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The Nation-Building Experiment That Failed: Time For U.S. To Leave Afghanistan

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America's longest war continues. The U.S. military has been fighting in Central Asia for more than 15 years. To what end? Perpetuate a corrupt, incompetent, and unpopular central government in Kabul without bolstering America's security.

When asked at a recent hearing whether the U.S. was winning, Gen. John Nicholson, commander of US forces in Afghanistan, said neither. David Adesnik of the Foreign Policy Initiative complained that this was "an optimistic assessment given that the Afghan military is both rapidly losing control of its territory and suffering unprecedented casualties." Nicholson contended that the Afghan forces were too small to launch the offensive necessary to break the stalemate. So in Adesnik's view, President Trump "now must decide whether to continue or reverse his predecessor's strategy of withdrawal."

It is time for Washington to get out entirely.

Yet the Afghan war, which is consuming more American lives than the fight against the Islamic State, was barely mentioned during the recent presidential campaign. While a punitive expedition was justified in 2001 to target the terrorist group al-Qaeda and overthrow the Taliban regime for hosting terrorist training camps, President George W. Bush turned the mission into a haphazard nation-building affair. No one seems happy with the result, least of all Afghans. When I visited back in 2010 and 2011 I didn't find a single Afghan who had anything good to say about his or her government, at least who didn't work for it.

Instead of getting America out of the war, President Barack Obama twice increased U.S. forces, to no long-term benefit. After finally planning an exit he halted the withdrawal. Today there are still roughly 8400 U.S. military personnel—along with several thousand allied troops—on station in the Central Asian country. Another 26,000 U.S. contractors are working there. Washington dropped 40 percent more bombs in 2016 than the year before, "the product of President Obama's decision to loosen the rules of engagement, broaden the target list, and

authorize U.S. commanders to expand the scope of U.S. air activity from defensive to offensive operations,” explained Daniel DePrezis, a fellow at Defense Priorities. American combat forces have returned to areas they left, such as Helmand province.

Donald Trump long spoke sense about Afghanistan. In 2012 he termed the conflict “a complete and total disaster” and encouraged the U.S. to “get out of Afghanistan. We’ve wasted billion and billions of dollars and more importantly thousands of thousands of lives.” The following year he said “Our troops are being killed by the Afghans we train and we waste billions there.” Thus, Washington should “get out of Afghanistan.” In 2015 Trump declared “We made a terrible mistake getting involved there in the first place. We had real brilliant thinkers that didn’t know what the hell they were doing.” He asked: “at some point, are they going to be there for the next 200 years.”

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