afghan people.*

## Sanctions in Context

Contrary to the narrative of U.S. politicians and journalists, the August 2021 withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces from Afghanistan did not mark the end of the United States’ so-called “forever war” but rather a shift in U.S. policy—from direct military intervention and occupation to one based on economic sanctions and indirect political subversion. Although the tactics changed, the goal is the same: the accumulation of wealth and power through class warfare against the Afghan people.

Just days after Kabul fell to the Taliban on August 15<sup>th</sup>, Washington [took measures](#) to turn off the flow of funds to the new government and paralyze the Afghan banking system. The Treasury Department quickly issued a freeze order on nearly [\\$9.5 billion](#) of the Afghan Central Bank’s assets held in U.S. financial institutions, including the New York Federal Reserve Bank.

Although the Taliban was entitled to receive more than [\\$460 million](#) from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in currency reserves known as Special Drawing Rights, or SDRs, the U.S. directed the IMF to block those funds as well.

President Biden has also ensured that [\\$1.3 billion](#) of Afghan funds held in international accounts remain frozen, including funds denominated in euros and British pounds and those held by the Swiss-based Bank for International Sanctions.



Protests against U.S. sanctions outside U.S. embassy in Kabul. [Source: [theintercept.com](https://theintercept.com)]

Notably, these punitive measures are in addition to the [pre-existing economic sanctions](#) that the U.S. has imposed on the Taliban, which began in 1999 under President Bill Clinton and which President George W. Bush ramped up following the 9/11 attack as part of the U.S.'s newly created counterterrorism sanctions program, known as the Specially Designated Global Terrorist list. The Obama and Trump administrations followed suit by imposing over 100 and 23 sanction orders, respectively, against Taliban-related targets.

Despite purported exemptions for humanitarian aid, the lack of clarity under U.S. law deters financial institutions from processing such transactions out of fear of violating U.S. sanctions—which not only freeze all assets associated with the Taliban; they subject any individual or entity that conducts a transaction involving the Taliban to criminal liability. The ubiquity of U.S. dollars and financial institutions in international commerce provides the U.S. with virtually [global jurisdiction](#).

### **Horrible Consequences of Sanctions**

Decades of U.S. occupation and war have left Afghanistan a poor country [dependent on external sources](#) to fund public spending. No longer able to rely on brute military and political force to protect the interests of Western capital in Afghanistan, U.S. strategists understand that seizing the central bank's money and cutting all international aid gives Washington powerful [leverage](#) against the Taliban, all while inflicting maximum pain on the Afghan people, who continue to be relegated to "[starving pawns in big power games](#)."

The horrific and totally foreseeable consequences of these sanctions have, so far, been well documented by international humanitarian organizations, even if they are reluctant to depict the United States as culpable.

On October 25<sup>th</sup>, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization and World Food Program published a [report](#) urging humanitarian assistance, warning that Afghanistan is on a "countdown to catastrophe." According to the report, more than 50% of Afghans will face "crisis" or "emergency" levels of acute food insecurity, including over 3 million children

under the age of five.

On November 22<sup>nd</sup>, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) published a [report](#) warning that Afghanistan's financial and bank payment systems are "in disarray" and on the verge of collapse. The UNDP report, citing the IMF, predicts the Afghan economy could contract by 30% for 2021-2022.



Afghanistan is teetering toward famine under Taliban rule. [Source: [asiatimes.com](https://www.asiatimes.com)]

On December 6<sup>th</sup>, the International Crisis Group issued a more scathing [report](#), warning that the "hunger and destitution" caused by "economic strangulation," imposed by the West in response to the Taliban takeover, could "kill more Afghans than all the bombs and bullets of the past two decades."

In other words, U.S. policy of intentionally starving the Afghan people through economic sanctions on Afghanistan is going as planned. As [many predicted](#), blocking funds from the Taliban and curtailing foreign aid and assistance would lead to a rapid financial meltdown and exacerbate the ongoing famine plaguing Afghanistan.

### **U.S. Retaliates for Taliban's Military Success**

Despite the Taliban's success in [forcing](#) the U.S. government to the negotiating table in Doha and then ousting the U.S. military from Afghanistan, or rather, [because of that success](#), Washington has made it clear that it has no plans to respect Afghanistan's sovereignty. Indeed, the Biden administration's response to pleas that the asset freeze be lifted demonstrates the hypocrisy and callousness of U.S. foreign policy.

On November 17, 2021, as [reported](#) by Tolo News, **Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi**, Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, sent a [letter](#) to the U.S. Congress calling for the return of Afghan assets, correctly noting that "the fundamental challenge of our people is financial security, and the roots of this concern lead back to the freezing of assets of our people by the American government."

The U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan, **Thomas West**, rejected the Taliban's request in a series of revealing [tweets](#). West's remarks effectively admitted that the dire

situation pre-dates the Taliban takeover and confirmed that the United States was preventing “critical” international aid from reaching Afghanistan as retribution for the Taliban’s military success, while recognizing that Afghanistan’s “economy [is] enormously dependent on aid, including for basic services.”

Further, in a fashion typical of bourgeois idealism, which values words and appearances over substance and material reality, West condescendingly lectured the Taliban that “[l]egitimacy and support must be earned” and confirmed that the United States would consider lifting the murderous sanctions if the Taliban only learned to “respect the rights of minorities, women and girls.”

The irony of Washington’s position of respecting humanitarian rights by denying humanitarian aid was not lost on Muttaqi, who, in [response](#) to West’s tweets, questioned the tortured logic: “The U.S. froze our assets and then told us that it will provide us humanitarian aid. What does it mean?” Muttaqi reiterated the demand to release Afghanistan’s assets: “The assets should be freed immediately. The Americans don’t have any military front with us now. What is the reason for freezing the assets? The assets don’t belong to the Mujahideen (Islamic Emirate) but to the people of Afghanistan.”

In tacit acknowledgment that the state needs legitimacy to stabilize its rule, the U.S.-driven humanitarian crisis has prompted members of Congress to ask the Biden administration to reconsider certain aspects of its sanctions policy in light of the dire warnings issued by the UNDP and World Food Program.



Children collect food waste in dumpster near Kabul airport. [Source: [English.aawsat.com](https://www.english.aawsat.com)]

On December 15<sup>th</sup>, a bipartisan group of 39 lawmakers wrote a [letter](#) to the State and Treasury departments calling on the Biden administration to “allow international financial institutions to inject the necessary economic capital into Afghanistan while avoiding the transfer of money to the Taliban-led government” and designate a “private Afghan or third-country bank” as a central bank. The lawmakers also recommended, among other things, the release of the \$9.5 billion of Afghan assets—but only if sent “to an appropriate United Nations agency” and only if used “to pay teacher salaries and provide meals to children in schools, so long as girls can continue to attend.”

On December 20<sup>th</sup>, a group of 46 lawmakers led by House progressives wrote a similar [letter](#) to President Biden, explicitly linking the “U.S. confiscation of \$9.4 billion” of Afghan assets to “contributing to soaring inflation” and “plunging the country...deeper into economic and humanitarian crisis.” Although the House progressives struck a harsher tone, they made the same requests as the December 19<sup>th</sup> letter, urging President Biden to allow Afghanistan’s central bank to access its reserves, consistent with proposals by “[c]urrent and former Afghan central bank officials appointed by the U.S.-supported government” and supported by “private sector associations such as the Afghan Chamber of Commerce and Investment and the Afghanistan Banks Association.”

This congressional pushback, tepid as it is, also reflects an inherent tension in the U.S. use of sanctions: While [economic warfare](#) is a necessary tool of U.S. foreign policy, sanctions are not always good for business in the short term. Afghanistan had been a source of wealth for the imperialist bourgeoisie for the past two decades, and now certain sectors of the capitalist class apparently want back in.

Still, the Biden administration has shown no sign of easing the sanctions. In fact, the Biden administration is [considering](#) permanently depriving the Afghan people of the funds needed to combat the current humanitarian crisis, by transferring those funds instead to [U.S. plaintiffs](#) with outstanding default judgments against the Taliban. That is what two groups of judgment creditors have argued to U.S. federal judges. (Those cases are captioned *Havlish et al. v. Bin-Laden et al.*, No. 03 Civ. 9848, and *Doe v. The Taliban et al.*, No. 20 Misc. 740, and are pending in the Southern District of New York before Judges Daniels and Failla, respectively.)

Although its formal statement is not due until January 18, 2022, the Biden administration seems willing to go along with the plan—the only apparent obstacle is how to seize the Afghan funds without recognizing the Taliban as the legitimate Afghan government. Press Secretary Jen Psaki has [twice cited](#) that ongoing litigation as the primary reason for maintaining the asset freeze.

Following its imperial playbook, the U.S. sanctions imposed on Afghanistan are aimed at destabilizing Afghan civil society, making daily life so unbearable that the Afghan people eventually blame the Taliban for their misery, providing the United States and its proxies an opening to enact regime change.

Similar to sanctions imposed on [Venezuela, Cuba, Iran, Zimbabwe, Eritrea, Nicaragua](#), and many others, the sanctions on Afghanistan are having their intended effect, which is to deprive the masses of essential goods and services as punishment whenever a government refuses to surrender its nation’s resources and sovereignty to the demands of U.S. and European capital.

Now more than ever, those in the imperial core must demand the end of U.S.-imposed sanctions against the Afghan people and oppressed people all over the world.

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