



Has our government learned the lesson of the Afghan withdrawal?

April 21, 2022

For many Americans and veterans, images of the Taliban sporting US military gear around US military gear are still fresh in our minds. However, with the duration of the war in Ukraine longer than claimed by “military experts” and the growing demand to send more aid, one has to wonder if our government has learned the lesson of the Afghan withdrawal. Do we have measures in place to ensure that American weapons and equipment do not fall into the wrong hands? They do not have.

THE UNITED STATES HAS FEW WAYS TO TRACK THE WEAPONS IT HAS SENT TO UKRAINE, SOURCES TELL CNN, A BLIND SPOT LARGELY DUE TO THE LACK OF AMERICAN BOOTS ON THE GROUND IN THE COUNTRY [HTTPS://T.CO/UGDS4JTYUE](https://t.co/UGDS4JTYUE)

— CNN (@CNN) APRIL 19, 2022

Earlier this week, CNN reported that the United States did not have a clear idea of what would happen to weapons and equipment flowing into Ukraine. Javelins and Switchblades are of particular concern.

The Javelin Weapon System is a shoulder armour-piercing system. The Switchblade 300 is a lightweight drone armed with a small explosive warhead. Although javelins have serial numbers, there is no effective way to track the transfer of this equipment once it enters theater and is out of American hands. Alarming, a senior defense official told CNN, “We may never know exactly how much they use Switchblades.”

Pentagon press secretary John Kirby also said the DOD does not affect the weapons it sends to particular units.

Nothing new

It’s not that we’re sending aid and materials to Ukraine that appalls me. Instead, it’s the fact that we haven’t found a way to track this gear.

Jordan Cohen, a defense and foreign policy analyst at the CATO Institute who focuses on arms sales, said the danger surrounding the flood of weapons flowing into Ukraine is what happens to them at the end of the war.

This is not a new worry, nor is the concept of American weapons and equipment getting lost in the fog of war.

For example, weapons sold to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates ended up in al-Qaeda and Iran.

And for those unfamiliar with former Rep. Charlie Wilson and the aptly named film *Charlie Wilson's War*, we have been sending weapons to Afghanistan for decades, first to arm the mujahideen in their fight against the Soviet army, then to arm the Afghan forces in their fight against the Taliban. But unfortunately, some of these guns ended up on the black market in both cases.

The Afghan debacle

About \$88 billion has been allocated to equip the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF). However, with the hasty nature of our withdrawal, we saw that the very group we had ousted at the start of the conflict were back in power and stronger than ever and better equipped militarily, mainly thanks to what we had left behind.

Assault rifles, pistols, machine guns, missiles, planes, helicopters and armored vehicles are some of what we left behind.

While the argument is that most of this equipment has been destroyed beyond usability, there is something more to having US military equipment than just its usefulness.

Make these articles serve as valuable propaganda props and revenue-generating activities.

*WEAPONS THAT THE UNITED STATES LEFT WITH THE AFGHAN
ARMY [PIC.TWITTER.COM/XIW2IW2UIM](https://www.pic.twitter.com/XIW2IW2UIM)*

— *ANTON GERASHCHENKO (@GERASHCHENKO_EN) [MARCH 29, 2022](#)*

Showing the world the capture of these weapons was a way to reinforce the Taliban narrative of the defeat of US and Afghan national forces.

This underscores the Taliban's message that they are the true allies of the Afghan people and the only ones capable of protecting them.

This could push Central Asian countries like Tajikistan or Uzbekistan to strengthen bilateral security ties with Moscow and Beijing. Or worse, to be more open to dealing diplomatically with the Taliban.

Even though the argument that these weapons are destroyed and can only be used as accessories, which is honestly a big deal, we left more than just weapons behind.

From a single base, the Taliban are known to have acquired over 160,000 radios and pieces of communications equipment and 16,000 night vision goggles. Waging war and inflicting suffering on others is more than ammunition and missiles. These other forms of non-lethal military equipment can be a game-changer in the theater of operations.

where we are today

According to Mark F. Cancian of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, we have provided almost a third of our Javelin missile supply. While it might seem okay with two-thirds in stock, the reality is that war planners like to maintain a certain level of stock should a conflict break out with North Korea or other adversaries.

President Biden announced today that he is approving an additional \$800 million in aid to Ukraine. He said we had provided nearly \$1 billion in the past two months; rough calculations should give us over \$3 billion in total aid to Ukraine.

PRESIDENT BIDEN HAS SAID THE UNITED STATES WILL GIVE AN ADDITIONAL \$1.3 BILLION IN MILITARY AND HUMANITARIAN AID TO UKRAINE, BUT ADDITIONAL FUNDS WILL SOON BE NEEDED FROM CONGRESS TO CONTINUE THE ARMS FLOW. [HTTPS://T.CO/KXEBXS5JWA](https://t.co/kxebxs5jwa)

— *NBC POLITICS (@NBCPOLITICS) APRIL 21, 2022*

With inflation the main problem plaguing American voters and our terrible record of ensuring our guns don't end up in the wrong hands, it's natural for Americans to be worried.

It's hard not to want to send as much help and assistance as possible to the brave Ukrainian people as they battle a monster.

However, I don't think it's too much to ask our government to figure out how to track what's being sent and where.

In a world where I can track a purchase in real time from the warehouse to my house, I find it odd that we can't track equipment that has serial numbers attached.