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As US casualties hit new highs, Trump must fulfill promise to end war in Afghanistan

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President Trump promised the American people an “America First” approach to foreign policy. When are we going to get it?

There’s never been a better time for the president to deliver on his long-standing promise to end the war in Afghanistan. As reported by the *Washington Examiner*, 2019 has seen the highest number of U.S. troop casualties in Afghanistan in a half-decade, with two deaths last week pushing the number of heroes’ lives claimed in the war this year to 14. A total of roughly 2,400 Americans have now died in the conflict.

Trump has vocally opposed the war in Afghanistan for almost a decade, and promised to stop fighting “endless wars” and “policing the world” countless times both as a candidate and in speeches since taking office. But two and a half years into Trump’s presidency, we’re still in Afghanistan — an utter disappointment and grave mistake.

We must bring our troops home immediately, and not allow a single additional American soldier to die in vain.

To recap: We entered Afghanistan in 2001, in response to the country’s harboring of the terrorists who carried out 9/11. We weakened the Taliban early on in the war and disrupted al Qaeda, and have spent much of the time since in a failed attempt at nation-building. What do we have to show for it?

According to the Brown University Cost of War project, we have spent at least \$975 billion in our failed invasion of Afghanistan. To put that figure in perspective, that’s \$3,000 out of the wallet of every American (or taken on in debt), all flushed down the drain in a conflict that’s done little except further destabilize the region, kill thousands of people, and fail to make us any safer.

And the war has been a complete failure. Writing for War on the Rocks, Center for a New American Security fellow Jason Dempsey explains:

Despite over 17 years of engagement, including nine years of significant military training and financial support, the [U.S.-supported] Afghan government can only claim control of most major cities (albeit with frequent bombings), tenuous control of central provinces, and a ceding of significant swaths of rural territory to the Taliban.

The [U.S.] military [has] failed to achieve clear victories, or even its own stated objectives, over the course of America’s longest war. For over a decade the key to the American strategy in

Afghanistan was the creation of independently competent Afghan security forces. But ... we built a force so lacking in basic proficiency, and so foreign to the country it serves ... that it would not survive more than a few months without American support.

Frankly, I'm left wondering what it will take for Trump to finally follow through and bring our troops home. How many thousands more have to die? How many more billions of taxpayer dollars must we spend?

Trump continues to demur and flip-flop on the issue, still leaving roughly 13,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan. This is likely due to the fact that he's surrounded with hawkish advisers such as Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and national security adviser John Bolton, who, as Republican Sen. Rand Paul has noted, do everything they can to undermine the president's noble anti-war instincts.

They, like most hawks, insist that we cannot pull troops out of Afghanistan, or we will create a "power vacuum" that will allow for terrorism to rise in the country once again. Indefinitely continuing war until all terrorism is defeated is itself a ridiculous standard, but even on its own terms, the hawkish narrative simply isn't true.

I spoke with Cato Institute Director of Foreign Policy Studies John Glaser, who explained this to me:

Territorial safe havens are not the danger they're made out to be, and the Taliban have already pledged not to host al Qaeda, and to fight other terrorist groups. Additionally, other countries in the region, such as China and India, have overlapping interests with the U.S. — they want stability in Afghanistan too, and have an incentive to maintain it. All in all, arguments about a 'power vacuum' are little more than hogwash.

The pro-war establishment's worries aside, the American people are ready for Trump to fulfill his promise and end the war in Afghanistan. The president should pull our troops out now, before another American life is lost — or he'll pay for it at the ballot box, and he'll deserve it, too.