

# Turning the Corner in Afghanistan

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Region: [Asia](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [AFGHANISTAN](#)

*The news about the wars the U.S. is waging all over the world is unreliable. The same statements of progress are repeated year after year. The official numbers, be they of civilian casualties or deployed troops, are mere lies. Every news presentation should be engraved with a warning: "Assertions and numbers are not what they appear." Consider, for example, the various "turned corner" statements officials have made about Afghanistan.*

On October 5 2017 the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani [confirmed to the BBC](#) that Afghanistan has "turned the corner":

... when I ask whether he is saying Afghan forces have turned the corner in the fight against the Taliban, there is no hesitation: "Yes," he says.

On October 24 the U.S. and NATO commander in Afghanistan General John Nicholson [agreed](#) with President Ghani:

"With the mounting military, diplomatic, and social pressure that is building – that we all are collectively committed to sustaining over the coming years – the enemy will have no choice but to reconcile. I believe, as President Ghani says, 'we have turned the corner,'" he concluded.

But a month later General Nicholson seemed to [disagreed](#) with his earlier statement:

"We are still in a stalemate," Nicholson, a four-star Army general said in an exclusive interview.

Today, five days after his "stalemate" statement, the general's opinion has changed again. Kevin Baron, the editor of [Defense One](#), [reports](#):

JUST IN: Top US general in Afghanistan says war has "turned a corner... " The momentum is now with the Afghan security forces." ...

The General seems confused. But he is not the first to have such a change of mind.

On February 3 2010 then U.S. commander General Stanley McChrystal was [cautious](#) about the proverbial corner:

General Stanley McChrystal also expressed confidence that Afghan forces

would grow quickly enough to allow a reduction in U.S. troop numbers to begin on schedule in 2011. ... "I'm not prepared to say we have turned the corner," he added.

Only twelve days later the turn [had been made](#):

Gen Stanley McChrystal had his own words. Helmand had "turned the corner" in its four year war, he told The Daily Telegraph.

In May 2011 a British General also [noted](#) the turn:

The civilians are looking to people such as General James Bucknall, a British Coldstream Guards officer who is second in command of the International Security and Assistance Force (Isaf).

...  
[H]e sets out why he thinks a corner has now been turned, nodding to the surge in American troop numbers that has made it possible.

Six years earlier another British General had already [seen](#) that turn:

Handing over to 3 Commando Brigade, Brig Butler said: "When we prepared, we knew there would be rocky times ahead, and that things would get harder before they got easier. That has certainly been the case, but I judge we have turned the corner. We have achieved a huge amount."

In May 2011 the U.S. Secretary of Defense was more cautious than the generals but nonetheless [optimistic](#):

I think we could be in a position by the end of this year where we have turned the corner in Afghanistan," [U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates] said.

According to his boss, progress came faster than Gates anticipated. On June 23 2011 CBS headlined [Obama: U.S. has turned corner in Afghanistan](#):

President Barack Obama on Thursday told American troops who've fought in Afghanistan that the U.S. has turned a corner after nearly 10 years of war, and it's time for their comrades still in that country to start coming home.

Obama's victory jump may have been a bit premature, but a month later the local commander agreed that the turning process had at least [begun](#):

I spoke to Gen Petraeus as he stopped off in London on his way home from Afghanistan. In the interview, he spelled out what makes him think the country has begun to turn a corner after nearly 10 years of war.

In September 2012 another U.S. Secretary of Defense [asserted](#) that the turn had finally been completed:

[US Defense Secretary Leon] Panetta, however, has rejected suggestions that the strategy is failing, and on Friday he said “we have turned the corner,” in Afghanistan ...

Four month later the Afghan President [confirmed](#) the turn:

[President] Karzai also said that Afghanistan has turned the corner in terms of battling the Taliban.

Karzai was very modest in acknowledging the turn. He knew that it had already happened much [earlier](#):

On October 9th, 2004, Afghanistan turned the corner. After decades of invasion, civil war, and anarchy, Hamid Karzai became the first democratically-elected President of a united Afghanistan.

In May 2014 another man was elected President of Afghanistan. This finally [turned](#) the corner:

Tonight there is a sense that the country has turned a corner – a new president who will sign the BSA, a continuation of developmental aid and training programmes, and Afghanistan has more than a fighting chance.

A year later the Afghan Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani was [encouraged](#) by the corner turning progress the new government had made:

With the successful conclusion of the security and political transitions, Afghanistan turned the corner in our path to becoming a self-reliant nation.

Today, two and a half years later, General Nicholson is still in the corner turning business.

The corner turning in Afghanistan is [similar to](#) an earlier war the U.S. had fought in vain:

Of course, the Afghanistan War (ostensibly part of a Global War on Terrorism) differs from the Vietnam War (ostensibly part of the Cold War) in myriad ways. Yet it resembles Vietnam in three crucial respects. First, it drags on with no end in sight. Second, no evidence exists to suggest that mere persistence will produce a positive outcome. Third, those charged with managing the war have long since run out of ideas about how to turn things around.

Another similarity is the constant lying by the military spokespersons. The famous Five o'clock Follies of Vietnam have been replaced by video conferences and drone videos but the central issue is the same. The military is consistently and consciously lying to the public.

How many U.S. troops are there in Afghanistan? By law the Pentagon has to release the [deployment numbers](#) every three month. The latest release for September 2017 lists 15,298 soldiers and 1,202 DoD civilians in Afghanistan. But there are 29,092 soldiers listed in “unknown locations”. The generals must have lost these somewhere. The report also lists

nearly 2,000 soldiers in Syrian and nearly 9,000 in Iraq. The publicly admitted numbers are way lower. They are as trustworthy as all the “turned corner” claims. [Indeed](#):

The Defense Department’s publicly disclosed data, which tracks U.S. personnel levels in dozens of countries, are “not meant to represent an accurate accounting of troops deployed to any particular region,” said Eric Pahon, a Pentagon spokesman.

The Pentagon clearly states that official data and assertions are “not meant to represent an accurate accounting”. It is a warning. Whatever officials claim about this or that war, about “turned corners”, or casualties, or troop deployments, must be considered to be a lie until it has been confirmed by observation or additional sources.

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