

Paralysing Afghanistan: Washington's Regime Change Agenda

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Nation states are habitually doomed to defeat their best interests. Conditions of mad instability are fostered. Arms sales take place, regimes get propped up or abandoned, and the people under them endure and suffer, awaiting the next criminal regime change.

Nothing is more counter-intuitive than the effort to isolate, cripple and strangulate the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. For all the talk about terrorism and concerns about failing regimes, the Biden Administration is doing every bit to make this regime fail and encourage the outcome it decries. Along the way, a humanitarian catastrophe is in the making.

Prior to the fall of Kabul to the Taliban in August 2021, foreign aid constituted a mainstay of the economy, covering roughly three-quarters of public spending. After August 15, an almost immediate cessation of funding took place, led by the United States, and those less than noble institutions, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. But it did not stop there. Billions of dollars in Afghanistan's own funds were frozen. (For the US alone, this amounted to \$9.4 billion.)

This particularly nasty bit of statecraft [was justified](#) by UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson as necessary to coerce the Taliban into good conduct. Releasing such reserves was “no guarantee that the Taliban will actually use it effectively to solve problems.”

Johnson should know, given his government's profligate tendency of waste and dissoluteness during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ever one to relish hypocrisy, he claimed that Britain and its allies needed “to ensure that that country does not slip back into being a haven for terrorism and a narco-state.” Ironically, the sanctions and asset freezing regime will be an incitement to just that.

The move did not only paralyse the Central Bank of Afghanistan but impose dramatic limits on the use of bank accounts by Afghans. Loans have been left unrepaid, the amount in deposits has declined, and the liquidity crisis has become acute. In November 2021, the UN Development Programme [observed](#) that the economic cost of a banking collapse in the

country “would be colossal.”

The UNDP also remarked that the banking situation had to be “resolved quickly to improve Afghanistan’s limited production capacity and prevent the banking system from collapsing.” Unfortunately, the organisation’s Afghanistan head, Abdallah al Dardari, was wishing to do the impossible. “We need to find a way to make sure that if we support the banking sector, we are not supporting the Taliban.”

This foggy-headed reasoning typifies much policy towards Afghanistan, dooming humanitarian programs and other measures of assistance. It also renders Washington, and its allies, culpable in fostering famine, starvation, and death. As long as they can focus their attention on the wickedness, and lack of competence, of the Taliban regime, this monumental bit of callous gangsterism can be justified. The Afghan civilian can thereby be divorced from the government official disliked and disapproved of by foreign powers.

With pestilential force, this contorted line of thinking finds its way into the heart of the US State Department, which has [expressed its desire](#) to cooperate with the UNDP and other institutions “to find ways to offer liquidity, to infuse, to see to it that the people of Afghanistan can take advantage of international support in ways that don’t flow into the coffers of the Taliban”.

In January, the crisis was becoming so grave as to compel the UN Secretary General António Guterres [to describe](#) a landscape of catastrophe: the selling of babies to feed siblings, freezing health facilities overrun by crowds of malnourished children and people “burning their possessions to keep warm.” Without a full-fledged effort by the international community, the Secretary warned, “virtually every man, woman and child in Afghanistan could face acute poverty.”

A modest request was made: that Afghanistan receive \$5 billion in aid. The UN chief has also urged the release of international funding to pay the salaries of public sector workers and aid the distribution of health care, education “and other vital services.”

The international community, or at least a portion of it, is certainly not listening. Sanctions continue to be the mainstay of the treatment of Afghanistan, as orchestrated through the UN Security Council. Perversely, this is done, [in the words](#) of the Australian Department of Trade and Foreign Affairs to “promote the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan.” This is darkly witty stuff indeed, given that sanctions are, by their very purpose, designed to destabilise and target governments, while impoverishing the populace and creating desperation.

What President Biden has done this month is tinker with the freezing order by decreeing the release of \$7 billion. But there is a huge catch: half of the funds will be reserved to satisfy legal claims brought by the families of US 9/11 victims; the rest will be placed in a designated humanitarian fund for Afghanistan. In doing so, a foreign government has effectively determined how to deal with a country’s national assets and foreign reserves, effectively initiating a de facto theft.

Many a famine and societal collapse has been a product of engineered circumstances. “This impending mass murder of Afghan civilians,” argue the undersigned luminaries of a [note published](#) in CounterPunch, “is preventable.” For those on a list including Noam Chomsky, Richard Falk and Tariq Ali, the Biden Administration should “immediately end these cruel

and inhumane policies by lifting the sanctions, unfreezing Afghanistan’s foreign assets, and increasing humanitarian aid.”

For those wedded to the canard and moral excitement of the “rules-based” order, causing a degree of horrendous harm comes as second nature. Having lost Afghanistan, as every great power has tended to do, revenge is being sought.

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