

Why the United States Will Not Leave Afghanistan Voluntarily

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In 2013 Tom Engelhardt wrote, referring to the United States presence in Afghanistan, Iraq and Yemen, where at eight United States air strikes had killed almost 300 wedding guests: "we have become a nation of wedding crashers, the uninvited guests who arrived under false pretenses, tore up the place, offered nary and apology, and refused to go home."

That was never truer than in Afghanistan. Contrary to widespread news reports, the United States did not begin its involvement in Afghanistan with the invasion and occupation of the country in October 2001. Its modern focus on Afghanistan can be traced back at least to the 1970s.

In the late 1970s Afghanistan was ruled by a relatively secular regime. The last King, Mohammad Zahir Shah had been deposed in a 1973 coup and a republic established. Shah was replaced by Mohammad Daoud Khan who ruled from July 1973 to April 1978 when he was assassinated. His replacement, Nur Mohammed Taraki lasted until September 1979 when he was also assassinated, a fate that also befell his successor Hafizullah Amin.

The turmoil was not entirely domestic related. Throughout the 1970s, Afghanistan's only real foreign friend was the Soviet Union. This was a temptation too great for the Americans to resist. United States President Jimmy Carter's National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski persuaded Carter to support an insurrection against the Taraki Government. To this end, foreign insurgents were to be trained in Pakistan, armed by the Americans, and largely financed by Saudi Arabia.

These insurgents were then infiltrated not only into Afghanistan, but also the Muslim dominant Central Asian republics of the Soviet Union, and Xinjiang province of China, also with a large Muslim population.

The objective, as Brzezinski disclosed in his book *The Grand Chessboard*, (1997) was "to give the Soviet Union it's own Vietnam." The program to train and infiltrate terrorists into Afghanistan, Xinjiang and the Central Asian republics was code named Operation Cyclone. This was the origin of the group that came to be known as al Qaeda, which in Arabic means "the list." The members of that list were then known as Mujihideen, foreign fighters that could be relied upon to pursue goals consistent with the objectives of United States geopolitics.

One of the leaders of this fighting force was Osama bin Laden a Saudi Arabian from a wealthy Saudi family.

Brzezinski's task was at least partially successful. The Soviet leader Brezhnev eventually agreed to the multiple requests of the Afghanistan government for assistance, and dispatched troops to Afghanistan. This has been falsely depicted as a Soviet "invasion" ever since. Militarily and politically it was a disaster for the Soviet Union. The last Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev ordered the withdrawal of the combat troops in May 1988 and it was successfully concluded by the following February.

Political instability continued however, with a bitter civil war that eventually led to the formation of the Taliban government. That government never had full control of all of Afghanistan's territory, with significant portions under the control of sundry warlords, particularly in the north of the country. The Taliban's singular achievement was to slash opium production to a tiny fraction of the volume that had produced more than 90% of the world's heroin supply.

The events of 11 September 2001 gave the United States its excuse to once again focus on 'regime change' in Kabul. What the western media resolutely fails to tell its readers/listeners is that the decision to invade Afghanistan was in fact taken in July 2001 when the Taliban Government refused to award the contract for a gas pipeline from the enormously resource-rich Caspian basin through Afghanistan to an American company, and instead gave to an Argentinian company Bidas.

Afghanistan was, for the Americans, the only feasible route for the pipeline as alternative routes were through Iran, Russia or China, none of whom were geopolitically feasible for the United States.

The ostensible public reason for the invasion and occupation was the alleged refusal of the Taliban Government to hand over Osama bin Laden, the alleged ringleader of the 9/11. The evidence was produced they were willing to hand bin Laden over to an international tribunal for trial.

That evidence was never forthcoming. There were two reasons for this: the evidence is non-existent; and more importantly for present purposes, the decision to invade had already been made. Regardless of what the Afghanistan government did or did not do, their fate had already been determined.

Now, nearly 17 years later, the Americans and their allies such as Australia are still there. As Engelhardt said, they arrived uninvited, trashed the place, and refused to leave.

The longer they stay, the hollower the original justification is revealed to be the case. The public is still fed the same nonsensical excuses, such as training the Afghan troops to be able to be responsible for their own security. Evidence of 'ghost' troops, rampant corruption and a manifest unwillingness as well as an inability to be an effective fighting force has done nothing to diminish the propaganda.

Rather than bringing 'peace and stability', training Afghans to a mythical self-sufficiency, or helping rebuild Afghanistan's shattered infrastructure, the time is long past for an honest appraisal of what western Allied forces are really trying to achieve in Afghanistan. There are a number of motives that readily reveal themselves.

The first relates to Afghanistan's geography. It is strategically located in close proximity to, or bordering upon, the United States' designated enemies, China, Iran and Russia. A map of

US military bases shows that they closely follow the pipeline route, and are readily accessible to the poppy fields that once again produce more than 90% of the world's heroin.

The refining of opium into heroin requires imported chemicals, and those are flown into Afghanistan on planes operated by the occupying NATO forces. This should not come as a surprise, despite being totally suppressed by the western media. Peter Dale Scott (*American War Machine*, 2010) and Alfred McCoy (*Politics of Heroin* New ed. 2003) have long pointed out the central role of drug trafficking in the financing of CIA clandestine operations.

Those military bases have also fulfilled a further role as 'black sites' where alleged terrorists are illegally rendered, to be tortured, indefinitely imprisoned, or simply disappeared.

A second reason relates to Afghanistan's resource wealth. One of the least publicized facts about Afghanistan is it is enormous potential as a source of oil, gas, precious metals, precious stones, and perhaps most significantly rare earth minerals.

A number of US geological survey reports in recent years have conservatively estimated Afghanistan's resources and those areas to be in excess of \$3 trillion. It is hardly surprising given this potential bonanza, which Trump himself described as being sufficient to pay for Afghanistan's own occupation, that the United States and its allies "refuse to go home."

The third factor relates to the geopolitical changes occurring in the region. As corrupt and incompetent as the current Afghanistan government is, it is still able to discern that the continued US occupation is a road to nowhere. Afghanistan has, since June 2012 had observer status of the Shanghai Corporation Organisation, rapidly emerging as one of the most influential groups in the Eurasian region.

The SCO grouping poses a progressively stronger challenge to the US centred geopolitical world, and the US is not giving up its previous unipolar status without a fight.

The Mujihideen of the 1970s and 1980s, now morphed into various guises but still under US direction, is being used to destabilize and disrupt those same nations targeted during those earlier decades. It is one of the major reasons why the SCO has security related issues as a central focus.

On 4 September 2018 the Taliban will be participating in Russian sponsored peace talks in Moscow. Twelve countries and the Taliban were invited, but the United States and Afghanistan governments have announced that they will not be attending. The Afghan government says it prefers "direct talks" with the Taliban, although given the realities of the presence of foreign occupying troops, it is difficult to see how direct talks will produce a meaningful result while their status remains undetermined. It is also an open question as to how freely the Afghan government decision was made.

The Americans have also declined to take part, saying that the talks were "unlikely to yield any progress" toward a settlement. Rather obviously, progress is difficult if one of the principal players refuses to participate. The more likely real reason for American non-participation is that they do not control the agenda, the venue, or the outcome. Rather than being part of the solution, they remain instead a major part of the problem.

After nearly 17 years of occupation, destruction, civil war and a manifest absence of progress, it is clearly way past the time when there was a fresh approach with Afghanistan's needs being the top priority. For the reasons set up above that has not been the case for the

past several decades. Progress is unlikely to be achieved as long as the uninvited guests refuse to go home.

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