

20 Years Later, the Afghan War Isn't Really Over

Oct. 8, 2021

October 7 marked 20 years since the US invaded Afghanistan in the wake of the 9/11 attacks in New York and Washington DC. While President Biden followed through on Donald Trump's pledge to pull US troops out of Afghanistan, the war has not ended. The US has made clear their intention to continue using airstrikes from "over-the-horizon" positions, a tactic that was used during the pullout with disastrous consequences. Furthermore, the detention facility at the US Naval Base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, which was set up in January 2002 to house so-called "terrorists," remains open with 39 prisoners, including many who have been cleared for release and/or who have never faced trial. The 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force which intended to target Al Qaeda in Afghanistan remains in place and was used to justify other US military actions including those in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, Libya, and Syria. A separate 2002 AUMF designed to allow the US to attack Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq has been repealed by the US House, but not yet in the Senate (The Hill, 8/3).



The wars that began in 2001 are estimated to have killed over 7000 Americans and at least 660,000 people in other countries. The financial cost to the US including weaponry, military personnel, veteran care and the broad spying infrastructure set up in the wake of 9/11 is estimated at over \$8 trillion (Brown University Costs of War project, 9/21).

The US has stated that it does not intend to alert the Taliban to future drone strikes in Afghanistan (Military Times, 9/24). The second drone strike the US initiated after an attack on the Kabul airport during the evacuation of Americans and Afghans killed ten civilians, including a man who worked for a US nonprofit and several children. The US admitted no militants were killed in that blast (New York Post, 9/10).

The battle for the future of Afghanistan also includes the estimated \$1 trillion in minerals under Afghan soil, to which China has turned its eyes. Surely the US will not tolerate Chinese dominance in the region, as one goal stated by President Biden in removing the troops from Afghanistan was to reposition them for potential war with China and Russia (Associated Press, 6/25). The US has run a number of military operations, including sailing warships through the strait of Taiwan at least eight times in 2021, to "send a message" to China (US Navy, 8/27). They also created a new military alliance with the UK and Australia (involving the sale of nuclear submarines, leading to diplomatic fallout with France) which is aimed at China (Associated Press, 9/21).

President Biden's stated desire to bring a close to the endless wars is admirable and seems to meet those of people who work for peace. However, it is difficult to take him at his word with the "pivot" to China, the positioning of drones, and his threat after the Kabul airport attack to "hunt you down and make you pay." These are not the words of a man of peace.

Congress also plays a role in perpetuating the wars. The US presence in Yemen predates the civil war mostly fueled by the involvement of Saudi Arabia. Congress tried to get President Trump to end support for the Saudi war, and out of only eight vetoes, Trump used three to overturn those efforts. Although Congress has put a provision in the spending bill for 2021-22 to end support for the Saudi war, there has been no effort to stop US so-called "anti-terrorism" activity there, which began with the first known drone strikes in the world in 2004. Over 344 US strikes in Yemen have killed at least 209 civilians since then (Airwars.org and TheBureauInvestigates.org).

President Biden made an incorrect statement when talking about the Afghan withdrawal, claiming the US has no military presence in Syria. However, there are an estimated 900 troops there (Fox News, 8/19), not invited by the Syrian Government, nor authorized by acts of Congress or the United Nations.

After a lull in the first six months after Biden took over from Trump, who increased drone and conventional aircraft strikes in Somalia from under 25 per year to over 50 in 2019-20, airstrikes in that beleaguered nation have continued. Trump oversaw six airstrikes in Somalia in January (Military Times, 1/6), and Biden six more since July (Airwars.org).

After over 550 airstrikes, the US attacks on Libya seem to have stopped in 2019, though the US/NATO war there in 2011 threw that country into chaos from which they are only now starting to emerge (NewAmerica.org). No drone strikes have occurred in Pakistan since 2017, though 414 were conducted from 2004 until then. Other than these two exceptions, the never-ending wars continue.

NOT THE LONGEST WAR, BUT STILL ALARMING

Conventional pundits continue to refer to Afghanistan as "America's longest war," ignoring the war against Native Americans that began before the US was even a nation and continued into the early 20th Century (and some would say continues today by subtle means). The Korean War started in 1950 and was put on hold with an armistice in July 1953, (continued, over)

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but there was never a peace treaty calling an end to that war. The war against Iraq began when the US imposed the most stringent sanctions in history in August 1990, bombed Iraq in 1991 and continued both of those strategies up until the invasion in 2003. With 2500 American troops still in Iraq today, that war has gone on at least 31 years. The US claims it will be swapping out combat troops for “military advisors” by the end of 2021 (CNN, 7/26), a job description that was given to the first troops in Viet Nam. However, in September a contingent of 2000 troops was announced for a nine month tour in Iraq, showing even this latest declared “end” to that war is dubious (Middle East Eye, 9/20).

President Biden astutely called attention to the fact that soldiers heading over to Afghanistan were not yet born at the time the war started. (Peace and Justice Works held an event in 2019 called “The Military’s New Recruits Are 9/11 Children” on this topic.)

The fact is that the public is weary of the never-ending wars, with 51% opposing more military action in an August poll from Concerned Veterans of America. Yet Congress has authorized one of the largest military budgets in US history, padding Biden’s request with an extra \$25 billion for a total of \$778 billion just in this coming fiscal year (The Hill, 9/23). They pledged to fund the military to the tune of \$8 trillion in the next decade (MSNBC, 10/1). And yet, so-called fiscal conservatives fight tooth and nail against things like the \$3.5 trillion infrastructure bill that would provide for human needs like education, housing and health care.

OTHER LOOMING WARS

Trump also vetoed a bill that would have limited his ability to start a war with Iran. Having withdrawn from the “nuclear deal,” Trump assassinated a high-level Iranian military figure in January 2020, escalating tensions further. The Israeli government has (falsely) claimed that Iran is on the brink of obtaining a nuclear weapon (Al Jazeera 9/5), and that if the US does not act militarily, they will (*Times of Israel*, 9/9). President Biden has not yet rejoined the nuclear deal almost nine months into his presidency and has done little to offer relief to the sanctions that have kept Iran from meeting the needs of its people, including combating COVID.

Biden also continues to make Russia into a potential enemy, especially focusing on cyberwarfare (Reuters, 7/28). He has made no effort to continue diplomatic ties with North Korea, as imperfect as Trump’s foray into that arena were.

And while the actions and rhetoric are less strident than under Trump, the US also continues its hostile posture toward Venezuela by recognizing an opposition leader who was never elected. Sanctions continue, in part because Venezuela has the world’s largest known oil reserves.

AND ON IT GOES AT HOME AND ABROAD

Despite the huge uprisings against racist and violent policing following the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis in 2020, Congress has failed to take actions to rein in the militarized and mostly unaccountable profession of police. PJW likens the police to a local version of the military— led by a civilian, people in uniform enforce state policy using violence. The US military is the largest non-state consumer of fossil fuels, ensuring that climate change won’t go away until we stop the wars. International pacts seeking to control climate change have explicitly excluded military pollution.

The US has also perpetuated the Israeli/Palestinian conflict by almost universally siding with Israel and, against international norms, moving its embassy to Jerusalem rather than keeping it in Tel Aviv, the UN-recognized capital.

And, even though President Biden’s speech at the UN in September announced that the US was back as a global partner to the rest of the world, America has still not signed on as a party to the International Criminal Court, meaning war crimes such as the Kabul drone strike may never be prosecuted (Al Jazeera, 9/27).

CONCLUSION

The war in Afghanistan, it is said, was lost many years ago. With our country in crisis, it is unthinkable to keep spending money on war instead of human needs. The rise of the US security state and backlash against Arabs, Muslims and immigrants in the US was another inappropriate response to 9/11, when the world was ready to stand with America. It is time to end all state-sponsored violence perpetuated by our own country so that human rights, and civil liberties can flourish globally.



This flyer was prepared
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Meetings usually 2nd Tuesdays, 7 PM; next one is Oct. 12.

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Contact us about our meetings !