

Afghanistan in Transition: A Tale of Two Lenses - Mainstream Fantasy Vs. On The Ground Reality

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All in a recent Sunday morning television viewing I go from watching a [Senate hearing on C-SPAN](#) of four-star Marine Corps General Joseph Dunford spinning a rosy picture that things couldn't be going any better in Afghanistan as America winds down its war there, to suddenly being confronted with the totally opposite on-the-ground reality of unprecedented levels of corruption, waste and loss on [HBO's eye-opening documentary series Vice](#). First at C-SPAN hearing the lies of how we're winning the war most Americans believe the US lost years ago, just like the lies told by Petraeus before him and Westmoreland in 'Nam before him, it all becomes agonizingly clear that this worn out scenario is simply a forever do-loop of nightmarish American Empire war ad nauseum.

We keep installing corrupt, weak puppet governments incapable of resisting the stronger insurgency forces that invariably prevail in the end once US imperialistic forces leave with its tail between its legs. Called the graveyard of Empires, be it the Soviet Empire in the 1980's or the British Empire in the nineteenth century, no imperialistic power has won wars in Afghanistan. Yet US Empire wars have become a permanent revolving door of disgrace and defeat decade after decade, with top military brass periodically paraded before Congress always singing the praise that we're winning the war or at least making significant progress, always propagating false claims feebly unable to convince a skeptical, war-weary public to stay the course in a series of lost causes at mind-boggling expense to both human life as well as criminal misuse of public tax revenue.

Dunford repeatedly fed the fawning, admiring Armed Services Committee senators exactly the delusions of grandeur they all came to hear, want and pretend to believe, that the transition to training the Afghan security forces to take over their country after our exited absence at the end of this year is going remarkably well and right on schedule. Like a mantra, each senator would repeat the positive affirmation that thanks to more than a dozen years of US occupation and US war, the Afghan people are so much better off for what our boys and girls in uniform have done for them.

Forget the hundreds of innocent civilians who continue to be cowardly obliterated and terrorized by remote controlled drones that have become the US government's favorite killing machine in its Empire arsenal. Forget the total of more than 20,000 Afghan civilian lives lost thanks to America's "noble" intervention ([Costofwar.com](#) plus [2013 UN](#) total). Forget the UN report released last month that in 2013 civilian casualties actually went up by 14%, highest for women and children since 2009. Forget that the 200,000 man Afghan National Army the Americans are training has historically been plagued by abysmally low retention and out of control desertion rates. In a [New York Times article](#) from a little more than a year ago, it was reported that one third of the Army is annually lost while recruitment

can barely keep up with the attrition. In June 2013 [BBC news](#) quoted concerned deputy coalition force commander British General Nick Carter calling the serious attrition rate “unsustainable.” And finally, forget the multi-billion dollar heroin export industry rising the last four years to a record poppy field harvest in 2013 according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime’s (UNODC) latest report. The US has been complicit in profiting from this booming drug trade after the Taliban in 2001 had nearly eliminated the Afghanistan heroin production.

These facts just do not match the glowing report delivered to Congress by the Afghanistan war commander. During the hearing the general and numerous senators with annoyed indignation would take turns making reference jabs toward outgoing Afghan President Hamid Karzai’s refusal to sign off on America’s “there-forever” (otherwise known as the bi-lateral security agreement) prior to his upcoming departure. Meanwhile, according to a [Bloomberg News](#) article last month, Michele Flournoy, a former top Pentagon policy official, emphatically stated that whichever one of the eleven leading candidates replaces Karzai will definitely sign to keep the US military presence in the country for years to come. The all too painfully reminiscent scene of another deceitful general reassuring America we have nothing to fear or worry about because the Afghans have been more than up to the task of securing their homeland from the big bad Taliban wolf howling at their door, while nothing could be further from the truth.

General Dunford insisted that all the Afghans would need for a successful transition from weaning off the three wheeler “safety” vehicle of imperial occupation to riding a two wheeler on their own would be about “12,000 coalition troops” (8,000 of which will be American military personnel) and a “few more thousand” additional US troops (another estimated 4,000) to stay behind in 2015 to keep the enemy at bay beyond the scheduled December 31st departure date.

The current commander of US-coalition security forces in Afghanistan kept pontificating pious platitudes of how proud he was of the determined Afghans stepping up to the task and meeting the challenge of taking back their country to keep safe and secure from the Taliban enemy, and how happy he has been since taking command in February 2013 witnessing the steady Afghan progress and pride in the war effort to build and democratize their nation, elevating the lives of Afghan women and vanquishing the repressive jihadi extremists from once again gaining an Al Qaeda foothold. Of course he made no mention of the recurring theme of US soldiers who have been killed in recent years by the very Afghan security forces the Americans are training. Nor did he mention how Afghan Army nationals historically jump ship for the Taliban cause.

Out of the near dozen senators asking questions of the general, only two inquired with any remote semblance of harder-edged queries that represent the genuine concerns of their constituents that need to be asked. Only Democratic senators from West Virginia Joe Manchin and Missouri’s Claire McCaskill failed to bring a blush to the crowned war hero in their presence. The rest were all gushing too much in awe busily stroking the general’s gun and war ribbons in a nauseous display of Capitol Hill sycophantism. It was far removed from the grim reality in Afghanistan that the rest of us on planet earth have long accepted. I became so disgusted with the circle jerk in DC that I changed the channel to escape from choking on the vomit of all their “pretend-world” lies being bandied about.

Then with the flick of a switch, I went from la-la land at the capitol dome and instantly was

transported back to cold hard reality of yet more doom and gloom evidence that our latest Empire war is just another debacle, abruptly entering the real world of HBO's Vice. Despite covering the exact same war in the exact same country, a jarringly harsh and completely different picture emerged in stark, 180-degree contrast to the frothy, sugarcoated, C-SPAN fantasyland, to the near trillion dollar tune at taxpayer expense of a thirteen year old war drum dragging the US into its longest running war in history. The standard American foreign policy of destroying another war torn nation only to spend ungodly amounts of money on its reconstruction is sheer madness. Yet presently in Afghanistan more taxpayer dollars – 100 billion and counting – have gone toward its shaky reconstruction, establishing the dubious world record as the most costly in human history, including postwar Germany. But unfortunately the senseless and insane US war policy of tearing down nation after nation only to rebuild at obscenely enormous expenditures has come to be how America typically loses all its twenty-first century wars, first in Iraq and still in Afghanistan.

Vice host Shane Smith opened the season with a tour of the huge empty Tarakhil Power Plant near Kabul, constructed by US private contractors at a cost of 300 million taxpayer dollars that is not even in operation, producing zero electricity for the country because it costs too much to operate. So it just sits empty wasting away. Yet to power the power plant on costly diesel fuel another 20 million US dollars are wasted on a plant that furnishes no electricity at all. Afghanistan must import 100% of its electric power from neighboring Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan though it's only enough to supply one in seven Afghan citizens with regular electricity. Then because of the lack of security with Taliban controlling most of Afghanistan beyond Kabul particularly in the south, Afghan bill collectors cannot even go out into the countryside and collect the electric bill. Instead any revenue generated from the electricity power grid is simply collected by the Taliban and used to finance its operations to fight against the US soldiers and Afghan nationals.

The next Vice location was near the historic Taliban stronghold and embattled city in southern Afghanistan Kandahar, to a helicopter graveyard bought and paid for with more US tax dollars that are sitting there wasting away also not being used. 700 million dollars have gone towards purchasing dozens of modern US and Russian built helicopters rusting motionless on the airfield do not have enough Afghan pilots to fly them, nor do they have the mechanics and parts to maintain them. Just another waste in a war of waste.

The final stop was a nearby scrap yard where piles and piles of new engines, tires, generators have been systematically severed from their original vehicles by US military contractors. They are then sold to local Afghani black market vendors. Corrupt US contractors then use the invoices to justify ordering more in an endless supply from the Department of Defense. The corruption in Afghanistan rips off the hardworking American people whose taxes are funding this trillion dollar nightmare of a war.

Also a large display of IED's (improvised explosive devices) were shown collected at a rate of 9000 every five or six months. The IED's along with all these assorted parts are sold directly to the black market racketeers that transport the equipment across the Pakistan border into the hands of the Taliban enemy, and then brought back to Afghanistan to be used by the enemy to kill more Afghans and Americans. Another destructive do-loop of waste that Americans pay for with hard earned tax money that US and Afghan soldiers and civilians continue paying for with their lives. The thousands of culverts throughout the country are the favorite dumping grounds for Taliban planting the fresh supply of IED's that are the number one killer in Afghanistan. Millions more of US dollars have funded a program called culvert denial system that welds bars across the culverts to prevent the IUD's from

being placed inside. However, the Taliban will simply cut the bars away, rendering this program so ineffective that the Afghan government stopped even bothering to replace them. So the Taliban regularly blows up US military vehicles driving on roads over the culverts and more Americans die from these IED's than any other source in the war.

Intermittently interviewed back in Washington DC during all these obscene Afghan locations is the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction John Sopko who delivers his incisively biting commentary throughout, explaining the absurdity of US government waste and corruption being exposed 7000 miles away. As a tough former prosecuting attorney who put Mafia mobsters behind bars, John Sopko expressed outrage at such gross incompetence and malfeasance committed by Pentagon generals and high level Defense and State Department bureaucrats who he would like to also put behind bars. Sopko reasoned that "if any of us displayed this same level of incompetence, wasting 30, 40 or 100 millions dollars, we would customarily be fired on the spot." But he lamented that these guilty individuals responsible for such unprecedented monumental waste of taxpayer dollars are instead systematically "promoted and rewarded" by the corrupt, morally bankrupt, thoroughly broken system. Despite the mind-blowing amounts of waste that have been uncovered and have become common knowledge, the US government has a plan in place to continue funding reconstruction at these same squandered rates through the year 2017.

The Afghanistan war presents a pathetic and seemingly hopeless situation where for years our enemy has clearly been winning, taking full advantage of every US blunder and, just like North Vietnam forty years earlier, waiting for us to leave in order to completely regain full control over the country again. The Afghanistan war exit plan strategy is designed to lend a superficial, face-saving appearance of "peace with honor" all over again, just like Vietnam.... anything but honestly calling it what it really is, another disastrous, humiliating and devastating US military war defeat and in its wake another virtually destroyed nation. As America phases down its operations this year, ultimately another full blown civil war is being fought between the Afghan National Army and the Taliban Army. And as in Vietnam, in all likelihood, the Taliban insurgent forces will overpower the weaker, corrupt US puppet government forces.

Just to prove this very point leading up to the April 5th presidential election, several Taliban members penetrated what was believed to be one of the most secured buildings in Kabul last Thursday and murdered with pistols nine people dining in a restaurant of a luxury hotel. The hotel was frequented by foreign press and Afghan officials. Four of the nine dead were foreigners. In Kandahar province several hours later a bomb wounded the deputy governor and his chief of staff in critical condition. To terrorize Afghani citizens into not voting in the coming election, Taliban has stepped up its level of violence throughout the nation. According to [Reuters](#), just in this last week alone, seven or eight suicide bombers have killed at least eleven people in Jalalabad in eastern Afghanistan. Another eighteen died from a bomb planted in a marketplace in northern Afghanistan. The obvious message to both the US and Afghan governments including Afghan citizens is that the current government forces are too weak and incapable of protecting them from the Taliban's ability to kill at will anywhere in the war ravaged country. All this of course is designed to sabotage the first so called democratic transfer of power in the nation's history.

When imperialistic Empire occupiers reek so much havoc in each occupied Third World nation, inevitably it causes people in the occupied nation to view themselves as "freedom fighters" determined with more will and determination than any overextended Empire to rid

their homeland of the imperialistic occupiers. Combine this internationally outlawed aggression with American house raids in the middle of the night killing innocent civilians believed to be enemy sympathizers along with frequent drone strike missiles obliterating more innocent victims attending weddings and funerals and the US continues creating a fresh supply of instant enemies. But fortunately for Afghanistan, they have gotten pretty skilled at ousting empires for centuries. Therefore, the American military should never be looked upon as the benevolent good guys only doing good will for the people of this Third World nation, not when the entire world (other than blindly manipulated Americans) realize that the Empire war machine is simply an extension of global corporatism and global hegemony and not in the interest of any nation or people on this planet.

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