

CHAPTER 3

Afghanistan

Losing the Just War

As a result of the American military the Taliban is no longer in existence.

—George W. Bush, September 2004 (before the U.S. elections)

Across Afghanistan last year, the number of roadside bomb attacks almost doubled, direct fire attacks on international forces almost tripled, and suicide bombings grew nearly fivefold.

—George W. Bush, February 15, 2007

The Afghanistan war launched in 2001 arguably met all six principles of a *just war*, which, as discussed in the previous chapter, are: *legitimate authority*; *just cause*; *right intention*; *last resort*; *reasonable chance for success*; and *proportionality* (with the weakest link being the argument supporting the *reasonable chance for success* principle.) The Taliban government had harbored and supported bin Laden and al Qaeda, and following 9/11 it refused to cooperate in broad international efforts to bring bin Laden and al Qaeda to justice. The United Nations approved the subsequent invasion, and it had worldwide support, in sharp contrast to Bush's later voluntary invasion of Iraq.

Although the six principles of a just war were present in Afghanistan, Bush utterly failed as a leader in its planning and execution. Regarding the "reasonable chance for success" principle, Bush snatched defeat from the jaws of victory.

Regarding the *five pillars of a strong coalition* also discussed in Chapter 2, Bush failed on the last four: *clear goals*; *trustworthy leadership*; *a sensible plan*; and *excellent execution*. But no one should have been surprised. After all, Bush—neither a builder of nations nor a builder of coalitions—didn't want a coalition in the first place, and he did not insist on expert planning.

International political efforts to create a provisional Afghani government proceeded in parallel with the military campaign. In accordance with the Bonn Agreement of December 5, 2001, a *Loya Jirga*—meaning "grand council" in the Pashto language—attended by 1,500 delegates was held in June 2002, and a transitional government headed by Hamid Karzai was established. A special commission created under the Bonn Agreement had established procedures and rules governing this *Loya Jirga*, including a process to select delegates and ensure the fair representation of

women and other groups in Afghan society. Loya Jirgas, which are quasi-democratic, have been used for centuries in Afghanistan to choose new leaders and decide other important matters. Tribal leaders and influential elders from the various tribes and ethnic and religious groups traditionally attend the Loya Jirgas.

The American-led military operation—at least, initially—proved to be a showcase for American military might. The strategy relied principally on sophisticated modern high-tech weaponry and the use of special operations forces. America's smart bombs and other weaponry had advanced considerably from those used in Gulf War I in 1991, a point highlighted by Bush's father while discussing the much greater military strength available to his son in 2001 than that available to him during Gulf War I in 1991.

In short, the power of America's military increased substantially during the eight years of the Clinton administration, as it did during prior administrations.

Notwithstanding the initial military successes in Afghanistan, and notwithstanding the fact that the conflict there arguably met all requirements of a just war, the overall operation in Afghanistan under Bush deserves a grade of "F," or at best an "I" for incomplete. The conflict drags on with no end in sight, and Bush certainly has no plans to end it during his presidency. Corruption and crime are rampant. Osama bin Laden is still at large directing terrorist activities in various parts of the world, and many of his followers were neither killed nor captured. Al Qaeda has expanded its membership, and new leaders have stepped in to replace those killed. More ominously, many new terrorist organizations have been formed throughout the world, independent of al Qaeda but generally sympathetic to its goals. Local warlords effectively control most of Afghanistan. The drug trade is booming. The Taliban has made a strong comeback in various parts of the country. The Taliban and al Qaeda have not said uncle. The criminals responsible for 9/11 have not met their maker. Bush did not do his job.

SIDEBAR: Opium Production

Although Afghanistan has no oil to feed America's addiction for petroleum products, it does supply opium to help feed America's addiction for heroin, which is derived from opium. During its several years in power the Taliban outlawed opium poppy growing in Afghanistan and enforced strict anti-drug policies with draconian measures that were quite effective.

Unfortunately, opium production in Afghanistan skyrocketed after the fall of the Taliban, hitting an all-time high in 2003 (double the previous year), followed by additional records the next few years. By 2007 Afghanistan supplied more than 90% of the world's opium and had virtually no other exports. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) estimates that Afghanistan's opium production is worth about \$2.5 billion a year to Afghanistan—with a street value many times that—greatly dwarfing the \$40 million in official exports to neighboring Pakistan.

It is estimated that the drug business accounts for 60% of Afghanistan's gross national product, employing more than 2 million people. Only a small percentage of the drug's value goes to Afghanistan's poor farmers. The criminals controlling the distribution channels, including mid-level and senior officials in Karzai's U.S.-supported government, take the lion's share. Even Karzai's brother has been accused of having a significant role.

The White House's own Office of Drug Control Policy acknowledges that the war on terrorism conflicts with the war on drugs in Afghanistan, with much of the cash from opium sales being funneled to terrorist groups.

The U.S.-backed Afghani government officially banned opium cultivation but lacks the power and desire to prevent it, especially in several provinces outside its control.

Virtually no one would suggest that the hallucinatory Bush neocons wanted Afghanistan's opium production to skyrocket in order to reduce the price of their recreational drugs. However, the sad story of record opium production in Afghanistan is another example of *unintended consequences*, and it *does* illustrate the Bush administration's incompetence in planning the war and prosecuting it to completion, as well as its wobbly¹³ halfhearted efforts to win the peace. Bush and his team of amateurs botched the historic opportunity to turn a just war in Afghanistan into a just peace.

The military shortcomings in Afghanistan were—and still are—strategic, not tactical. The blame rests entirely at the highest levels of the United States government, with Bush and the neocon civilian leaders who unilaterally chose to conduct the war *on the cheap, on the slow, on the dumb*.

In a major defeat for the United States, bin Laden escaped from Tora Bora in the mountains along Afghanistan's eastern border with Pakistan in early December 2001. By the following April U.S. intelligence and military personnel in the Bush administration had concluded and admitted that the failure to commit American ground troops at Tora Bora—and relying instead on local Afghani militias—was the gravest error in the war against bin Laden and al Qaeda.

At the tactical level, American and allied soldiers performed superbly in Afghanistan, and they would have eagerly done much more if called upon to do so. If ordered, they would have done everything possible to seal the border with Pakistan, block escape routes, and kill as many of the enemy as possible, including bin Laden.

However, our neocon leaders wanted a high-tech media-friendly war without American casualties, thus protecting bin Laden from a well-deserved lethal blow. The Taliban and al Qaeda criminals who escaped into Pakistan emerged from the experience recharged and invigorated. Fighting American occupiers and escaping over the mountains into Pakistan gave them strength, confidence and prestige. In the eyes of their followers, they emerged from the great hardship as heroes, much like George Washington and his hardened troops during the early dark days of America's Revolutionary War. The Taliban and al Qaeda survivors became effective recruiters

¹³ Yes, "W" also stands for "wobbly."

for their misguided cause. Likewise, Muslim prisoners returning from America's prison camps in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and elsewhere are often treated as heroes.

Michael Scheuer, a central CIA figure in the hunt for Osama bin Laden—and the author of *Imperial Hubris: Why the West Is Losing the War on Terror*—asserts that the Bush administration acted much too slowly following 9/11. Its response was a “complete disaster,” he says. By waiting more than three weeks to attack al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, the United States missed an opportunity to kill bin Laden and other key leaders, who were thus able to escape. The Bush administration should have had a lethal quick response plan in place, given the prior attacks by al Qaeda against the USS Cole and two American embassies in Africa.

The Bush administration had little use for the most skilled fighters in Afghanistan—the mujahideen—who are seen as war heroes by their people because they drove the Soviet occupiers out of Afghanistan. The Bush neocons chose to alienate them—neither killing nor courting them—and they will remain a major threat to the central Afghani government for a long time.

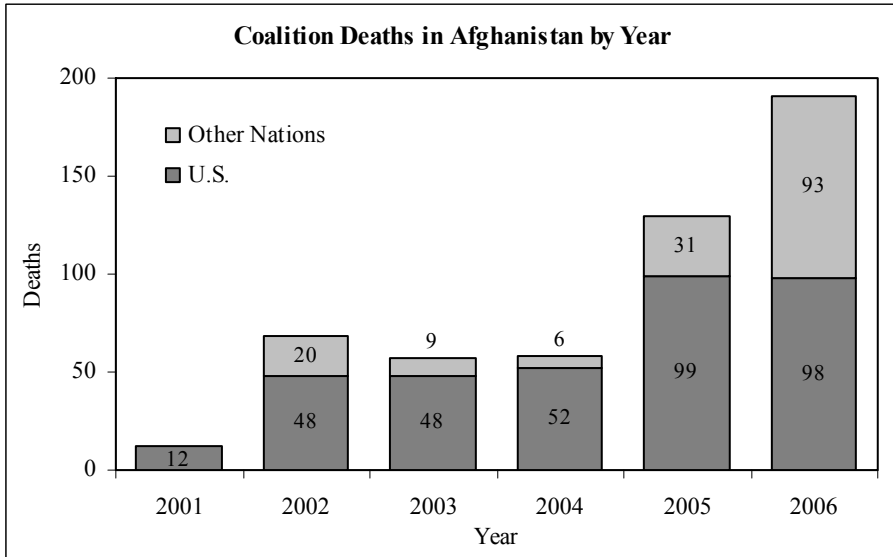
Later, in Iraq, the Bush neocons made similar but even more catastrophic mistakes as they broke their prewar promises to Iraqis by firing both the Iraqi army and Iraqi police forces, sending them home alienated, angry, without jobs and pay, but with their weapons and access to *hundreds of thousands of tons* of munitions.

The Bush administration failed to win the war and peace in Afghanistan because it failed to devote sufficient military forces to complete the job, and because it failed to develop and implement comprehensive plans to win the peace. Its central obsession was always Iraq, and the significant American military forces it later diverted to Iraq helped create a power vacuum in Afghanistan.

Incredibly, even Arabic-speaking Special Forces fighting bin Laden and al Qaeda in Afghanistan were pulled out and sent to Iraq, to be replaced in part by Spanish-speaking Special Forces that in turn had been fighting the war on drugs in Latin America.

Afghanistan is not very important to the neocons because it does not have oil. Iraq was always their coveted prize. The neocons incorrectly concluded that Afghanistan was of little strategic importance. But consider Afghanistan's neighbors, all of which are global hot spots or potential hot spots: nuclear-armed Pakistan on the south and east; nuclear-armed wannabe and Axis of Evil member Iran on the west; nuclear-armed China to the east; and the “stans” on the north (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.)

Most important, Afghanistan was the number one battleground in the broader war on terrorism. Regrettably, Bush badly fumbled the ball by not finishing the job in Afghanistan, and by gratuitously invading Iraq, a country that had nothing—absolutely zero—to do with 9/11. Only one war was on the calendar of just wars, but Bush chose to play a doubleheader, and he lost both “games.” As a result, America's moral standing, power and influence took a nosedive. Bush painted himself and America into a corner, with virtually no viable options available, and America's position in the so-called war on terror was greatly compromised.



Like a marriage, a coalition without mutual trust usually results in a train wreck. Both on the international stage and in America, Bush earned his status as the most distrusted American president ever, and America and the world will pay the price for decades.

Bush's unilateral and insulting foreign policy divided NATO and prevented it from doing what was necessary, which was to make a strong early commitment to help build a secure and functional Afghanistan. The departure of Bush and Cheney from Washington will improve relations with NATO, but the putrid odor left behind by these two-legged skunks from Texas will last a long time.

On December 20, 2001, the United Nations Security Council authorized the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) for Afghanistan, and by late 2002 about 20 nations had contributed a measly total of 4,650 troops to the cause. The ISAF would have been much larger but for the omniscient and omnipotent Bush regime, which called the shots in Afghanistan and exhibited little desire or respect for allied assistance. Why share the glory of victory? The emperor knew best.

Thanks to bush league policies, NATO's efforts in Afghanistan were half-hearted and much less than what the situation demanded, and NATO's summit meetings were more ceremonial than productive. When NATO finally assumed command of the international peacekeeping forces in Afghanistan in August 2003, the ISAF's peacekeeping mandate was limited to Kabul. In late 2003 the Security Council expanded the mandate to cover all of Afghanistan, including security for the upcoming national elections. But by mid-2004 NATO-ISAF still had only 6,500 troops in Afghanistan, only a small fraction of what was required, and most of these troops remained in the Kabul area because of security concerns. Due to deteriorating security, NATO-ISAF increased its troop levels from 8,000 in early 2005 to 20,000 by September 2006. The following month 12,000 American troops in Afghanistan were transferred to NATO-ISAF, bringing its total forces to 32,000.

NATO and the United States simply do not have sufficient forces in place to accomplish the mission. The border with Pakistan remains porous; warlords run much of the country and protect the drug trade Columbia-style; the Taliban has rebounded strongly; and the corrupt Karzai government does not have the military and political support it needs.

Bush's unilateral invasion of Iraq coupled with the diversion of American forces profoundly compromised NATO's mission in Afghanistan. Given the small size of America's presence in Afghanistan, NATO reluctantly committed only token additional resources.

Unfortunately, the United States has insufficient uncommitted military forces to commit to Afghanistan, unless it diverts forces from Iraq, which it must do immediately. America's armed forces are stretched too thin, and the desperate stopgap actions by the Bush administration will not make a big enough difference.

W's premature evacuation in Afghanistan and diversion of forces to Iraq reduced America's already insufficient troop levels in Afghanistan to a low of 10,000. A subsequent flip-flop by Bush increased the total to about 20,000 by the third anniversary of the Taliban's fall, and to 27,000 by February 2007 (15,000 of which were in NATO-ISAF), but once again Bush and the rubber-stamping GOP Congress were "too little, too late."

Thanks to America's corporate media, Afghanistan is off the radar, which is where Bush wants it, as he runs out the clock on his disastrous presidency. Along the way, Bush feebly claimed—lied—from time to time that the war in Afghanistan had been won and the people of Afghanistan were free, although after 2006 he reduced the frequency of such bogus claims.

The road ahead in Afghanistan is orders of magnitude more difficult, uncertain, and costly than it should have been.

The central government has little authority outside Kabul, causing Afghans to refer derisively to President Karzai as the "Mayor of Kabul." Vast stretches of Afghanistan are under the control of competing warlords. Karzai views many of these warlords, who cooperated with American forces in the war against the Taliban, as a bigger threat than the Taliban. Many of these warlords rose to power in the 1980s when the United States helped them drive Soviet forces out of Afghanistan. In 2001 the Bush administration greatly increased their power by relying on them to battle the Taliban in Kabul, and he further increased their power and anger by attacking Iraq. The forces of these warlords are now much greater than those of the central government, which is inadequately supported by NATO and the United States.

One of the most dangerous, virulently anti-American, anti-west warlords is Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, a Wahhabi Pashtun supported by Saudi Arabia who was elected a representative at the Loya Jirga in 2003. His militants are responsible for many war crimes over the years, including the massacre of civilians. Sayyaf, a Wahhabi fundamentalist, opposes the expansion of rights for women and wants the new government to follow strict fundamentalist Islamic law. Karzai needs international help in disarming him, a very difficult chore at best. Sayyaf was a member of the Afghanistan branch of the Muslim Brotherhood and had a close relationship with bin Laden during the jihad against the Soviet Union in the 1980s. According to the 9/11 Com-

mission Report, Sayyaf was a mentor to Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, who managed the quadruple plane hijackings on 9/11.

In July 2004 Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) announced that it was leaving Afghanistan, after 24 years of service, because the Karzai government failed to act regarding evidence that local warlords were responsible for the killing of five members of its staff the previous month. The organization, which had 1,400 Afghani staff and 80 international volunteers in Afghanistan, also denounced the U.S. military's new requirement that aid recipients provide information on insurgents, because the policy put all aid workers at greater risk. The Nobel Peace Prize-winning organization relies on neutrality to protect its medical staff in war zones.

As for winning the peace and helping build Afghanistan into a viable nation, the Bush regime in 2002 quickly went AWOL. At subsequent Afghanistan reconstruction conferences the United States did increase its pledges, but the total of about \$10 billion through 2006, which includes security assistance, is still much less than needed. It is a pittance compared to the potential long-term costs if Afghanistan does not emerge as a viable nation, and is less than 1% of the cost of Bush's and the GOP's mad adventure in Iraq.

A large majority of the people of Afghanistan rejoiced at the overthrow of the Taliban. They desperately needed and wanted assistance, and expectations of America were running high. It was a golden opportunity for America to help transform Afghanistan, but the Bush neocons failed to recognize that the window of opportunity was short. Bush blissfully sat on his hands—basking in the glow of the corporate media spin machine—and turned victory into defeat.

The United Nations was ready, willing and able to assist in nation building in Afghanistan, but Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld foolishly told the United Nations to confine itself to Kabul. Having virtually no interest in nation building, the Bush neocons refused to step aside and let the United Nations do its work.

Following 9/11, Bush also fumbled a long-awaited historic opportunity for the United States to improve relations with Iran and thus possibly even restore diplomatic relations with the strategically most important nation in the greater Middle East. Notwithstanding three decades of broken diplomatic relations due to the Iranian takeover of the American embassy in Tehran, Iran was a good candidate to be a friend and strategic ally of the United States. The Iranian people had great affection for Americans, and hundreds of thousands of Iranians have immigrated to America.

With the exception of Israel, Iran could be America's number one partner and ally in the greater Middle East.

Following the 9/11 attacks, Iran offered to fight side by side with American forces in Afghanistan to remove the Taliban. Iran despised the Taliban for many reasons, including the Taliban's slaughter of 10 Iranian diplomats in Mazar-e-Sharif in 1999, and almost went to war against the Taliban in the 1990s. Negotiations regarding military cooperation in Afghanistan and a possible rapprochement between Iran and the United States were making progress until Bush included Iran in his bizarre Axis of Evil in his State of the Union address in January 2002. "Tough cowboy" Bush preferred militant confrontation with Iran over rapprochement and a possible historic alliance. The rest is history. Bush's saber rattling empowered Islamic hard-liners, weakened the growing pro-modernity democratic movement in Iran, and

caused Iran to look to China as a better strategic partner than the United States. Iran later emerged as the biggest winner in Bush's disastrous war on Iraq, and the vast majority of Iranians reasonably concluded that with Bush on the loose Iran needed nuclear weapons to ensure respect and security.

Thanks to Bush's illegal and poorly managed war on Iraq, Iran's influence in the region is ascendant, and America's is declining. In half-hearted, helter-skelter response, the Bush regime tried to counter the growing power of Shiite Persian Iran by cobbling together an alliance of regional Sunni Arab nations, including Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. However, these nations preferred to work independently of the Bush regime and its taint. The Bush administration characterized the nations in this new "Sunni Axis" as moderate, but all three are dictatorships, with Egypt and Saudi Arabia ranking near the bottom of all nations in respecting human rights. Thanks to Bush's bungling of "democracy" in Iraq, democratic reform in these nations is now off the table.

Following the overthrow of the Taliban, the people of Afghanistan had great expectations that America would rise to the occasion and help transform Afghanistan and improve the lives of its long-suffering citizens. But Bush was AWOL.

SIDEBAR: Too Little, Too Late

A 2003 study by the Rand Corporation compared America's *nation building* efforts in several countries. Here are some of the findings:

Country	Peacekeepers per 1,000 People	External Assistance for First Two Years (per capita)
Bosnia	18.6	\$1,390
Kosovo	20.0	\$814
Afghanistan	0.18	\$52

The above data highlight Bush's foolish decision to do Afghanistan *on the cheap*. Incredibly, on a per capita basis, Bush's peacekeeping commitment was less than 1% of that in Bosnia.¹⁴ Neither Bush's father nor Bill Clinton would have made this tragic mistake in Afghanistan.

Bush's *bomb-em-and-leave-em* strategy was especially foolish because: (1) The reality of 9/11 required that America not fail in Afghanistan; (2) Afghanistan presents an enormously more difficult challenge than either Bosnia or Kosovo, and thus requires more resources, not less; and (3) Afghanistan is strategically more critical, given its key crossroads location and its center-stage role in the war on terrorism.

¹⁴ If America's combat troops in Afghanistan are added to the peacekeeper total for Afghanistan, the result is still well under one peacekeeper per 1,000 Afghans.

Compounding the problem, Bush's Iraq war drained U.S. military resources from Afghanistan at a time when they were still desperately needed there to fight the Taliban. There are more sworn police officers in the New York City Police Department (NYPD)—about 35,000—than there are U.S. troops in Afghanistan, and only a small percentage of the residents of New York City shoot at law enforcement.

For the sake of Afghanistan, and in America's own self interest, America must take a lead role in helping to build Afghanistan into a viable nation. But neither Bush nor the Republican Party has the backbone and steadfastness to do it right and see it through. Unfortunately, thanks to Bush's mishandling of both Afghanistan and Iraq, there is no groundswell in America for helping Afghanistan in other than bush league fashion. Afghanistan—center stage in the war on terrorism—is the forgotten war. It is another "Mission Not Accomplished."

Michael Scheuer is right—America is losing the war on terror, and we don't even know it. Bin Laden is now seen as a heroic defender of his faith both against Western powers that have intruded into the Muslim world and also against the many corrupt Muslim dictatorships that rule that world.

Thanks to the arrogance and incompetence of the Bush neocons in Afghanistan, in Iraq, and in the war on terrorism, bin Laden is now much more loved and respected in the Muslim world than George Bush. The Muslim world was appalled and shamed by 9/11. But, thanks to Bush, the ruthless murderer of more than 3,000 innocent people on 9/11 now has a better reputation than the so-called "leader" of the world's leading democracy.

In the next chapter we turn our attention to Iraq, which, unlike Afghanistan, had nothing to do with 9/11 or the war on terror.