Mullings

An American Cyber-Column

Afghanistan is Worse then You Thought

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* The last time the Taliban ran Afghanistan, they turned the country into Band Camp for Terrorists.
* One week after 9/11, September 18, 2001, with justifiable blood lust, the Congress adopted a joint resolution simply titled: “Authorization for Use of Military Force.” With those six words, President George W. Bush with the full support of the American people through their elected representatives, set about reclaiming Afghanistan from the Taliban.
* Afghanistan as the world has learned too many times, is not an easy country to conquer, to free, or even to help.
* In 2004, shortly after I got back from Iraq, I was asked by an auditing group based in the Pentagon to be a field investigator, reporting on schools with no teachers, students, or books; phantom roads never constructed, hospitals and clinics with no doctors, nurses or patients; and farm equipment that had ended up in Pakistan or India.
* The Mullings Director of Standards and Practices with The Lad said that didn’t sound like the best idea they’d ever heard of and denied me yet another opportunity to get myself killed.
* They, of course, were right.
* In 2008, it was determined that it might be a good idea to keep track of the billions of dollars we were spending on this conquering/freeing/helping activity.
* The organization now charged with that auditing task is called the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction – SIGAR in Pentagon-speak.
* From the first quarterly report, dated Oct 30, 2008:

Since 2001, the U.S. has provided approximately $32 billion in humanitarian and reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan.”

* This week, the most recent quarterly report began:

“Today, SIGAR its 58th Quarterly Report to Congress exa mining the $146.68 billion U.S. reconstruction effort in Afghanistan.”

* According to a Brown University study cited by President Joe Biden, the US and its allies have spent $8 trillion on military and civilian activities in 80 countries on the war on terror since 2001. “Of that, $2.3 trillion is attributed to the Afghanistan/Pakistan war zone.” That, the President said, works out to about “$300 million PER DAY for the past 20 years.”
* Humans have occupied what is now Afghanistan for a long, long time. According to Wikipedia

“A cave called Kara Kamar contained Upper Paleolithic blades Carbon-14 dated at 34,000 years old”

* Compare and contrast with this from the Smithsonian:

“Within just the past 12,000 years, our species, Homo sapiens, made the transition to producing food and changing our surroundings.”

* From that jump start on early civilization, to 2023, Afghanistan has gone backwards. SIGAR states: “Afghanistan is now the only country in the world where it is illegal for a woman to attend secondary school or university.”
* Further,  “On December 24, the Taliban ordered all local and international nongovernmental organizations working in Afghanistan to terminate their female employees. In response, UN agencies and most NGOs have partially or fully suspended operations, saying they cannot reach female recipients without female staff.”
* The UN stepped in and got the Taliban to agree to let women continue to work in the health sector.
* More? 34,000 years after making tools, “Some 28.3 million Afghans (two-thirds of the population), are depending on international food assistance this winter.”.
* Since the Taliban takeover in August of 2021, “the United States has appropriated or otherwise made available over $8 billion in assistance to Afghan citizens and refugees. In addition, the United States obligated $2.7 billion to transport, house, and feed Afghan evacuees.”
* SIGAR points out that “the Taliban regime derives revenue from this aid in the form of “licenses,” “taxes,” and “administrative fees” imposed on NGOs and their employees as a condition for operating in Afghanistan.”
* That money goes a long way in allowing the Taliban to operate domestically and internationally.
* So, why don’t we just stop paying for a bad deal? Without continuing aid thousands – if not millions – of Afghans would starve, the minimal economy would turn to dust, the Taliban would still be in charge and who knows which bad actor might try *their* hand in the conquering/freeing/helping Afghanistan business.
* Not on the cheap, though. The United Nations estimates “97% of the population now lives below the poverty line.”
* Is anything working in Afghanistan? Alas, yes. According to the SIGAR report:

“While many industries in Afghanistan are suffering, opiates trafficking has not been affected since the Taliban seized power in August 2021. Afghanistan continues to provide 80% of the global supply through various cross-national networks.”

* As the U.S. haa learned too many times in the past almost 250 years, getting into a war is one thing. Getting out of a war is much, much more complicated.
* See you next week.