

# STRATEGIKA

Conflicts Of The Past As Lessons For The Present

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## AMERICA AFTER AFGHANISTAN

IN THIS ISSUE

RALPH PETERS • PETER R. MANSOOR • JOSEF JOFFE

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## ABOUT THE POSTERS IN THIS ISSUE

Documenting the wartime viewpoints and diverse political sentiments of the twentieth century, the Hoover Institution Library & Archives Poster Collection has more than one hundred thousand posters from around the world and continues to grow. Thirty-three thousand are available online. Posters from the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia/Soviet Union, and France predominate, though posters from more than eighty countries are included.

# Our Revels Now Are Ended

By Ralph Peters

It's hard to win a war when you refuse to understand your enemy. It's harder still when you cannot realistically define your strategic mission. You lame yourself further when you reduce a complex history to a single inaccurate cliché; i.e., "Afghanistan is the graveyard of empires." If you lack the will to win at all costs and—out of moral cowardice—allow critics to dictate your operational parameters, you might as well stay home. And if you ignore the lessons of your last war—lost barely a generation earlier—you are, no matter your fantastic wealth and inherent power, doomed.

The Taliban just had to show up for roll call.

We went to Afghanistan in October 2001 to punish al-Qaeda and chastise the Taliban for hosting the mastermind of September 11th. Mission accomplished, and well done. Then we stayed for twenty years to conduct a madcap experiment meant to transform a profoundly traditional society defined by its religion into a liberal modern society with ecumenical views. We began by denying that religion had anything to do with the challenge at hand: Faith made us nervous and criticism of Islam was strictly taboo. We pretended that our enemy was fighting, well, just because.

But let us begin at the beginning, with the obvious lessons from Vietnam—the which, for short-term convenience, we refused to acknowledge, let alone apply.

In order for a U.S.-led or U.S.-backed counterinsurgency effort to have any hope of success, premise number one is that we must be operating in support of a host-government leadership that can win and retain the support of the population. The local people, rural and urban, must be convinced that the government is so clearly the better option that they become willing to die to sustain it. The key bellwether is the behavior of young, relatively educated males, the natural officer class. Do they volunteer to fight in decisive numbers? Or do they withhold their active support and pursue personal advantage? If the locals are not galvanized by the leaders we back, the struggle is already lost.

In Vietnam, then in Afghanistan (and Iraq), we backed leaders we found congenial—preferably those who spoke English and told us whatever they thought we wanted to hear. We never asked ourselves who the local population might prefer (not least, because we might not have liked the answers).

We compounded our error of imposing a government that crowned out-of-touch expatriates by committing our country's favorite strategic folly: with the best intentions, we poured massive wealth into an impoverished country. The inevitable—and swift—result was to foster an orgy of corruption. And in Kabul as in Saigon (and Baghdad) we were unwilling to punish or even admonish our thieving clients because it would've been inconvenient. Those who should have led, stole. Those who should have fought, sought lucrative employment. Those who should have extended a hand to their wretched compatriots instead closed their

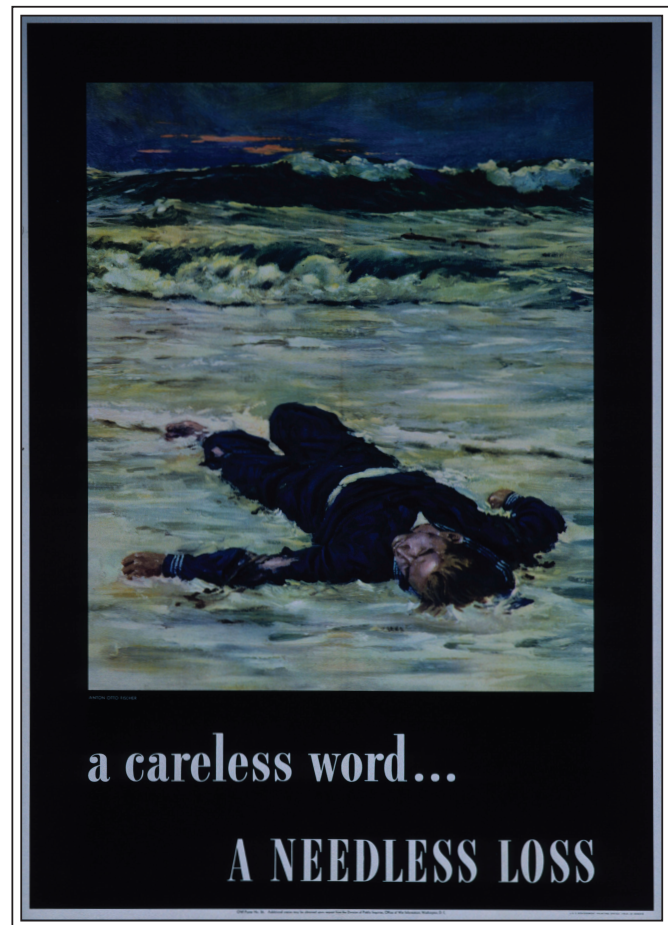


Image credit: Poster Collection, US 5993, Hoover Institution Archives.

fists around contracts, cash, and offshore bank accounts. In “our” Afghanistan, justice was for sale. In Taliban country, justice was rough but ready.

To whom would the villager turn? To a distant magnate? To a foreign soldier with a suspect smile? Or to the now-grizzled Talib who, years before, had taken up arms to defend his faith, his home, and his way of life?

In Afghanistan, we were the Redcoats. And we never figured it out.

As in Vietnam (and, arguably, as far back as the Korean War), we sent our troops to Afghanistan while our national leadership lacked the will to win. The greatest single advantage the Taliban (and the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army) had was that they would do anything to win, while we called off any operation that encountered media condemnation. Our enemies yearned to win; we wanted good reviews.

Yet another ghost of Vietnam: we granted our enemies sanctuary. When a Talib withdrew into Pakistan, he became untouchable (and, of course, we cornered ourselves by allowing our troops to become dependent on choke-point supply lines through Pakistan, an “ally” whose salient characteristic was and remains treachery). Our enemies killed civilians with a purpose. We launched investigations of our own troops whenever a round went astray.

At the tactical level (as in Vietnam), our troops performed superbly and could not be defeated on any battlefield. But their strategic leadership declined the moral burden of ferocity.

Our flag officers—even the best—served our soldiers poorly, unwilling to state, or even recognize, what victory requires in the face of a self-sacrificing opponent. Our enemies meant to win. We wanted to avoid offense. Worsening our military leadership crisis (for such it was), team spirit became groupthink, with generals in-country determined to find reasons to be hopeful, even as their subordinates died in futile efforts initiated simply because it seemed that something had to be done somewhere. Even as in-the-field officers questioned the abilities and commitment of Afghan national forces, no single general had the clarity of vision or the integrity to stand up and say, “This isn’t working and won’t work.” No senior commander wants to declare that his mission is a failure.

Indeed, political correctness had insinuated itself so deeply into the psyches of senior officers that they could no longer keep a balanced perspective. The Army-led promulgation of our counterinsurgency doctrine was the archetypal—and disheartening—example.

In Afghanistan, we faced an enemy empowered by religious conviction, a foe who regarded death as a promotion. We have over 2,000 years of history of religion-fueled insurgencies across multiple continents, civilizations, and cultures. I am unable to find one which was put down without immense slaughter—a prospect that we did not want to contemplate. Our military’s institutional response? Ignore the history. Ignore millennia of instructive, if sobering, examples.

Tasked to draft a counterinsurgency doctrine, an ambitious general surrounded himself with PhD-wielding officers whose narrow expertise, such as it was, focused on political insurgencies. In the resulting manual of several hundred pages, only one line in one paragraph mentioned religion, and that innocuously. Every case study cited was politically triggered and secular. Even when the authors indulged an ill-placed infatuation with T. E. Lawrence, no mention was made of the banner of jihad—under which both the Arab tribes and their Ottoman opponents waged war.

Yet there is an immense difference between humanity’s long-standing resort to jihads, crusades, faith-ignited mutinies, and manifold rebellions in the name of a god, and the modern phenomenon of political/ideological insurgencies rooted in post-Enlightenment theories. The most-common difference is that politically inspired insurgents, while they sometimes may fight to the death, at other times can be neutered through deals, offers, bribes, compromises . . . some political insurgents just want a seat at the table or a particular grievance addressed; others may want provincial dominion, or a cabinet role, or just tax relief.



But the hard-core religious insurgent, convinced he is doing a god's will, has a level of commitment that dwarfs that of the Minuteman or Marxist guerrilla. He is his god's agent on earth, purifying a world of heretical filth. Zealot or Mahdist, Hussite or Talib, he would rather embrace an apocalypse than compromise.

Veterans can cite plenty of tales of Taliban misbehavior (by our standards) or even perversion (again, by our standards), leading them to dismiss the religious fervor of Talibs as hypocrisy. But hypocrisy has always been a companion to faith. From Talibs to televangelists, the man of belief has often proven adept at rationalizing his own misbehavior, even as he persecutes others for similar deeds.

In any case, the purpose of counterinsurgency doctrine is not to keep a village quiet with bribes (also known as "aid projects") for a few months, but to establish *enduring* conditions favorable to our strategic interests. Our much-ballyhooed counterinsurgency doctrine cannot point to a single enduring success.

We tried to fix a supercomputer with a dishwasher-repair manual.

And no, contrary to an infamous quote, counterinsurgency operations are not "the graduate level of war." D-Day was warfare at the graduate level. If you have the guts and resolve to do what it takes—which we do not—counterinsurgency is war at the junior-high level (replete with the breathtaking cruelty of thirteen-year-olds).

We combined self-congratulation with intellectual dishonesty. The doctrine's drafters not only declined to examine and cite religion-fueled insurgencies, they even shunned study of political insurgencies successfully suppressed, such as the British defeat of the Mau-Mau, if the tactics that worked were distasteful to us.

Our troops paid for this dereliction in blood. And the minority of Afghans who embraced us are paying a price still. The American taxpayer paid almost a trillion dollars. Allies, too, paid in blood and treasure. Afghan villagers who just wanted to be left alone to live in familiar ignorance and squalor paid price after price. All because our civilian and too many military leaders measured success by indicators that actually signaled failure. The physical courage displayed by lance corporals in remote Afghan valleys was never complemented by moral courage in Washington or Kabul.

We asked Afghans to change their core identity and ended by revealing our own identity's shortcomings.

Now it's over, at least for us. At least, for a while. (When anyone within spitting distance of the Potomac says "Never again," he or she means "Not until next time.")

For the present, we can shake our heads at the incompetence with which we staged our Afghanistan end-game, even as we're relieved to be gone. Our military can be proud of the Kabul airlift: a proven military maxim is that it's almost impossible to recover from flawed initial dispositions, but our troops pulled it off in Kabul in August 2021.

Now what? Is the recent hysteria justified? Will Afghanistan again welcome terrorists? Is the damage to our image and our alliances irreparable?

No. Although the American president ended our engagement clumsily and with scant regard for our allies, calmer days will show that our departure was overdue. As for Afghanistan itself, we may find ourselves handsomely entertained as the Chinese, Russians, Iranians, Pakistanis, and others squabble over that strategic booby prize. Regarding geopolitical combinations, alarmists would do well to recall that, in May 1945, few Americans imagined that, barely a decade later, we would be militarily allied with Germany. Strategic necessity loves irony.

As for fighting Islamist terror, which has spread widely, if not always deeply, combatting a mobile enemy demands mobility. Tying ourselves down endlessly in Afghanistan would not have helped. Nor are we as blithe and unprepared to address the terrorist threat as we were on September 10th, 2001.

The NATO Alliance *has* been harmed. But neither we nor our most-important allies have viable alternatives. The grumpy marriage will go on, with occasional sordid affairs alternating with interludes of rediscovered romance.

We will not pay a significant price beyond that already deducted. We were not even humiliated, merely embarrassed (only the weak are humiliated). Our power is undiminished. As for our folly, we shall see.

Even domestic politics will only be affected if another major terror attack occurs on our soil. Our next elections will be shaped by the progress of the economy and the retreat (or resurgence) of the pandemic, but will be, fundamentally, a contest between reactionaries who would restrict voting rights and “progressives” who deify the irredeemable. There will be no serious discussion of strategic designs at rallies or debates. Not in 2022, not in 2024, and perhaps not ever again.

Our collective memory will be as short as our national patience. And we will, all too soon, forget the lessons of Afghanistan—if, indeed, we learn them at all—just as we discarded the lessons of our Indochina involvement. Sometimes, unprecedented wealth and immeasurable power is a curse. But the curse falls on the privates, not on the privileged.

Afghanistan? Where’s that?



**RALPH PETERS** is the author of thirty-four books, including works on strategy and security affairs, as well as best-selling, prize-winning novels. He has published more than a thousand columns, articles, and essays here and abroad. As a U.S. Army enlisted man and career officer, he served in infantry and military intelligence units before becoming a foreign area officer for the dying Soviet Union and the new Russia. As a soldier, journalist, and researcher, he has experience in more than seventy countries, covering various wars and trouble spots. His historical fiction won the American Library Association’s Boyd Award for Literary Excellence an unprecedented four times and also received the Herodotus Award and the Hammett Prize. Additionally, he was the 2015 recipient of the Goodpaster Award, presented each year to a distinguished American soldier-scholar. In 2017, he was selected for the U.S. Army’s Officer Candidate School Hall of Fame.

# Afghanistan Post-Mortem

By Peter R. Mansoor

The United States has lost its longest war. After twenty years of conflict and nation building in Afghanistan, the U.S.-backed Afghan regime collapsed like a house of cards in just a few weeks after the announced departure of American and NATO troops from the country. A final flurry of activity by the U.S. military managed to rescue 123,000 people from Kabul, but as Winston Churchill once said of Dunkirk, “Wars are not won by evacuations.” The United States now needs to reckon with the strategic, political, and military repercussions of defeat, while assessing what could have been done differently to prevent this tragic outcome at such a high cost in blood and treasure.

The most important strategic consequences of the defeat in Afghanistan include the impact on America’s alliances and the future of counterterrorism in the region. America’s partners are already reassessing the viability of their alliances with the United States in the wake of its abandonment of its Afghan partners. Europe, once enamored of President Joe Biden’s claim that America is back in the global arena, has discussed the need for more autonomy in its foreign and defense policies given the potential unreliability of the United States as an ally. Afghanistan was a NATO war as well as an American one, and the unwillingness of the Biden administration to discuss the impact of the withdrawal of foreign forces from the country has soured America’s NATO allies on the relationship, at least for the moment. Former UK prime minister Theresa May stated in the House of Commons, “What does it say about NATO if we are entirely dependent on a unilateral decision taken by the United States?” That statement came from a member of the “special relationship”; imagine what other NATO countries are thinking.

The impact of America’s withdrawal from Afghanistan will also resonate across Central and South Asia. The Biden administration has vowed to continue its counterterrorism work in the region via over the horizon strikes, but the lack of intelligence on the ground makes such actions tenuous at best. An errant drone strike on August 29 targeting a supposed car bomb hit an aid worker and his family instead, killing three adults and seven children. This action was undertaken with U.S. troops on the ground; how much harder, then, will it be for intelligence to pinpoint terrorist leaders absent a robust human intelligence component in the region?

Over the horizon strikes are problematic in other ways as well. What would be the main target of drone strikes in Afghanistan? Presumably these would not include the Taliban, on whom the United States will now depend to suppress the even deadlier Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant–Khorasan Province, or ISIS-K. There clearly isn’t any love lost between the two groups, but the prospect of the United States providing support for the Taliban to target their enemies is unsavory at best. The technical difficulties are also manifest. Maintaining surveillance of terrorist leaders in the remote regions of Afghanistan will be difficult, as transit times for drones from bases in the Gulf region or elsewhere are long, giving the platforms limited loiter time once on station. The technological challenge is not impossible, but it is expensive—and for limited benefit given the many other areas of the world in which terrorists can operate.

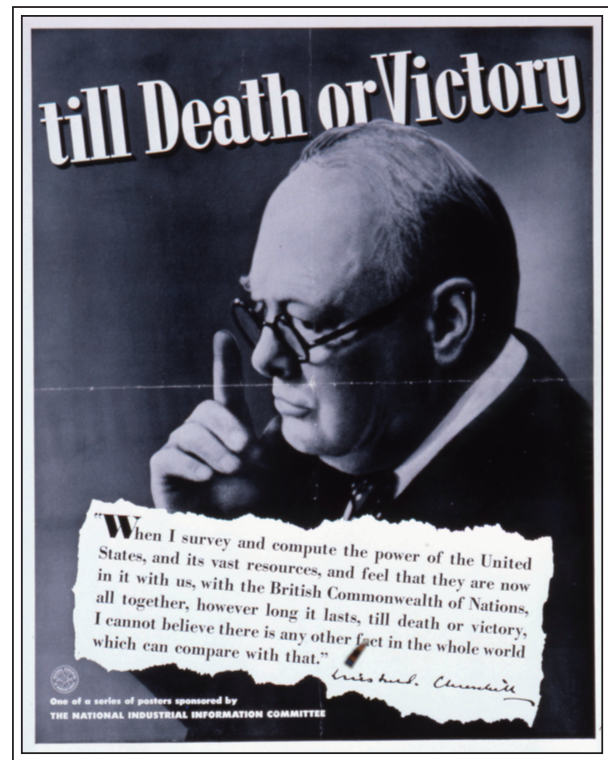


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The defeat in Afghanistan will also have domestic political blowback, although this will be shorter lived. Republicans are blasting the Biden administration both for its withdrawal and the manner in which it was executed, conveniently ignoring the fact that under the deal inked by the Trump administration with the Taliban, U.S. forces would have been withdrawn from Afghanistan three months earlier and under similar chaotic conditions. Even if Biden were to be blamed for a catastrophe four presidential administrations in the making, it is unclear if American voters will care. A majority of Americans believe the decision to withdraw was correct, even if they also believe the withdrawal was poorly conducted. Foreign policy also does not sway many voters, who tend to vote based on economic or cultural issues. By the midterm elections Afghanistan will most likely be an afterthought.

The U.S. military was already shifting its focus to major power conflict well before the Taliban entered Kabul. If anything, the defeat in Afghanistan will reinforce and sharpen this new focus. After Vietnam the U.S. military failed to institutionalize the lessons of counterinsurgency warfare learned in that conflict, choosing instead to focus on the greater threat of the Red Army in Europe. The danger today is a repeat of that experience, where the hard-won experiences of Iraq and Afghanistan are ignored in the halls of professional military educational institutions.

The sad reality is Afghanistan did not have to fall. The American people, most of whom sacrificed nothing to prosecute the war in Afghanistan, were not tired of “forever wars.” They were tired of hearing about them. The provision of several thousand troops and \$20 billion a year would not have bankrupted the U.S. military, but it would have maintained the foundation under the Afghan Security Forces, which relied on U.S. logistical, advisory, airpower, and intelligence assistance to keep the Taliban at bay. There needn’t have been an end date for such support, as critics contend. Seventy-five years after the Korean War, U.S. troops are still on the Korean Peninsula, maintaining stability in a region critical to the United States. The American people are not clamoring for their removal from East Asia. In Afghanistan, the Taliban was emboldened by their belief that the United States would not stay the course.

Sadly, that turned out to be the case.



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assumed his current position after a twenty-six-year career in the U.S. Army that included two combat tours, the first as a brigade commander in Baghdad and his final duty as executive officer to General David Petraeus, commander of Multi-National Force–Iraq. His latest works are *Surge: My Journey with General David Petraeus and the Remaking of the Iraq War* (Yale University Press, 2013), a history of the surge in Iraq in 2007–8; and *Grand Strategy and Military Alliances* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) and *The Culture of Military Organizations* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), both coedited with Williamson Murray.



# Dented, Not Damaged: The American Empire after Afghanistan

By Josef Joffe

When small, even middle-sized, powers make grievous mistakes like fighting a losing war or ignoring deadly threats, they risk their place in the global hierarchy or, worse, their existence. Thus did France and Britain when they failed to fight Nazi Germany in the thirties while still in position of strategic superiority. Instead of preventive war, it was “Munich.” Yet the mark of a super-power like the United States is a vast *margin of error*. It can absorb a deadly blow in Pearl Harbor 1941 and crush Japan in 1945. It can stumble badly in Vietnam and Afghanistan, but will not fall like France in 1940.

America plays in a different league. Its mistakes are not fatal. When Dean Acheson excluded South Korea from its defense perimeter in 1950, North Korea’s invasion followed swiftly. Yet America’s position in the global scheme remained unscathed. It bounced back and restored the status quo ante. Vietnam was humiliating, but after 1975, the U.S. still remained the greatest power on earth, ready to prevail in the next critical contests: the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, Afghanistan after 9/11, and two Iraq wars. Did anybody think that the U.S. was on the way out when it tucked tail after losing 241 Marines to a terror attack in Beirut in 1983?

The analytical point is the distinction between the assets and achievements of power. The payoffs of power were clearly negative in Vietnam and Afghanistan. But failure could not touch the asset side of the ledger—the enormous pile of chips the U.S. continues to bring to the table. Among these are the world’s no. 1 economy, the global reach of its sophisticated, battle-hardened army, and its unmatched cultural and technological clout.

So, in spite of repetitive failure during the past 70 years, America is still the greatest power on earth. Its mistakes are not lethal because of its vast strengths.

Now, the fears triggered by Joe Biden’s thoughtless self-eviction from Afghanistan are not groundless, and there is a price to pay: the loss of credibility and reputation, the crowing on the part of Russia and China, the doubts about American commitments among allies in Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East.

Some partners may well recalculate their interests, siding up to Russia and China for reinsurance. On the other hand: How far will they go if Beijing keeps pressing on Japan et al. in the Pacific, Russia is extending its tentacles in Europe from the Baltics via Poland to Ukraine, and Iran is getting closer to the bomb by the day? The United States remains the security lender of the last resort for those who will not or cannot provide for their own defense.

The problem is not the doomsday commentary in the media, but the changing character of “Mr. Big.” The key symptom is the retraction of American power that *precedes* the 46th president, as foolish or mendacious



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his oratory may be. “What, me worry?” in Afghanistan is part of a pattern that signals an ominous retreat from global responsibility. The trend began with Barack Obama, progressed under Donald Trump, and reached the acme of obliviousness under Joseph Biden. And *hoi polloi* are not far behind. A majority of Americans cheer the withdrawal from Afghanistan, though they are unhappy about the execution worthy of the Keystone Cops.

Left and right, the twain have met. The trend is now 13 years old. Its markers are Obama’s fitful retrenchment from the Greater Middle East, followed by Trump’s “America first,” as manifested by his drawdown of American forces in Europe and his pullout deal with the Taliban, not to speak of trade isolationism and a steady flow of insults against America’s allies. Nor is Biden alone in failing to think in grand strategic terms. He has plenty of allies in the Congress who would cut defense spending and lower America’s profile in the world. Biden finds himself in the company of Messrs. Obama and Trump.

Biden is more radical than Obama and less abrasive than Trump, but he is not an outlier. Thirteen years, for sure, is not enough to make for a secular shift, and America has gone through such cycles before. But note what is happening on the domestic stage where Biden is about to overtake Europe on the left with an ever-expanding welfare state. The nation is not just leery of America’s role as a world power; it is also turning inward in ways that damage its standing on the global chessboard—with welfare trumping warfare. Once enshrined into law, an American entitlement society will lack both the will and the wherewithal to take care of the global house. Why? A great power must always be ready and capable to threaten and execute. That is what such powers do.

Mr. Biden aims to turn the U.S. into a “normal” power—one that puts its faith into amiability, modesty, cooperation, and goodness—such as saving the planet. That is tailor-made for the medium-sized nations of Europe, where virtue does not exact an existential price as long the U.S. provides a security umbrella. Russia, China, and Iran, though, are not in the business of benignity. Their game is revisionism: a lot more for us and a lot less for the reigning superpower.

On the other side of the ledger, which the prophets of doom tend to overlook, there are the enduring realities of America’s vast assets. Such riches do not forebode the relentless decline of America. Like in Vietnam, the humiliation in Afghanistan may pale. The real problem is the longer-term factors that have been driving retraction for a dozen years.

Prophecy is easy for agitated pundits whose columns will be forgotten tomorrow. But divination is not given to ordinary mortals like this author. All we can know is the recent past, which seems to be jelling into a pattern. What is the common denominator of three presidents as diverse as Obama, Trump, and Biden? It is to shrink America’s footprint in the world. Let’s reduce our burden, let’s follow Obama’s dictum: “It’s time for a little nation-building at home.”

It is “isolationism lite” for the sake of a more perfect, though debt-financed welfare state, which imposes stark choices. Shall we match the Chinese ship by ship or provide free kindergarten for all? Add the psyche of a nation that has tired of the burden after so many interventions that have claimed thousands of lives and trillions of dollars without bearing fruit. The impulse now is to upgrade the American interest and to downgrade the responsibilities the U.S. has borne for a lifetime.

The difference between Obama-Biden and Trump is not substance, but tonality. The Democratic duo spoke softly; Mr. Trump roared. But the name of the game has been “more for America and less for the rest of the world.” Retrenchment is the common motif.

Where is that road going? No prophecy, but probability at this point. In the affairs of nations, rivals will not reward strategic reticence with modesty on their own part. They will exploit opportunity. Like nature, world politics abhors a vacuum, which China, Russia, and Iran have been filling since the days of Obama. They will redouble their efforts under Biden, who is practically issuing an invitation to them.

History has richly proven this point: great powers cannot withdraw from the game—or only at their own and the world’s peril. Is there a silver lining? Once the U.S. bestrode the world at the end of the nineteenth century, it has gone through cycles of intrusion and inwardism. In each cycle, it would have been far less costly to show the flag rather than to furl it (think 1914, 1939, and 1950 in Korea).

The nasty irony today is the old one. In all cases of retreat, the U.S. was not down, let alone out. In spite of its towering strength, it blithely deemed itself immune to the gathering storm—and then had to return at the cost of bloody war. Mr. Biden is not the first to face this lesson, and hence, he has no excuse. The country has been there so often before. Great powers, alas, have to take care of both: their own welfare and the state of the world.

## Poll: How should Americans assess the recent chaos in Afghanistan?

- ☐ The Afghan self-inflicted disaster is the greatest American strategic, political, and military defeat of the past fifty years.
- ☐ An American contingent in Afghanistan was still viable to deter the Taliban and to facilitate U.S. air operations.
- ☐ The staying or leaving is not the problem; the terrible manner in which we left is.
- ☐ Despite the chaos, making a clean break now from Afghanistan is better than a costly one later on.
- ☐ Ignore the media: the U.S. was right to leave—and did so in the best way given the circumstances.



**JOSEF JOFFE** is a distinguished visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution and professor of practice—international affairs at SAIS/Johns Hopkins. He also serves on the editorial council of the German weekly *Die Zeit*.

His areas of interest are U.S. foreign policy, international security, European-American relations, Europe and Germany, and the Middle East. He has been affiliated with Stanford since 1999 when he was appointed Payne Lecturer. He has also taught at Harvard and SAIS (Johns Hopkins). A cofounder of *American Purpose* and previously the *American Interest*, his latest book is *The Myth of America’s Decline*. His essays and op-eds have appeared in all the major papers of the U.S. and Britain.

## Related Commentary

- Angelo Codevilla, "Graveyard of Narratives," *The American Mind* (August 24, 2021). <https://americanmind.org/memo/graveyard-of-narratives/>
- Victor Davis Hanson, "The Afghanistization of America," *American Greatness* (September 19, 2021). <https://amgreatness.com/2021/09/19/the-afghanistization-of-america/>
- Victor Davis Hanson and H. R. McMaster, "A Lost War: A Conversation with Victor Davis Hanson and H. R. McMaster on Afghanistan's Past, Present, and Future," *Uncommon Knowledge* podcast (September 20, 2021). <https://www.hoover.org/research/lost-war-conversation-victor-davis-hanson-and-h-r-mcmaster-afghanistans-past-present-and>
- Bruce Thornton, "Fleeing Afghanistan," *Frontpage Mag* (August 16, 2021). <https://www.frontpagemag.com/fpm/2021/08/running-away-afghanistan-jamie-glazov/>
- Bing West, "Who Will Trust Us after Afghanistan," *National Review* (August 26, 2021). <https://www.nationalreview.com/magazine/2021/09/13/who-will-trust-us-after-afghanistan/>
- Paul Wolfowitz, "The 'Forever War' Hasn't Ended," editorial, *Wall Street Journal* (August 27, 2021). <https://www.wsj.com/articles/endless-war-afghanistan-withdrawal-biden-taliban-isis-mass-casualty-terror-attack-taiwan-11630076447>

## Discussion Questions

1. What will likely be the lasting political, strategic, and military repercussions on America from the defeat in Afghanistan, and how might it have been avoided?
2. Which superpower will now inherit concessions in Afghanistan, and will it suffer the same consequences as all others?
3. Was the Afghan democratic military viable with air support, or doomed to fail no matter what the U.S. did?
4. Will enemies see the disaster as a one-off aberration or see the defeat as endemic U.S. weakness to be exploited globally?
5. Who is properly to blame for the fall of Afghanistan? The U.S. military? Intelligence services? The Biden administration? Prior U.S. policies under three previous presidents?



IN THE NEXT ISSUE

## The Costs of America's Military Interventions



## Military History in Contemporary Conflict

As the very name of Hoover Institution attests, military history lies at the very core of our dedication to the study of “War, Revolution, and Peace.” Indeed, the precise mission statement of the Hoover Institution includes the following promise: “The overall mission of this Institution is, from its records, to recall the voice of experience against the making of war, and by the study of these records and their publication, to recall man’s endeavors to make and preserve peace, and to sustain for America the safeguards of the American way of life.” From its origins as a library and archive, the Hoover Institution has evolved into one of the foremost research centers in the world for policy formation and pragmatic analysis. It is with this tradition in mind, that the “Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict” has set its agenda—reaffirming the Hoover Institution’s dedication to historical research in light of contemporary challenges, and in particular, reinvigorating the national study of military history as an asset to foster and enhance our national security. By bringing together a diverse group of distinguished military historians, security analysts, and military veterans and practitioners, the working group seeks to examine the conflicts of the past as critical lessons for the present.

## Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict

The Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict examines how knowledge of past military operations can influence contemporary public policy decisions concerning current conflicts. The careful study of military history offers a way of analyzing modern war and peace that is often underappreciated in this age of technological determinism. Yet the result leads to a more in-depth and dispassionate understanding of contemporary wars, one that explains how particular military successes and failures of the past can be often germane, sometimes misunderstood, or occasionally irrelevant in the context of the present.

## Strategika

*Strategika* is a journal that analyzes ongoing issues of national security in light of conflicts of the past—the efforts of the Military History Working Group of historians, analysts, and military personnel focusing on military history and contemporary conflict. Our board of scholars shares no ideological consensus other than a general acknowledgment that human nature is largely unchanging. Consequently, the study of past wars can offer us tragic guidance about present conflicts—a preferable approach to the more popular therapeutic assumption that contemporary efforts to ensure the perfectibility of mankind eventually will lead to eternal peace. New technologies, methodologies, and protocols come and go; the larger tactical and strategic assumptions that guide them remain mostly the same—a fact discernable only through the study of history.



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