

12 Reasons to Leave Afghanistan Now

1. The U.S. War has increased anti-US sentiment.

As the U.S.-led war and occupation in Afghanistan enter their 9th year there is clear evidence, including acknowledgement by military leaders, that the war strategy has led to an increase in anti-US sentiment throughout the region including destabilization of Pakistan. Al Qaeda has decentralized its command structure, and without a focus upon it as an international terrorist conspiracy – instead of as a military conflict – will continue to be a threat. So long as the war and occupation continues, the potential for future violence and radicalization among disaffected young people in the region remains high.

2. The problems of Afghanistan require non-military solutions.

Afghanistan is the fourth poorest nation on earth, in part due to three decades of wars and their aftermath. The rise of the Taliban was a direct outgrowth of the U.S. proxy-fights with USSR, the destruction caused by that war, and the social and economic breakdown in that country after the Russian withdrawal. The primary issues of Afghanistan remain ones of social defragmentation and poverty, which can only be solved through economic development and strengthening of social institutions that encourage growth and openness at the local level. The military lacks both will and the capability to address the economic and social challenges of Afghanistan in a meaningful way.

3. The U.S. presence in Afghanistan has emboldened Al Qaeda.

From a strengthened position, Al Qaeda has been able to grow its financial and membership base outside of Afghanistan, and numbers fewer than 100 members in that country, according to military experts. While they may reconstitute in Afghanistan once U.S. soldiers withdraw, they are no longer dependent on that country for their training bases and could easily remain in Pakistan, Sudan, Yemen, Egypt or even Bosnia. Instead, they point to the NATO occupation as evidence of Western “ill will” and use the ongoing war as a recruiting tool.

4. Withdrawal from Afghanistan will not move the war’s frontline from overseas to the homeland.

U.S. military forces in Afghanistan and Iraq and drone bombings of Pakistan remain a critical irritant to the people of those countries and is a primary tool for recruitment of “freedom fighters”. However, there is no evidence that moving the armies from overseas back to the continental United States will expose Americans to more danger at home. Indeed, withdrawal will likely result in a collapse of the international recruitment of fighters, as it did when the USSR withdrew.

5. Training of Afghan defense and security forces is not a reason to stay.

U.S. military and NATO plans currently project the ongoing training of Afghan defense and security forces for another 2-3 years, at minimum. They recommend that the local defense forces will eventually number in the range of 300-400,000. However, such numbers are economically unsupportable in a nation where the national government has an annual budget of only \$750 million – the government would be unable to pay the salaries of these security forces once trained. While some technical assistance may be needed, thousands of foreign soldiers and years of training will not change the economics of the situation.

6. The cost of war exceeds the costs of development.

The entire GDP of Afghanistan, a nation with 33 million persons, is just \$26 billion per year. The annual war effort by the U.S. alone is already \$48 billion and rising. While acknowledging that Afghanistan is desperately in need of economic development, policy makers continue to spend more than twice as much on war than on investing in the people of Afghanistan. As the war progresses, much of the fragile infrastructure of Afghanistan continues to be destroyed and the costs of reconstruction actually rises.

7. The fight to stabilize Afghanistan is unwinnable and the lesson of Vietnam is being ignored.

Afghanistan is almost the same size in population and land area as Vietnam, and it is a complex country to dominate from a military perspective. Even with 537,000 troops in Vietnam, it became clear to military and civilian strategists that a “win” was not possible. The same can be said for Afghanistan. Like Vietnam, Afghanistan needs economic and social development, not war, if it is going to be anything other

than a failed state. Regardless of the amount of military resources poured into that country, there is no way to win militarily – short of annihilating the people whom we claim to be helping.

8. Escalation of forces will only prolong the conflict.

The prolonged desire by military strategists to “try something new” and send in an additional 40-60,000 troops, after eight years of failed strategy, will only serve to prolong the conflict and suffering of Afghans. Significant international, social and economic development will only truly commence once war forces have withdrawn. The U.S. supporters of the war, by continuing to hope for minor improvements, weakens the entire effort and ensure greater failure.

9. Americans need to honor the sacrifice of U.S. soldiers by bringing them home.

Dedicated families, friends, and communities have stood behind the very real sacrifices of sons and daughters to fight for defense of the nation. However, they have found that they are becoming pawns to a flawed strategy and outmoded military concepts. Forcing soldiers to fight in failed efforts ensures that fewer in the next generation will be willing to defend the nation, when called upon. The best way to support the troops is to bring them home.

10. Most Afghans want the U.S. military to leave.

A clear majority of Afghan citizens – and their U.S. counterparts – want NATO soldiers to leave their country, despite the inherent security risks. The ongoing occupation neither helps the people of those nations to develop their own social society, nor brings about the hoped-for end to violence. The ongoing war and occupation only advances the aims of those who profit from the circumstances – whether through corruption or death – and will not lead to a peaceful Afghanistan.

11. Withdrawal will weaken the Taliban.

The Taliban cannot “win” if Afghanistan becomes a peaceful country and the economy is rebuilt. However, they remain emboldened so long as they have an “external” enemy to fight. Once foreign troops have left Afghanistan, the Taliban will have to become more responsible to the people. International groups will need to remain active in helping Afghanistan to become a more democratic and open society offsetting conservative ideology and addressing the underlying social problems of the country.

12. The Occupation is Harmful to Women and Children.

There is great concern among well-meaning Americans to not “abandon the women of Afghanistan to the repressive regime of the Taliban”. However, actions of the past eight years show how little the military presence has helped women, but rather has created millions of homeless families. The NATO occupation, with its hierarchy of control, has served the paradigm of “strongmen” and the Taliban’s subjugation and repression of women. As the military withdraws, there will be a need for peace, development and women’s organizations to assist Afghan women in building up their society while defending their rights.

At the center of debate, however, is the question of whether the average U.S. voter will continue to be duped into believing that Afghanistan and the Taliban pose a serious threat to U.S. national security interests at home. The conflation of Al Qaeda with the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan wastes hundreds of billions of dollars from the national treasury that could go to serve the real human needs – such as providing healthcare – and leads to endless war.

While warmongers and profiteers continue to support endless overseas wars, Al Qaeda grows as a threat and the global economy remains captive to war-related events. No escalation of forces in Afghanistan will change that fundamental fact. Instead, like the war in Iraq, the ongoing conflict takes resources away from the real problems – economic insecurity, institutional violence, international terrorism and the global spread of war.

<http://www.texansforpeace.org/HealthcareNotWarfare>

