

GUEST ESSAY

I Commanded Afghan Troops This Year. We Were Betrayed.

Aug. 25, 2021

By Sami Sadat

General Sadat is a commander in the Afghan National Army.

For the past three and a half months, I fought day and night, nonstop, in southern Afghanistan's Helmand Province against an escalating and bloody Taliban offensive. Coming under frequent attack, we held the Taliban back and inflicted heavy casualties. Then I was called to Kabul to command Afghanistan's special forces. But the Taliban already were entering the city; it was too late.

I am exhausted. I am frustrated. And I am angry.

President Biden said last week that "American troops cannot and should not be fighting in a war and dying in a war that Afghan forces are not willing to fight for themselves."

It's true that the Afghan Army lost its will to fight. But that's because of the growing sense of abandonment by our American partners and the disrespect and disloyalty reflected in Mr. Biden's tone and words over the past few months. The Afghan Army is not without blame. It had its problems — cronyism, bureaucracy — but we ultimately stopped fighting because our partners already had.

It pains me to see Mr. Biden and Western officials are blaming the Afghan Army for collapsing without mentioning the underlying reasons that happened. Political divisions in Kabul and Washington strangled the army and limited our ability to do our jobs. Losing combat logistical support that the United States had provided for years crippled us, as did a lack of clear guidance from U.S. and Afghan leadership.

I am a three-star general in the Afghan Army. For 11 months, as commander of 215 Maiwand Corps, I led 15,000 men in combat operations against the Taliban in southwestern Afghanistan. I've lost hundreds of officers and soldiers. That's why, as exhausted and frustrated as I am, I wanted to offer a practical perspective and defend the honor of the Afghan Army. I'm not here to absolve the Afghan Army of mistakes. But the fact is, many of us fought valiantly and honorably, only to be let down by American and Afghan leadership.

Two weeks ago, while battling to hold the southern city of Lashkar Gah from the Taliban, President Ashraf Ghani named me commander of Afghanistan's special forces, the country's most elite fighters. I reluctantly left my troops and arrived in Kabul on Aug. 15, ready to fight — unaware how bad the situation already was. Then Mr. Ghani handed me the added task of ensuring the security of Kabul. But I never even had a chance: The Taliban were closing in, and Mr. Ghani fled the country.

There is an enormous sense of betrayal here. Mr. Ghani's hasty escape ended efforts to negotiate an interim agreement for a transition period with the Taliban that would have enabled us to hold the city and help manage evacuations. Instead, chaos ensued — resulting in the desperate scenes witnessed at the Kabul airport.

It was in response to those scenes that Mr. Biden said on Aug. 16 that the Afghan forces collapsed, "sometimes without trying to fight." But we fought, bravely, until the end. We lost 66,000 troops over the past 20 years; that's one-fifth of our estimated fighting force.

So why did the Afghan military collapse? The answer is threefold.

First, former President Donald Trump's February 2020 peace deal with the Taliban in Doha doomed us. It put an expiration date on American interest in the region. Second, we lost contractor logistics and maintenance support critical to our combat operations. Third, the corruption endemic in Mr. Ghani's government that flowed to senior military leadership and long

crippled our forces on the ground irreparably hobbled us.

The Trump-Taliban agreement shaped the circumstances for the current situation by essentially curtailing offensive combat operations for U.S. and allied troops. The U.S. air-support rules of engagement for Afghan security forces effectively changed overnight, and the Taliban were emboldened. They could sense victory and knew it was just a matter of waiting out the Americans. Before that deal, the Taliban had not won any significant battles against the Afghan Army. After the agreement? We were losing dozens of soldiers a day.

Lt. Gen. Sami Sadat commanded the Afghan National Army's 215 Maiwand Corps in southwestern Afghanistan. Handout photo from the Public Relation Office of 215 Maiwand Corps, via Agence France-Presse/Getty Images

Still, we kept fighting. But then Mr. Biden confirmed in April he would stick to Mr. Trump's plan and set the terms for the U.S. drawdown. That was when everything started to go downhill.

The Afghan forces were trained by the Americans using the U.S. military model based on highly technical special reconnaissance units, helicopters and airstrikes. We lost our superiority to the Taliban when our air support dried up and our ammunition ran out.

Contractors maintained our bombers and our attack and transport aircraft throughout the war. By July, most of the 17,000 support contractors had left. A technical issue now meant that aircraft — a Black Hawk helicopter, a C-130 transport, a surveillance drone — would be grounded.

The contractors also took proprietary software and weapons systems with them. They physically removed our helicopter missile-defense system. Access to the software that we relied on to track our vehicles, weapons and personnel also disappeared. Real-time intelligence on targets went out the window, too.

The Taliban fought with snipers and improvised explosive devices while we lost aerial and laser-guided weapon capacity. And since we could not resupply bases without helicopter support, soldiers often lacked the necessary tools to fight. The Taliban overran many bases; in other places, entire units surrendered.

Mr. Biden's full and accelerated withdrawal only exacerbated the situation. It ignored conditions on the ground. The Taliban had a firm end date from the Americans and feared no military reprisal for anything they did in the interim, sensing the lack of U.S. will.

And so the Taliban kept ramping up. My soldiers and I endured up to seven Taliban car bombings daily throughout July and the first week of August in Helmand Province. Still, we stood our ground.

I cannot ignore the third factor, though, because there was only so much the Americans could do when it came to the well-documented corruption that rotted our government and military. That really is our national tragedy. So many of our leaders — including in the military — were installed for their personal ties, not for their credentials. These appointments had a devastating impact on the national army because leaders lacked the military experience to be effective or inspire the confidence and trust of the men being asked to risk their lives. Disruptions to food rations and fuel supplies — a result of skimming and corrupt contract allocations — destroyed the morale of my troops.

The final days of fighting were surreal. We engaged in intense firefights on the ground against the Taliban as U.S. fighter jets circled overhead, effectively spectators. Our sense of abandonment and betrayal was equaled only by the frustration U.S. pilots felt and relayed to us — being forced to witness the ground war, apparently unable to help us. Overwhelmed by Taliban fire, my soldiers would hear the planes and ask why they were not providing air support. Morale was devastated. Across Afghanistan, soldiers stopped fighting. We held Lashkar Gah in fierce battles, but as the rest of the country fell, we lacked the support to continue fighting and retreated to base. My corps, which had carried on even after I was called away to Kabul, was one of the last to give up its arms — only after the capital fell.

We were betrayed by politics and presidents.

This was not an Afghan war only; it was an international war, with many militaries involved. It would have been impossible for one army alone, ours, to take up the job and fight. This was a military defeat, but it emanated from political failure.

Lt. Gen. Sami Sadat commanded the Afghan National Army's 215 Maiwand Corps in southwestern Afghanistan. Before that, he served as a senior director in Afghanistan's national intelligence agency. He is a graduate of the Defense Academy of the U.K. and holds a master's degree from King's College London.

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Cheney: What we're seeing now in Afghanistan is actually the opposite of ending war

BY ARIS FOLLEY - 08/15/21 10:56 AM EDT

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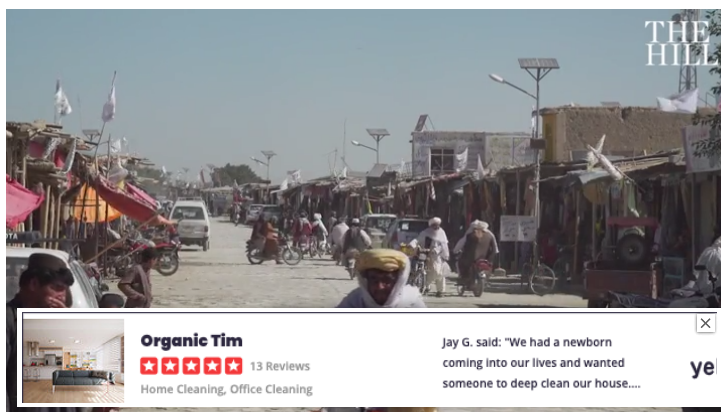
IN THE KNOW — 4H 34M AGO

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Rep. Liz Cheney (R-Wyo.) criticized President Biden on Sunday over his decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Afghanistan in the wake of reports that the Taliban entered Kabul on Sunday, arguing the move by the president is "not ending the war."

"This is not ending the war. What this is doing actually is perpetuating it. What we have done and what we're seeing in Afghanistan is instead of keeping 2,500 forces on the ground, which with air power, working with the Afghans, we were able to keep the Taliban at bay," Cheney said during an appearance on ABC's "This Week"

"This has been an epic failure across the board, one we're going to pay for years to come," Cheney, a member of the House Armed Services Committee, said.

Her comments come as report indicated on Sunday that the Taliban has entered Kabul, [demanding](#) a peaceful surrender of power from the country's government.

"What we're seeing now is actually the opposite of ending war. What we're seeing now is a policy that will ensure -- ensure, that we will in fact have to have our children and our grandchildren continuing to fight this war at much higher costs," Cheney told co-anchor Jonathan Karl on Sunday.

During the interview, Cheney was pressed about [polls](#) showing higher support for U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan from the past several years.

"Look, as leaders we have an obligation no matter what, the issue is to tell the American people the truth. And we have an obligation to explain what's necessary," she said. "There's one question, one question that matters when it comes to Afghanistan or any other deployment of U.S. Forces, and that question is, 'What does American security require?'"

"And if American security requires that our enemies can't establish safe havens to attack us again, then our leaders across both parties have the

Cheney: What we're seeing now in Afghanistan is actually the opposite of ending war | TheHill
responsibility to explain to the American people why we need to keep the deployment of forces on the ground," she said.

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Biden and other Democratic lawmakers have defended his decision to withdraw from the war in recent weeks, pointing to the billions of dollars spent over the past two decades and the thousands of troops that have died, arguing further time in the region won't make much difference.

"The complete, utter failure of the Afghan National Army, absent our hand-holding, to defend their country is a blistering indictment of a failed 20-year strategy predicated on the belief that billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars could create an effective, democratic central government in a nation that has never had one," Sen. Chris Murphy (D-Conn.) said [this past week](#).

"Staying one more year in Afghanistan means we stay forever, because if 20 years of laborious training and equipping of the Afghan security forces had this little impact on their ability to fight, then another 50 years wouldn't change anything," Murphy added.

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The Last Neocons On The Island

Those saying all we need to do is stay in Afghanistan a little longer both tip their hands and demonstrate their lack of seriousness.



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1/16

If you want to understand the delusions that permeated the early-stage war on terror, pick up a copy of *An End to Evil* by Richard Perle and David Frum. Published in 2004, it reads like a fever dream one might have after playing *Age of Empires* on fast mode right before bed. Iraq? Saddam indicted not just himself “but all Arab tyrannies and all of their supporters.” Syria? “Why have we put up with it as long as we have?” (The entire country, apparently.) Everyone from the South Koreans to the peacekeepers in 1994 Rwanda are presented as appeasers for having failed to sufficiently confront evil.

The difference, of course, is that sharpshooters tend to not get trapped for the next 20 years in the office buildings they help clear. So it is that even most hawks don't talk this way anymore. Frum spends his time on Twitter pretending *An End to Evil* never happened. The antiwar blog LobeLog, meanwhile, noticed a few years ago (<https://lobelog.com/the-disappearing-prince-of-darkness/>) that Perle had effectively vanished from public life. Some of their fellow neocons have gone and reinvented themselves as realists, asserting that American empire is a hardheaded necessity rather than an idealistic choice. Others have even moderated a bit.

It's a sloppy comparison for several reasons. In none of those three theaters did America face an active civil war 20 years after the occupations began. And in none of those cases did the government we helped build turn out to be a weak, dysfunctional, on-the-take narco-state. It is also hardly a credit to the interventionist cause to point out that America still has military bases in the most powerful country in Europe and the third largest economy on earth 75 years after World War II ended. It tends instead to confirm what their opponents have said all along: occupations encourage dependence and mission creep.

But more important is the mentality that runs beneath this contention. Because by pointing to Germany and Japan, the hawks have let the cat out of the bag. They really do see Afghanistan not as a “victory just around the corner,” but as a long-term commitment, a campaign in a global hundred-years war that pits the forces of enlightenment and decency and democracy against those of backwardness and terror and dictatorship. Such grandiose thinking was common among elite neocons back in the early 2000s, as Perle and Frum demonstrate. Yet today it comes off less as a throwback than a last gasp.

<https://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/the-last-neocons-on-the-island/>

1938-style appeasement. Or when John Bolton tells NPR, (<https://www.npr.org/2021/08/16/1028016046/rise-of-the-taliban-is-a-catastrophic-failure-for-the-u-s-john-bolton-says>), “I think a continuing presence there would have been an insurance policy,” before sneering, “People say, oh, we’ve been there so long. Let me ask you a question—how long do you want to keep America safe?”

Because even amid such certainty, the truth can no longer be curtailed out. It is no longer possible to rationalize these wars by saying their durations just need to be extended. If 20 years couldn’t buy us more than an on-the-spot surrender from the Afghan army, then another 20 or 80 is not going to make a difference. That blink-of-an-eye capitulation brought the entire project of a long war crashing down upon itself. The problem was not the length but the design. And then from out of the *Washington Post* comes an op-ed that argues in essence that true nation-building in Afghanistan has never been tried (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/08/21/afghanistan-biden-obama-bush/>). It’s no coincidence that this is the same rhetorical trick employed by post-Soviet communists. We are watching what remains of an ideology die, buried under the sheer weight of real-world evidence.

The most striking takeaway from Perle’s and Frum’s *An End to Evil* is the constant baseline of fear that throbs throughout. Everything must be done quickly—right now!—lest a dirty bomb suddenly swallow New York or a chemical weapon take out much of London. “There is no middle way for Americans,” they write. “It is victory or holocaust.” Yet the blessed thing about fear is that it does recede, that while it might scare you into desperate measures at first, you are eventually able to see clearly again. It was fear that sold the public on what was for some a tacitly radical project, but that fear has long since dispelled.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



(<https://www.theamericanconservative.com/author/mattpurple/>).

Matt Purple is a senior editor at *The American Conservative*.

✉ [email \(mailto: Matt@Purple.com\)](mailto:Matt@Purple.com).

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Fran Macadam • 12 days ago

And its moral bankruptcy of greed has predictably degenerated into a dissipated, syphilitic War for Woke.

6 ^ | ▾ 1 • Reply • Share ›



EliteCommInc. → Fran Macadam • 11 days ago

However, even you must admit that the US does have a call to lead. I think you and I might agree on what that looks like and how that leadership takes as well as a duty to our own first

but leadership does not require the damage we have inflicted on others and ourselves by default by the use of force.

^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›



vlp1730 → EliteCommInc. • 4 days ago

Like the family of 10, including a two year old child, incinerated, blown apart, by one of our drones, in order to "get even" with "those dastardly terrorists (my words).

I am ill that my tax dollars funded that drone.....

^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›



Victor Riqueti • 12 days ago

a consumerist society which makes money out of breaking windows to repair them, should not be in the business of building empires -not like empires are bad things necessarily. The best type of empire building is always non-violent, economic in nature (and so a gain to both parties). and respects the local customs as far as is possible. The Habsburgs and even the bourbons were masters of doing that: expanding their own cultures while respecting the cultures of others.

10 ^ | ▾ 2 • Reply • Share ›



Avatar

This comment was deleted.

**KevinS** → Guest • 12 days ago

Indeed! The only intact industrial economy in the world, a massive military, unprecedented power projection capabilities, and, of course, a monopoly on atomic weapons. Just imagine what other great powers would have done with such a power disparity. Imagine what Joe Stalin would have done if the Soviet Union was in a similar position.

7 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**tiny print** → KevinS • 11 days ago

"Just imagine what other great powers would have done with such a power disparity."

Pure whataboutism hypothetical nothing burger. Try again.

5 ^ | v 1 • Reply • Share ›

**KevinS** → tiny print • 11 days ago

Nah.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Phil Kershner** → tiny print • 4 days ago

You don't have the power to imagine? I can easily imagine what Joe Stalin would have done if he had been in our position. For one thing, we wouldn't be writing in English.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**JonF311** → KevinS • 11 days ago

Re: The only intact industrial economy in the world

Sigh, This simply is not true. One does not fall off the Earth north of the 49th parallel: Canada was wholly intact. And the UK still had a functional economy and industrial base. And Sweden? Switzerland?

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**KevinS** → JonF311 • 11 days ago

UK had a "functional" economy and industrial base...but intact?

I'll give the others. Let me rephrase: The only major industrial economy that emerged from the war unscathed.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**JonF311** → KevinS • 11 days ago

I'll go with that. It's worth noting that even before WWII the US was the world's predominant economy, though That had not carried over into foreign affairs and military might.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Scott** → JonF311 • 11 days ago

Very true. The US probably had the world's largest economy by about 1900, I believe.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**vlp1730** → JonF311 • 4 days ago



At the end of WWII, the CEO of General Motors was so impressed by the wartime profits that he said that our wartime economy should be permanent. Welcome words to the Military Industrial Complex.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



BrusselsSucks → JonF311 · 11 days ago · edited

As a 10-years-old I read in an Encyclopaedia that immediately after WWII, when Europe and Japan were in ruins, the USA had over half (51%) of the world's manufacturing capacity. Think of it, over half of everything in the world that was made in a factory was made in America. This was such an interesting fact that I have remembered it till this day. So, Canada my have been "intact" but they had next to nothing in an industrial capacity compared to the US of A.

3 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Dave Acklam → JonF311 · 11 days ago

The UK 'intact' in 1945?

Their home island was bombed to rubble and the empire that made their industrial production possible was collapsing...

Not very intact.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



JonF311 → Dave Acklam · 11 days ago · edited

The UK was not "bombed to rubble". Are you posting from an alternate timeline?

3 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Phil Kershner → JonF311 · 4 days ago

Yes, that particular statement was a mistake, but the main thrust of his argument still holds. Was Canada going to save the world from Soviet totalitarianism. Was Switzerland going to protect Western Europe from the same?

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



vlp1730 → KevinS · 4 days ago

5800 atomic weapons.....

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



kouroi → Guest · 11 days ago

Korean War, Vietnam War, coups and assassinations', development of Jakarta method

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Dave Acklam → kouroi · 11 days ago

Communism was an existential threat.

In case you missed it, we won that fight (took 70 years, but)...

2 ^ | v 3 · Reply · Share ›



kouroi → Dave Acklam · 11 days ago



Communism was an existential threat only to the febrile minds of plutocratic America. And while USSR collapsed, China is still going strong, Vietnam, Cuba, N. Korea are still run by communists, while Russia is run by nationalists that won't give an inch to the US and push back. And Iran and Syria are semi-socialists...

Not only the US hasn't won much, it has lost itself in the battle.

5 ^ | v 1 • Reply • Share ›



Dave Acklam → kouroi • 11 days ago

Communism was an existential threat as exhibited by the 100 million people that Communist regimes tortured and executed for wrongthink...

The USSR collapsed, Vietnam is now a capitalist playground & US satellite (ironically - the kids of the Viet Cong make sneakers for the kids of Americans for peanuts in wages)...

China embraced 'state capitalism' and has been 'Communist in Name Only' for most of my lifetime...

Cuba and North Korea sputter along poor & isolated from the world...

And the US has hardly lost ourselves... As a bonus, we avoided Europe's fall to social-democracy....

1 ^ | v 4 • Reply • Share ›



Wild Bunch 6 → Dave Acklam • 11 days ago

Dave Acklam I think that I am going to have to disagree with you on this one. Communism is alive and well.

There are a number of Communist Tyrannies in the world. They include Communist China; Cuba; Vietnam; North Korea; and Laos. It is possible that Nacagua; Venezuela; and Ecuador could be classified as Communist. Each of these countries has a form of managed economy.

The United States is definately a Social Democracy. We can measure this by looking at Entitlement spending. The United States spends at least \$5 Trillion on Entitlement spending on an annual basis. Put another way, government spending (Federal, State, and Local) accounts for well over 50% of GDP. The United States is well on it's way to a managed economy.

Communist China is expected to exceed US GDP by 2030. I suspect that the 21st Century will be Maoist and dominated by Communist China.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



kouroi → Dave Acklam • 11 days ago • edited

Vietnam a US satellite? You are really high on something....



^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Dave Acklam → kouroi • 11 days ago

Vietnam is a country with an economy dominated by US corporations & who's 'enemy' or 'greatest threat' is the PRC.

Almost to the point that one could say if the point of the Vietnam war was to ensure a capitalist future for Vietnam, the communist 'winners' didn't stay that way for long...

<https://www.economist.com/a...>

<https://www.usatoday.com/st...>

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



kouroi → Dave Acklam • 11 days ago

The Economist writes for La La Land. Lots of business in Vietnam are set up by Chinese firms. Plus, China and Vietnam will always be neighbors, and they will deal. US is a Pacific Ocean away. And Vietnam will not engage in war against China at the US behest.

Never mind the fact that Vietnam does not have the ability to invest and built infrastructure at the level required to become the next workshop of the world.

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



tiny print → kouroi • 11 days ago

The Economist IS the La La land. I still remember reading an article about how the Taliban were "at least bringing security to the Afghan people". That was more than twenty years ago! The Economist "liked" the Taliban even then ;)

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



vlp1730 → Dave Acklam • 4 days ago


The Pentagon Papers disclosed the resources that Vietnam had. Plus, we killed only a couple of million Vietnamese, ruined the Plain of Jars in Laos (which Nixon adamantly said we were not bombing).

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Sarastro92 → Dave Acklam • 11 days ago

The US has collapsed and bankrupt on every front

 The US has collapsed and bankrupt on every front.

1 ^ | v 1 • Reply • Share ›



vlp1730 → Sarastro92 • 4 days ago

With a Capital "B".

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



vlp1730 → Dave Acklam • 4 days ago

Four percent of the worlds population. One quarter of the world's incarcerated.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Sarastro92 → kouroi • 11 days ago

Correct again kouri. The Cold War was ginned up to justify Military Keynesian policies. When the Reds were gone, overnight, a new existential menace was created in the 9/11 Terror Spectacle. Now the US is being eclipsed by an emerging alliance of China with Russia and Iran. It's over for Pox Americana.

1 ^ | v 1 • Reply • Share ›



Sarastro92 → kouroi • 11 days ago • edited

Correct Kouri. Once FDR died, the US Deep State picked up the ruins of the British Empire and tried to craft their own empire. That led to non-stop serial genocidal rampages across the globe, and with that, general moral degeneracy. It led to a spectacular assassination of a President who declared his intention to end the Cold War. By the late Sixties the Apex Predator Class declared a Post-Industrial Society centered on a debt-based FIRE economy. In their supreme cupidity, the Apex Predators in corporate America relocated US industry overseas, pocketing wage differences between the Us and (mostly) China. That bankrupted the US and destroyed the productive labor force leading to the present state of virtual civil war and now complete bankruptcy. The Pox Americana Empire is all but dead. Cause of death: Moral Degeneracy.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



tiny print → Guest • 11 days ago • edited

You have a small point there. The US was considered the "friendly" colonialist comparing to the crimes committed in the ME by the Brits and Russians. At least that was the post-war and post-occupation sentiment in Iran. Until the US bared its colonialist fangs and our behavior got us where we are right now.

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



vlp1730 → tiny print • 4 days ago

800 military bases later.....

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Steve Naidamast → Guest • 11 days ago

You are kidding right, about this no nation in history stuff? I guess you have not heard of The Roman Empire where at its height had conquered most of the known world.

While Rome, in total, lasted close to 1500 years, the US, after 250, is already in serious decline. I don't believe the US has anything on Rome except better propaganda. Even Rome's gods were much more fun...

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Dave Acklam → Steve Naidamast · 11 days ago

What would Rome have done with the military and political situation the US found itself in in 1945?

Probably nuked the hell out of Russia and invaded...

That is what he is talking about.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Steve Naidamast → Dave Acklam · 11 days ago

Rome didn't have to worry about such a situation. It already owned the known world.

I believe it was general LeMay who suggested that Truman nuke Russia...

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Dave Acklam → Steve Naidamast · 11 days ago

The Parthians would disagree with the subject of Rome owning the known world...

But again... The point that you replied to was that given the US' economic and military position in 1945, the majority of the world's great former empires would have exploited the situation to go on a conquest binge...

We didn't.

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Sarastro92 → Dave Acklam · 11 days ago · edited

Yeah, In 1945 America wanted more war and to nuke the ally that did the heavy lifting to beat the Nazis. sure.

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Wild Bunch 6 → Steve Naidamast · 11 days ago

You know that the United States pretty much fought a war and conquered the Pacific Ocean Area, controlled the Atlantic, and seized most of Western Europe. Unlike Rome, the United States gave all that real estate back to it's rightful owners. The United States then pretty much demobilized the largest Navy on Earth; the largest Air Force on Earth; and nearly 90 combat divisions within three years.

All the United States asked for was enough space to bury our dead. I would encourage a visit to the US Cemeteries in France, Belgium, and Luxembourg. And then the United States provided the Marshall Plan for Western Europe in order to enable them to get back on their feet.

1 ^ | v 1 · Reply · Share ›



tinv print → Wild Bunch 6 · 11 days ago



[my friend who is a neocon](#) · 11 days ago

Yes to get them back on their feet so they start buying our products. Nothing wrong with that. Just reminding folks that was not done out of the pure goodness of our hearts. We are Americans and we are very transactional.

^ | ▾ · Reply · Share ·



Hector_St_Clare → Steve Naidamast · 8 days ago

Rome had to contend with Persia and other powers. High Desert is correct that no country in the world was ever as globally dominant relative to its rivals, as the US was, for a short period, starting in 1945. Maybe the British Empire for parts of the 19th century (at the time when it was the only fully industrialized country in the world) might be the other case.

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pinkprince500 → Guest · 10 days ago

The USA hasn't been practicing what it's been preaching for over 200 years. The USA claims to support freedom and prosperity around the world but caused so many unprovoked wars. It was built on land confiscated from the Native Americans, the original peoples of the Americas of whom 98-99% of its people were killed off in wars and diseases such as smallpox, measles etc. The US took land from Mexico after the Mexican War ended because the US citizens there did not like its laws. The US could have let Mexico keep the land and have its citizens return to the areas that were still part of the USA. The USA took Spain's very last colonies

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RECOMMENDED

Afghanistan Is a Disaster. But It Was Always Going to Be.

It's sickening to see the Taliban taking Kabul. But we could stay another 20 years, or 120, and nothing would change. We must learn the lesson of limits.



SAJJAD HUSSAIN/GETTY IMAGES

The American flag is reflected on the windows of the U.S. embassy building in Kabul.

Michael Tomasky / August 16, 2021

It was tragic to watch events unfolding Sunday in Kabul. Blame Joe Biden for a terrible miscalculation based on intelligence estimates that were obviously crap. But also blame Donald Trump and Mike Pompeo (who signed the peace deal with the Taliban that forced Biden to choose between withdrawal and expansion of hostilities). And while you're at it,

blame George W. Bush and the neocons, blame the neocons, and in fact blame the whole

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Even blame people like me. I firmly opposed the Iraq War from the start, so at least I got that one right. But I supported the war in Afghanistan because I considered it thoroughly justified under both common-sense morality and international law. The Afghan government harbored a movement, Al Qaeda, that directly attacked our shores. If you're not allowed to respond to that, when is a response ever justified?

I may have paid attention to the question of whether war was justified. But I didn't pay quite enough attention to the question of whether it was wise.

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I didn't dismiss this issue; I remember thinking about it a lot. I remember hearing the warnings that, back in 1979, the Soviet Union thought it was going to waltz through Afghanistan—and ended up getting stuck there for a decade and losing in the end. I remember thinking that perhaps waging a full-on war went too far; maybe a mere “police action” (a phrase employed at the time by skeptics) designed just to rout Al Qaeda, not reinvent the country, was called for. I remember my apprehensive reaction when newscasters broke into whatever football game I was watching that Sunday in October 2001 to announce that we'd launched the first airstrikes in Afghanistan.

So I wasn't exactly in the Wolfowitz caucus. But I nevertheless thought it was justified, and I hoped in that foolish American way that we could build schools and sewage systems and libraries and playgrounds, and air-drop Ho Hos, and show them episodes of *Friends*, and make them see that we meant well and that our way of life was right for them, too.

I hoped, in other words, that this time, we could reverse history. Well, 20 years later (the Soviets got off easy!), it's clear that we can't. It's been a chastening two decades—or at least, I hope it's been a chastening two decades for the people who actually decide these things. You have to understand the context in which Afghanistan happened, by which I only partially mean the September 11 attacks. I was never out for bloodlust revenge. In fact, I thought a lot of people, like Christopher Hitchens, had lost their fucking minds. I was appalled at his belligerent and on-the-edge-of-racist rhetoric.

But something had happened earlier that Hitchens and Susan Sontag and people like them

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multiethnic and pluralistic democracy of people from three different religions, and the ethnonationalist Slobodan Milošević wanted to destroy it.

We should have done something. But George H.W. Bush and James Baker, his secretary of state, stood on the sidelines (“We don’t have a dog in this fight,” Baker infamously told Congress). Bill Clinton did better, organizing the 3,500 NATO air sorties that finally led to peace talks, but not before the bodies had piled high and the phrase “ethnic cleansing” entered the Western lexicon.

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The horrors of Bosnia made a lot of liberals around my age believe in this thing that we reassuringly named “humanitarian intervention.” It led many such liberal people and institutions, notably this magazine, to support the Iraq invasion.

As I said, I never went for that one, because I saw that that war was premised on a tower of lies about Saddam’s weapons of mass destruction, and because I knew the history of how Dick Cheney and crew had wanted to use the end of the Cold War to establish American global hegemony (Google “[1992 Defense Planning Guidance](#)”). Iraq was twisted like a pretzel to fit into the category of humanitarian intervention.

But even the moral fiasco of Iraq didn’t mean, to me, that we should give up on the idea that the United States could still help struggling small-d democrats around the world. In 2013, I thought Barack Obama ought to be doing more to aid the Free Syrian Army, which he callously dismissed as a bunch of “farmers or teachers or pharmacists.” If we couldn’t be squarely on the side of people risking their lives for democracy against a thug dictator who was dropping bombs that released hundreds of nails upon detonation on his own people, on children, what in the world did we stand for?

A question like the above states a moral absolute. It is tempting, alluring; indeed, nearly irresistible. How can any decent American answer it in the negative?

And yet, the world does not traffic in moral absolutes. The world is a fragile thread of conditional ambiguities. The fact of the matter, with respect to Svria, was that the chance of

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Part of me still wishes we'd done more. But what would it have accomplished? I can't honestly say. No one can.

The lesson of the post-9/11 era is that American power has limits—very severe limits at that. We can't remake the world. We couldn't remake one relatively small country. The post-Vietnam era should have left us well educated in this truth, but a new generation of foreign-policy leaders had to learn it all over again, at a cost (combining Afghanistan and Iraq) of hundreds of thousands of lives and more than \$6 trillion. Let that number sink in: In inflation-adjusted terms, that's about 35 Marshall Plans.

The United States should continue to promote democracy, but only in “soft power” ways. Military interventions, when they must happen, should be short and specifically targeted. Conventional wisdom heaps contempt on what Obama did in Libya, but I actually think that one accomplished its limited mission. Muammar Qaddafi's son vowed a mass slaughter of innocents in Benghazi. NATO stepped in, and no slaughter ever happened. Did we then leave too soon? That's what everyone said. But the future of Libya is up to Libyans, not us.

And the fate of Afghanistan, it saddens me to say, isn't up to us either. It's up to the people of Afghanistan. It sickens me to see the Taliban take over, and we may need to step in now and do something to shore up the Afghan military for a short time. But here's the unalloyed truth: We could stay another 20 years, or 40, or 120, and nothing would change. And finally, let us be honest with ourselves: The United States of America is no longer a country that can afford the luxury, if that's the right word, of promoting democracy abroad. Our first task is to preserve it here at home, where it is under such an extremely serious threat. The best way to show the rest of the world that we treasure democracy is to make sure it triumphs within our own borders. We'd better tend that garden first.

Michael Tomasky @mtomasky

Michael Tomasky is the editor of *The New Republic*.

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The New Republic editorial by Tomasky text cut off by ads in PDF: pg.1 = And while you're at it, blame George W. Bush and the neocons, blame the generals, and in fact, blame the whole bipartisan foreign-policy establishment for the hubris of thinking that we could remake the place in our image.

pg.2 = But something had happened earlier that Hitchens and Susan Sontag and people like them were right about: the horrific conflict in Bosnia. In that case, we witnessed the Serbs committing the worst atrocities in Europe since Hitler. The Bosnians were trying to build a multiethnic and pluralistic democracy of people from three different religions, and the ethnonationalist Slobodan Milošević wanted to destroy it.

pg.3 = The fact of the matter, with respect to Syria, was that the chance of Bashar Al Assad's foes, bitterly divided between Sunnis and anti-Assad Alawis, working together was extremely remote, as experts explained to me at the time.

GUEST ESSAY

What Trump's Disgraceful Deal With the Taliban Has Wrought

Aug. 28, 2021

By Kori Schake

Ms. Schake, a foreign policy expert who worked for the National Security Council and the State Department during George W. Bush's administration, is the director of foreign and defense policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute.

Believing you're uniquely capable of bending things to your will is practically a requirement for becoming president of the United States. But too often, in pursuit of such influence over foreign policy, presidents overemphasize the importance of personal diplomacy. Relationships among leaders can build trust — or destroy it — but presidents often overrate their ability to steer both allies and adversaries.

Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev had built such a solid relationship that during the Reykjavik summit most of Reagan's administration worried he would agree to an unverifiable elimination of nuclear weapons. Bill Clinton believed his personal diplomacy could deliver Palestinian statehood and Russian acceptance of NATO expansion. George W. Bush believed he looked into Vladimir Putin's eyes and saw his soul, and Barack Obama believed he could persuade Mr. Putin it wasn't in Russia's interests to determine the outcome of the war in Syria.

But in both hubris and folly, none come close to matching Donald Trump. For someone who prided himself on his abilities as a deal maker and displayed an "I alone can fix it" arrogance, the agreement he made with the Taliban is one of the most disgraceful diplomatic bargains on record. Coupled with President Biden's mistakes in continuing the policy and botching its execution, the deal has now led to tragic consequences for Americans and our allies in Kabul.

Mr. Trump's handling of Afghanistan is an object lesson for why presidents of both parties need to be better constrained by Congress and the public in their conduct of foreign policy.

Mr. Trump never believed Afghanistan was worth fighting for: As early as 2011, he advocated its abandonment. Once in office, his early infatuation with "my generals" gave the Pentagon latitude to dissuade the president from exactly the kind of rush to the exits we're now seeing in Afghanistan. Mr. Trump wanted to abandon the war in Afghanistan, but he understood atavistically that it would damage him politically to have a terrorist attack or a Saigon comparison attached to his policy choices.

Thus the impetus for a negotiated settlement. The problem with Mr. Trump's Taliban deal wasn't that the administration turned to diplomacy. That was a sensible avenue out of the policy constraints. The problem was that the strongest state in the international order let itself be swindled by a terrorist organization. Because we so clearly wanted out of Afghanistan, we agreed to disreputable terms, and then proceeded to pretend that the Taliban were meeting even those.

Mr. Trump agreed to withdraw all coalition forces from Afghanistan in 14 months, end all military and contractor support to Afghan security forces and cease “intervening in its domestic affairs.” He forced the Afghan government to release 5,000 Taliban fighters and relax economic sanctions. He agreed that the Taliban could continue to commit violence against the government we were there to support, against innocent people and against those who’d assisted our efforts to keep Americans safe. All the Taliban had to do was say they would stop targeting U.S. or coalition forces, not permit Al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations to use Afghan territory to threaten U.S. security and subsequently hold negotiations with the Afghan government.

Not only did the agreement have no inspection or enforcement mechanisms, but despite Mr. Trump’s claim that “If bad things happen, we’ll go back with a force like no one’s ever seen,” the administration made no attempt to enforce its terms. Trump’s own former national security adviser called it “a surrender agreement.”

Mr. Trump and his supporters clearly considered the deal a great success — until just days ago, the Republican National Committee had a web page heralding the success of Mr. Trump’s “historic peace agreement.” Really, the Trump administration’s deal with the Taliban deserves opprobrium even greater than what it heaped on the Iran nuclear deal struck by the Obama administration.

Mr. Trump wasn’t unique among American presidents in the grandiose belief that he alone could somehow change behaviors of our enemies and adversaries. Ever since Theodore Roosevelt brought an end to the Russo-Japanese war and won the Nobel Peace Prize, most American presidents have found irresistible the siren call of personal diplomacy.

Instead of banking on other countries being charmed or persuaded that American leaders know their interests better than they do, presidents should return to the practice of persuading their fellow Americans of the merits of agreements with foreign powers. Congress can begin by reasserting its role in diplomacy and requiring specific authorizations for the use of military force rather than continuing to acquiesce to claims that existing executive authorizations can be endlessly expanded. It should refuse the shifting of funds previously authorized and appropriated for other purposes (Mr. Trump made such shifts to construct the border wall). It should reject foreign policy changes enacted by executive order rather than congressional approval, and it should force the Supreme Court to clarify the extent of the president’s war powers.

Agreements with foreign powers, whether states, international institutions or organizations like the Taliban, should be submitted to Congress for a vote. The best way to prevent catastrophic foreign policy mistakes is to require the 535 representatives of the American people to put their jobs on the line, become informed, and support, reject or modify a president’s program. Congress tried to slow or block Mr. Trump’s planned drawdown of U.S. forces. Members who supported the Taliban deal should be explaining why they thought the outcome would be different than the tragedy unfolding in Afghanistan now. Apathy and unaccountability are the real enemies of good foreign policy. Presidents get around oversight by offering unilateral policy actions or claiming international agreements aren’t formal treaties. Congress shouldn’t let a president from either party get away with that.

Addressing foreign agreements as stand-alone votes would raise the profile and stakes even more. Supporting Mr. Trump’s Taliban agreement would have been — and should have been — a tough vote. There are reasonable arguments on the side of continuing the war and on the side of concluding it. America would be more secure today if Congress exerted its prerogatives more forcefully — both when Mr. Trump agreed to the Taliban deal, and when Mr. Biden continued it.

These are not partisan issues. They get at the heart of the constitutional separation of powers, a division that makes America strong and resilient. Restraining presidential fiat may mean that some foreign policy opportunities are missed, that some deals will remain out of reach. But it also insulates the president, and the American public, against bad deals by allowing for greater public scrutiny and oversight. As the debacle in Afghanistan shows, closer evaluation of Mr. Trump's Taliban deal and of Mr. Biden's withdrawal plans would have been preferable to the tragedy now unfolding.

Kori Schake worked for the National Security Council and as a deputy director of policy planning at the State Department during George W. Bush's administration. She is the director of foreign and defense policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute.

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