

Scenario 118

AMERICA QUILTS AFGHANISTAN

AMERICA'S OWN DISORDERS PLAYED:

America's own war analysts said that they lost war due to their own miss-management.

On 7th October 2010; a Senate report was issued for the media stating that US funds for private security contractors in Afghanistan had flowed to warlords and Taliban insurgents, undermining the war effort and fuelling corruption. The investigation by the Senate Armed Services Committee found that the government had failed to vet or manage those hired to provide security under contracts worth billions of dollars, with disastrous results. Carl Levin, Chairman of the Committee held that:

"Our reliance on private security contractors in Afghanistan has too often empowered local warlords and powerbrokers who operate outside the Afghan government's control and act against coalition interests. This situation threatens the security of our troops and puts the success of our mission at risk."

The report further said that under one US Air Force subcontract for an Afghan air base, Armour Group — a subsidiary of the British based firm G4S — used Afghan warlords to recruit security guards. The warlords included **"Taliban supporters"**. While the contract was in force, one of the warlords was killed in a US-Afghan military raid **"on a Taliban meeting being held at his house"**.

In a review of more than 125 Pentagon security contracts from 2007 to 2009, the committee found **"systemic failures, including security contractors' failures to vet personnel or to ensure that their armed personnel received adequate training."**

The report endorsed efforts by the US and Nato commander in Afghanistan, General David Petraeus, who had ordered a reform of security contracting and warned that spending large amounts of money without enough oversight could unintentionally feed corruption and the insurgency.

The US Defence Secretary Robert Gates also acknowledged the problem and in a letter to Levin, said the Pentagon had dramatically expanded oversight of contracts and had created task forces to overhaul contract work. **Richard Fontaine**, a senior fellow at the Centre for a **New American Security** said that:

"The Senate report is yet another wake-up call for the Pentagon, and I think they will have to address the problem. But the military faced a difficult dilemma.

In some cases, it appears that the choice is stark — allow subcontractors to pay the Taliban protection money — and essentially fund the enemy with taxpayer dollars — or bar protection payments and absorb a higher degree of risk of attack.

This choice is made even more difficult given that we rely on contractors and not military personnel to carry out a variety of security tasks, including convoy protection."

The Afghan government had condemned the role of private security contractors and formally banned eight foreign firms, including the controversial company formerly called **Blackwater**. Kabul had given security firms working in Afghanistan four months [two months had already gone till then] to cease operations, which could present a major headache for Nato-led troops and international organizations which rely on the contractors employing thousands of Afghan nationals; both from for and against the Karzai regime.

Another Aspect: For some, the end game in Afghanistan had started in the backdrop of President Obama's program announced on **1st December 2009** in New York Army Centre; considering that **Chicago Conference of 20th May 2012** was the final round. The players were there but the reps were having different goals in their minds. Think about the two odd deliberations, which had already been discussed in detail but reiterating again:

'One, Hillary Clinton said that Ayman el Zawahiri is likely to be hiding in Pakistan; two, the US Senators are coming up with fresh demands to bind Pakistan's security set up for routing out the Haqqani net work'.

That was why the relations between the USA and Pakistan were seen at their lowest ebb. Moreover, after **Salala check post attack**, there was uproar against America throughout the country; the military administration was more disturbed.

The US Defence Department officially declared that Pakistan refused to be part of a joint investigation into the **26th November 2011**'s NATO attack on Pakistani check post in Salala of Mohmand tribal area. The decision was one of the several that Pakistan's military and civil authorities had taken in its protest against the said attack in which 24 army personnel including one major and one captain were killed.

On 29th November 2011; the Press Secretary US Defence, George Little, had confirmed Pak- Army's refusal in his briefing to the media. Pakistan's Director General Military Operations (DGMO) Major Gen Ashfaq Nadeem had already ruled out the possibility of a joint probe, saying that earlier joint investigations carried out after similar attacks were unable to produce any results. Pakistan's military elite had decided to go by their independent decision.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's Parliament held a joint session to discuss the attack and the senate passed a **unanimous resolution** opposing the attacks. The cogent question was that would the senate's resolution and the parliament's impending joint session be able to form a concrete strategy against such attacks? And if formed, will such a strategy be followed in future?

On 14th April 2012, a unanimous adoption of the revised recommendations of the Parliamentary Committee on National Security (PCNS) was agreed as a civilian approach to Pakistan's foreign policy though very little was different to what went before. Details were:

- *The NATO convoys would be allowed but without arms and ammunition; [the Americans held that they never despatched arms through containers] however, Pakistan's security were permitted to peep into the containers.*
- *Pakistan would seek (note 'seek' and not 'demand or else') a cessation of the drone strikes. [Hillary Clinton had made crystal clear just a week before that **'America will continue its drone strikes whether we seek their cessation or not'**].*
- *There would be no foreign bases on Pakistani soil; since the closure of the 'so called secret' Shamsi airbase in Balochistan.*
- *Contractors or operatives would not be allowed; meaning thereby that the Americans should go more careful about covert operatives not to repeat Raymond Davis episodes again.*

- *Strict monitoring of all goods in transit at entry and exit points would be launched for tax and transit fees though Pakistani tax teams were known world over for their bargain skills in any odd situation.*
- *Pakistan would seek (but again not demand) an apology for the Salala incident which triggered this wave of tension; already settled that America would offer a 'regret to restore our national pride and dignity' though the US had flatly refused it.*
- *New protocols would be adopted but it would be an update of existing Standard Operating Procedures.*
- *Hot pursuit would not be permitted for Americans [but on rare occasions would be tolerated or ignored as before].*
- *There would be no more unwritten and secret agreements, between Pakistan and America; allegedly Gen Pasha was not given more extension on the issue that he had bargained secret pact with the US Commander for drone attacks in FATA [February 2012] perhaps without approval of the Army Chief Gen Kayani.*
- *The oil and gas pipeline projects with Iran and Turkmenistan would be actively pursued and Pakistan would continue a results oriented dialogue with India. It was not at all related with American role in War on Terror.*

The Pakistani intelligentsia and media analysts concluded that ***'it was an impressive wish-list and a cautious statement of intent, but hardly a policy document and the nature of our relationship with the US remains a work in progress.'***

The above agreement though conveyed green signal for the US and NATO to use Pakistani corridor for their transportation but had also suggested pointedly that ***'the US should start packing his luggage to leave that South Asian region'***.

On the other hand, President Obama's new agreement with Afghanistan dated **2nd May 2012** ensuring the presence of American 'experts' even after NATO leaves by the end of 2014, had given rise to another suspicious scenario. The US bases at Bagram, Kandahar and Kabul were to remain operational much beyond 2014.

When one pondered beyond 2014, the well trumpeted geography of new region, a part of the new world order game, comprising of Tribal Areas of Pakistan, the adjoining areas of Afghanistan, the territory of southern Bahawalpur till Gwader and the Indian Ocean all seemed to be linked to the US plans of Afghanistan's War on Terror.

Referring to Usman Khalid's analysis [at Rifah Party's website dated **21st May 2012**]:

*'The re-opening of the supply line to Afghanistan is no longer an issue. It is in Pakistan's interest to facilitate the withdrawal of NATO forces by the end of 2014 and logistic support until then. However, **Pakistan cannot support the overall design of USA which is now being made in consultation with India.** Pakistan - US relations will move along a rough and bumpy road.'*

The two miscalculations made by Pakistan and the US had caused thorns to grow on both sides of written history: Pakistani intelligentsia made the people believe that the NATO troops in Afghanistan would not be able to sustain this blockade for more than a month and the US would come running begging forgiveness for ***Salala killings*** and drone attacks etc.

The CIA & Pentagon also miscalculated the response of Pakistan by taking it for granted that Islamabad would not be able to survive beyond a month without US-aid. Then both, the Paki-

stan and USA corrected the wrongs by taking a cautious stance on NATO supply route; hats off to the **Chicago Summit**, the roughness had toned down on both sides. A concrete set of measures were required to solve the Afghan problem. Throughout the journey from Bonn to Chicago, a potent question remained alive that:

'Can Pakistan be ignored with its unique connectivity matrix in this part of the world?'

US & IRANI DOLLAR BAGS IN WOT:

According to a report published in **'New York Times' dated 28th April 2013:**

'For more than a decade, wads of American dollars packed into suitcases, backpacks and, on occasion, plastic shopping bags have been dropped off every month or so at the offices of Afghanistan's president — courtesy of the Central Intelligence Agency [CIA].'

Some American officials said the cash had fuelled corruption and empowered warlords, undermining Washington's exit strategy from Afghanistan. One official openly admitted that:

*"The biggest source of corruption in Afghanistan was the United States itself. The US was not alone in delivering cash to the president Karzai; the later had acknowledged a few years ago that **Iran regularly gave bags of cash to one of his top aides.**"*

American officials knew that CIA kept on providing cash to maintain access to Mr Karzai to guarantee its influence at the presidential palace, which wields tremendous power in Afghanistan's highly centralized government. **Whether the US got what it paid for – not sure; Karzai seemingly remained unable to be bought.** Karzai was seeking control over the Afghan militias raised by the CIA to target operatives of Al Qaeda and insurgent commanders and the CIA continued to pay.

Tens of millions of dollars were flown from the CIA to the office of President Hamid Karzai. Mr Karzai's Deputy Chief of Staff from 2002 until 2005 named Khalil Roman sarcastically confirmed it saying: **"...we called it 'ghost money, it came in secret and it left in secret."**

The CIA, which declined to comment on it, had long been known to support Ahmed Wali Karzai, brother of the Afghan president and a suspected player in the country's booming illegal opium trade, who managed to get regular payments since past eight years.

On 12th July 2011, Ahmed Wali Karzai, was assassinated by one of his own trusted aide in Kabul. The agency paid the Karzai family for a variety of services, including helping to recruit an Afghan paramilitary force that operated at the CIS's direction in and around the southern city of Kandahar, Afghan President's home town.

The US special considerations with Mr Karzai created deep divisions within the Obama administration. The CIA's practices also suggested that the US was not doing enough to stamp out the lucrative Afghan drug trade, a major source of revenue for the Taliban. Some American officials argued that the reliance on Karzai's brother undermined the American push to develop an effective central government that could maintain law and order and eventually allow the US to withdraw.

Maj Gen Michael T Flynn, the senior American military intelligence official in Afghanistan had rightly held that **'.... we are perceived as backing thugs, and we are just undermining ourselves.'**

Ahmed Wali Karzai had once told in an interview that he cooperated with American civilian and military officials, but did not engage in the drug trade and did not receive payments from the CIA. He used to operate a paramilitary group, ***the Kandahar Strike Force***, which was used for raids against suspected insurgents and terrorists.

Ahmed Wali Karzai, was being paid for allowing the CIA and American Special Operations troops to rent a large compound outside the city — the ***former home of Mullah Mohammed Omar***, the Taliban's founder. The same compound was also the base of the Kandahar Strike Force. In a way Mulla Omar was CIA's landlord - the senior American officials knew it.

Wali Karzai had also helped the CIA communicate and sometimes meet with Afghans loyal to the Taliban; his role as a coordinator between the Americans and the Taliban was then regarded as valuable placing a greater focus on encouraging Taliban leaders to change sides. Some American officials considered that the allegations of Wali Karzai's role in the drug trade were not substantiated as nothing that could stand up in court.

The fact remained that in the beginning of the Afghan war, just after the Nine Eleven episode, the US officials paid warlords with dubious backgrounds to help topple the Taliban and maintain order because there were few American troops in Afghanistan. But as the Taliban became resurgent and the war went intensified, the US needed a strong central government in Kabul to check the Taliban's moves. As the US committed more troops, more officials went frustrated with President Karzai.

Later, Wali Karzai's suspected role in the drug trade, as well as what the White House then described as the mafia-like way that he commanded over southern Afghanistan, made him a malicious figure. The US military and political officials held the circumstantial evidence that Wali Karzai got enriched himself by helping the illegal trade in poppy and opium to flourish. The senior officials in the Bush administration had also held the same views – it was on record that:

*"Hundreds of millions of dollars in drug money are flowing through the southern region, and nothing happens in southern Afghanistan without the regional leadership knowing about it. **If it looks like a duck, and it quacks like a duck, it's probably a duck.** Our assumption is that he's benefiting from the drug trade."*

The US officials held that Afghan opium trade, the largest in the world, directly threatened the stability of the Afghan state, by providing enough money the Taliban needed for their operations. The Obama administration repeatedly vowed to crack down on the drug lords who were believed to be very near to the President Karzai but could not move so for unknown reasons. White House pressed President Karzai twice to move his brother out of southern Afghanistan, but he had flatly refused to do so.

In an interview in mid 2010, Ahmed Wali Karzai denied his role in the drug trade or taking money from the CIA, though admitted receiving regular payments from his brother, the president, for 'expenses,' but said he did not know where the money came from. Among other things, he introduced Americans to insurgents considering changing sides and also given the Americans the needed intelligence though he was not adequately compensated for that dangerous job. He said '**....it was my duty as an Afghan.**'

FORMER CIA OFFICER SPEAKS:

A former CIA officer who had served in Afghanistan opined in the '**New York Times**' dated **27th October 2009:**

'...the [CIA] agency relied heavily on Ahmed Wali Karzai, and often based covert operatives at compounds he owned. Karzai might have the drug trade but it mattered little to CIA officers focused on counterterrorism missions.

Virtually every significant Afghan figure has had brushes with the drug trade. If you are looking for Mother Teresa, she doesn't live in Afghanistan."

For years, first the Bush administration and then the Obama administration held that the Taliban availed benefits from the drug trade, and the US military once expanded its target list to include drug traffickers with ties to the insurgency. The military had generated a list of 50 top drug traffickers tied to the Taliban who were to be killed or captured.

Senior Afghan investigators knew plenty about Karzai's involvement in the drug business. A top former Afghan Interior Ministry official familiar with Afghan anti-narcotics operations told that a major source of Karzai's influence over the drug trade was his control over **key bridges crossing the Helmand River on the route between the opium growing regions of Helmand Province and Kandahar**. Karzai used to charge huge fees to drug traffickers to allow their drug - laden trucks to cross the bridges.

However, it remained impossible for Afghan anti-narcotics officials to investigate Karzai family for that because **"....this government has become a factory for the production of Taliban because of corruption and injustice."** Americans believed that Karzai had expanded his influence over the drug trade, thanks in part to the US efforts to single out other drug lords.

The American officials believed that the cash dollars from the CIA coupled with Karzai's own drug money had fuelled corruption and empowered most Afghan warlords, undermining Washington's exit strategy from Afghanistan. American officials themselves held that **"....the biggest source of corruption in Afghanistan was the United States."**

The US was not alone in delivering cash to the President Karzai; he had acknowledged in person in 2010 that Iran regularly gave bags of cash to one of his top aides.

The US officials jumped on the payments as evidence of an aggressive Iranian campaign to buy influence and poison Afghanistan's relations with the US. What they did not say was that the CIA was also plying the presidential palace with cash — and unlike the Iranians, it continued for long.

American and Afghan officials familiar with the payments said the agency's main goal in providing the cash was to maintain access to Mr Karzai and his inner circle and to guarantee the agency's influence at the presidential palace, which wielded tremendous power in Afghan government.

[It was not clear that the US was getting what it paid for. Mr. Karzai could defy the US and the Iranians because much cash had piled up in the palace 'unnecessarily' - Karzai was seemingly unable to be bought.]

It was that strategy over which **President Obama had signed a 'Strategic Partnership Deal with Afghanistan on 2nd May 2012**, directly leading the Iranians to halt their payments. Like the Iranian cash, much of the CIA's money went to paying off warlords and politicians, many of whom had ties to the drug trade and, in some cases, the Taliban. Interestingly, the cash from Tehran was being handled with greater transparency than the dollars from the CIA.

Much of the money went to keep old warlords in line. One Abdul Rashid Dostum, an ethnic Uzbek whose militia served as a CIA proxy force in 2001, used to receive \$100,000 a month

from the palace to serve as Mr Karzai's emissary in northern Afghanistan. **"I asked for a year up front in cash so that I could build my dream house,"** he was quoted as saying in a 2009 interview with **Time** magazine.

When word of the Iranian cash leaked out in October 2010, Mr Karzai told reporters that **"...he was grateful for it. The US is doing the same thing. They are providing cash to some of our offices."** No one used to mention the agency's money at cabinet meetings; it was handled by a small clique at the Afghan National Security Council.

At a farewell cocktail party in the **third week of April 2013** hosted by the departing French Ambassador to Kabul: **Bernard Bajolet**, who was leaving to head France's Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure, its foreign intelligence service; spilled the beans saying:

*"... French troops are still fighting in Afghanistan we can claim to have done its part. **We lost more troops than all** but three other countries before withdrawing its last combat forces in the fall.*

*That the Afghan project is on thin ice and that, **collectively, the West was responsible for a chunk of what went wrong**, though much of the rest the Afghans were responsible for. **The West had done a good job of fighting terrorism, but that most of that was done on Pakistani soil, not on the Afghan side** of the border."*

His tone was neither shrill nor reproachful. It was matter-of-fact. Mr Bajolet continued with his comments.

"I still cannot understand how we, the international community, and the Afghan government have managed to arrive at a situation in which everything is coming together in 2014 — elections, new president, economic transition, military transition and all this — whereas the negotiations for the peace process have not yet started."

Mr Bajolet was echoing a point shared privately by other diplomats —:

"Afghanistan; a country that depends almost entirely on the international community for the salaries of its soldiers and policemen, for most of its investments and partly for its current civil expenditure, cannot be really independent."

On one side this wholesome game of dollars award was going on and on the opposite the US was on the move for opening talks with the Taliban. See a little report.

Referring to Husain Haqqani's essay printed in US media **on 27th June 2013**, the US was still looking for peace talks with the Taliban in Qatar, despite the fact that the group had attacked the presidential palace and a CIA office in Kabul earlier that week. In Haqqani's opinion, negotiating with the Taliban was going to be a grievous mistake.

Unlike most states or political groups, the Taliban were not amenable to a pragmatic deal. They were a movement with an extreme ideology not to compromise easily on their deeply held beliefs. Before committing the blunder of negotiating with them again, American diplomats were not able to study the history of Washington's engagement with Taliban during Bill Clinton's regime.

The said talks were arranged through the good offices of Pak-Army Chief Gen Kayani and the US had opened a Taliban office in Qatar for that very purpose. Taliban officials immediately portrayed the American concession as a victory. They flew the Taliban flag, played the Taliban anthem and called their new workplace the office of the **"Islamic Emirate of Afghani-**

stan” — the name of the state they ran in the 1990s before being dislodged from power after 9/11. An intentional move it was - which reflected the Taliban’s view of the talks as beginning of the restoration of their emirate. Though there was no sign that the Taliban were ready for political accommodation.

The fact remained that Pakistan did not want to become a party between that two party talks. Pakistan might had contacts in the far past with Taliban but it had no control over them especially during the PPP regime. For the Taliban, direct dialogue with the US was a source of international legitimacy and an opportunity to regroup. They were most likely playing for time while waiting for American troops to withdraw in 2014.

A latest interview [**dated 13th September 2015**] of a former CIA officer named Michael Scheuer is available at X99TV and most media pages. Mr Michael remained in interaction with ISI for most time in his twenty years career. In a frank interview available on media he admitted that the US should not have stepped in Afghanistan without having a thorough study of the area, their cultural traits and traditions. He categorically stated that:

*'ISI is also an intelligence agency just likes of America or Australia and **'the job of intelligence agencies anywhere is never to help the other countries; its job is to take care of his own state interests'**.*

*For ISI the world over perception prevails that it is **'a rude horse'** but my twenty years experience in intelligence tells that **'ISI is the most disciplined and professional service; it works for its own country'**. [...quite opposite to its politicians]*

The US has to quit that region one day but ISI will remain there after all. ISI prefers to have an Islamic government in Afghanistan and that is in Pakistan's favour. The US itself is responsible for loose moves in Afghanistan.

*The Americans were made to understand that Osama is dead so their problems have gone. But the US state functionaries have done so badly there in that region that it is in their neck now. **In 2001, Al Qaeda was operating from one platform – now they are fighting from SIX operational platforms.***

I also admit that we Americans are not 'behaving manly'; its enemy sacrifices hundreds of lives every week and we Americans are beating our heads and chests over 160 deaths in fifteen years - whereas we are super-power with 300 million population.

*Every American in Washington says today **that Pakistan is no good friend. My contention is that there is no friend of America who had got a decade long civil war in his country for the US – neither India nor Israel. Pakistan did so for us. We Americans were wrong – we did not understand the pitfalls in Afghanistan – so we suffered.***

US WAS WARNED TO RESIST WAR:

When Bush administration had decided to conquer Afghanistan after Nine - Eleven episodes, the historians of America went worrying that what the US government was going to do. The then recent past of Afghanistan and the humiliating defeat, the Russians had suffered on that land, was still being talked and discussed in the US print media. The general populace might not be remembering the world events or geo-political changes around but the intelligentsia and the academics were really concerned about their government’s abrupt decisions.

A 256 pages book titled: *Fear's Empire: War, Terrorism, and Democracy* written by Benjamin R. Barber and released in **October 2004 had timely warned the **US decision makers sitting in Pentagon and White House** that what mistakenly judgment their president Mr Bush had done.**

In Afghanistan, it happened the same way with the US forces what Benjamin had warned in 2004; the US political elite and army commanders found themselves trapped and since 2010 they had been planning to come out of that strategic sand grave through various pacts and negotiations – but could not avoid its defeat.

The Americans used usual cosmetic phrase '***...we have a duty to rebuild and defend that country, until it is strong enough to defend itself.***' But the intentions were wrong – from some countries the US planned to snatch oil reserves [think Iraq & Libya] – from some countries Opium and Hashish [think Afghanistan].

Why the American Generals and commanding army officers have gone billionaires during the Afghan war – some body will dig it out some time.

Now see an American blog by one *Moein Daqiq* says: **July 23, 2013 at 10:18 am:**

"I will say US and NATO were not very honest to Afghanistan in the recent decade. They know all the causes and roots of problems and they didn't address it at all. Instead they killed innocent people in the afghan villages.

US is here for the region and for Americans not for Afghans. Everybody is playing the bloody game in my country for their own interest. If the author is aware of all these things who believes that CIA is not. The other factor that contributes to this matter is the Afghanistan corrupt government, which is established and supported by USA and the credits go to them."

One *Hekmat Sial* **July 23, 2013 at 12:21 am** on the same website //pubrecord.org

"I agree to some extent with the article published by Barber. However, if Pakistan and Afghanistan two countries in the South-east Asia do not work out their issue themselves peace will never come to their home.

Both countries are in the best geo-strategic located countries which are paramount for the global economy to boost up particularly for China. These two countries are significant for the countries in the central Asia as well. the history is going to repeat for sure; no matter what that could be."

I leave the rest for my readers to draw conclusions – let us go straight.

Citing again the American Brave Advisor Mr Riedel who feared that the forces unleashed in 10 years of war may yet come to haunt the whole world:

"There is probably no worse nightmare, for America, for Europe, for the world, in the 21st Century than if Pakistan gets out of control under the influence of extremist Islamic forces, armed with nuclear weapons...The stakes here are huge."

That was an indirect tribute to the Pak-Army and its ISI once again – where the world's no: 1 super power stood amazed and feared through a personal experience of decade long war which ended with mix feelings of shame and humiliation.

Now see **Tom Engelhardt's** sarcastic and cynical remarks

about **AMERICA** appeared in media through
TomDispatch.com & commondreams.org on 29th January 2013
'The Setting Sun and the American Empire'

'That was the nature of the great Afghan drawdown. The words "retreat," "loss," "defeat," "disaster," and their siblings and cousins won't be allowed on the premises.

*But make no mistake, the country that, only years ago, liked to call itself the globe's "sole superpower" or even "hyper-power," whose leaders dreamed of a Pax Americana across the Greater Middle East, if not the rest of the globe is... not to put too fine a point on it, packing its bags, throwing in the towel, **quietly admitting—in actions, if not in words — to mission unaccomplished**, and heading if not exactly home, **at least boot by boot off the Eurasian landmass.***

Washington has, in a word, had enough. Too much, in fact. It's lost its appetite for invasions and occupations of Eurasia, though special operations raids, drone wars, and cyber-wars still look deceptively cheap and easy as a means to control... well, whatever.

*As a result, the Afghan drawdown of 2013-14, that implicit acknowledgement of yet **another lost war**, should set the curtain falling on the American Century as we've known it. It should be recognized as a landmark, the moment in history when the sun truly began to set on a great empire. Here in the United States, though, one thing is just about guaranteed: not many are going to be paying the slightest attention.*

*No one even thinks to ask the question: **In the mighty battle lost, who exactly beat us? Where exactly is the triumphant enemy?** Perhaps we should be relieved that the question is not being raised, because it's a hard one to answer. Could it really have been the scattered jihadis of al-Qaeda and its wannabes? Or the various modestly armed Sunni and Shiite minority insurgencies in Iraq, or their Pashtun equivalents in Afghanistan with their suicide bombers and low-tech roadside bombs? Or was it something more basic, something having to do with a planet no longer amenable to imperial expeditions?*

Did the local and global body politic simply and mysteriously spit us out as the distasteful thing we had become? Or is it even possible, as Pogo once suggested that in those distant, unwelcoming lands, we met the enemy and he was us? Did we in some bizarre fashion fight ourselves and lose?

After all, last year, more American servicemen died from suicide than on the battlefield in Afghanistan; and a startling number of Americans were killed in "green on blue" or "insider" attacks by Afghan "allies" rather than by that fragmented movement we still call the Taliban.

*Whoever or whatever was responsible; our Afghan disaster was remarkably foreseeable. In fact, anyone who, from 2006 on, read Ann Jones's Afghan reports at [TomDispatch](http://TomDispatch.com) wouldn't have had a doubt about the outcome of the war. Her first piece, after all, was prophetically entitled **"Why It's Not Working in Afghanistan."** (The answer is a threefold failure: no peace, no democracy, and no reconstruction.)*

From Western private – contractors – cum - looters making a figurative killing off the "reconstruction" of the country to an Afghan army that was largely a figment of the American imagination to up-armoured US soldiers on well - guarded bases whose high-tech equipment and comforts of home blinded them to the nature of the enemy, hers has long been a tale of impending failure.

Now, that war seems headed for its predictable end, not for the Afghans who, as Jones indicates in her latest sweeping report from Kabul, may face terrible years ahead, but for the US.

After more than 11 years, the war that is often labelled the longest in American history is slowly winding down and that's no small thing.

So leave the mystery to the historians that why America – the superpower was beaten and defeated - but mark the moment please; it's historic.