

The Fall of Afghanistan

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The current state of Afghanistan is an illusion of Western diplomacy, a conflagration of religious and ethnic groups unwillingly forced together in formation of a “nation” as the United Nations and the predominant powers within prefer to establish a world on a rules-based order. As a country, in its current form, it is not the end of 20 years at war but instead the continuation of a century of conflict with the West, first colonized by the British and then falling under the incompetent tutelage of Soviet meddlers. This latest episode of conflict comes at the tail-end of a millennium of invasion, conquest, subjugation, and submission to foreign powers and ambitious leaders beginning with the likes of Darius I of Persia and Alexander the Great of Macedonia. In short, Afghanistan possesses a history of conflict the United States cannot even imagine, and yet, for Afghans today, the current state is nothing new in their history.

What does the fall of Afghanistan mean for the failed nation, US foreign policy, and regional stability? Well, as George Costanza so eloquently stated, it is about nothing. For Afghans, the change is irrelevant to their meager daily existence. For Americans, it is a headline—quickly replaced by the next great domestic social issue. For the world, Afghanistan’s legacy as a troubled nation open for conquest and destined for chaos continues.

The resurgence of the Taliban is not a deterrent to Afghanistan, as the nation has not been successful in much of anything other than growing poppies and inundating global markets with a constant source of opium, as much as it could be an advantage. As an Islamic governing institution, undoubtedly born from the US-backed mujahadeen that finally ousted Soviet troops from within Afghanistan’s borders, the Taliban’s timeline is severely truncated to determine failure or success regardless of the methods or means to enforce their desired form of governance. Keep in mind, the US government took more than a decade to establish a functional document to empower its institutions from its founding. Thus, the expectation is for a governing body in a foreign land to quickly solidify control and exude power, in-line with American interests of course, is outrageous. For the nation of Afghanistan, this fall means nothing in their long and storied history of conflict, conquest, and chaos. Afghanistan most likely has its eye on the next potential invader, China, and wearily readies the next generation for unconventional warfare against their first non-Western adversary in more than a century.

The exit of the United States, first militarily and eventually diplomatically, means just as little to Americans as it does to Afghans, whose War on Terror in the mountains of the Hindu Kush became overshadowed by the terror debacle in the deserts of Iraq. There was little to gain and virtually nothing to lose by invading Afghanistan for harboring Osama bin Laden, who ironically was located and assassinated more than a decade later in neighboring Pakistan, and supposedly supporting efforts against American interests. Economically, there is not much to mention on trade partnerships between the United States and Afghanistan suffering as even the minor growth in export-import relations, making Afghanistan America's 105th largest goods partner (with a whopping 90-percent trade surplus), as negligible to American global economic policy objectives moving forward, especially in the region boasting a major economic initiative by the next global superpower. Diplomatically, there is nothing to be gained with Afghanistan in any global institutions such as the United Nations, where Afghan representation is currently conducted by a UN careerist who formally represented North Korea in the same role. An ally in Afghanistan will hold little sway among the powerhouse nations in the region—which include India, Pakistan, and, China—who are all eyeing the precious rare-earth metals lying under Afghan rocks. Militarily, the past 20 years provided the joint services a testing ground of tactics, techniques, and procedures to validate the simplest of infantry tactics to the most complex employment of joint force combat operations. Although the fighting men and women in uniform for the United States gained a wealth of experience, it comes against an enemy whose unconventional and unorthodox fighting style fails to prepare the force against future enemies at a near-peer to peer level of operations in a conventional environment.

Regionally, Afghanistan's status as a successful or failed nation, as a stable or unstable entity is inconsequential to future prosperity or global influence for the nations surrounding Afghan borders. Iran, the newest old adversary to regain national headlines for instigating tensions with the United States, is most likely relieved the American presence is quickly dissipating if, for nothing else, it keeps the long arm of Western justice from reaching inside Iranian borders easily. For Pakistan and India, America's failure in Afghanistan exacerbated the influx of refugees and tensions between the two rival nations but alleviated the need for planned future American involvement in the region and a regained focus on one another. The biggest winner, regional, of the American failure in Afghanistan will be Chinese Belt and Road Initiative gaining traction, as US opposition disappears with the last boots on the ground headed back west. There is little evidence Chinese influence, economically, would have suffered at all even with a large Ameri-

can presence or, dare I say, American success in bringing democracy to Afghanistan. Again, there is no change regionally, nothing, with the fall of Afghanistan.

For the fall of Afghanistan to mean anything, there are a few probabilities to consider which may, or may not, deliver importance to the current and future state of Afghanistan. First, the Afghan nation must realize their plight and take steps to alter the path destined by their past. It starts with a national identity. Who are Afghans, and what are their nationalistic goals? The United States, following a long line of former conquerors, oppressors, and colonizers, attempted to instill some nationalist values and ideals to identify this path. It has not worked. Second, the United States needs to realize the predicament Afghanistan has been placed in following two decades of instability and conflict as a result of our national intelligence agencies headhunting through the population for answers to questions they failed to develop prior to 9/11. Responsibility must be acknowledged and cannot be brushed off as the Afghans now have the responsibility to secure their government and lead their people without a solid foundation, which the United States failed to provide. Lastly, Afghanistan must make a meaningful contribution to the region economically, diplomatically, or militarily to be considered as even remotely influential for neighboring nations to even contemplate the state of Afghanistan as impactful to the region. Alas, these probabilities are unlikely to manifest, and the failed nation of Afghanistan will mean nothing to the state, to the region, and to the world.

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