

#1437 Afghanistan: The Long Road to Now

[00:00:00] **JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** Welcome to this episode of the award-winning Best of the Left podcast, in which we shall take a look at the history of the war in Afghanistan.

First of all, you think it's only been going on for 20 years? Think again. It's been a lot longer than that. From British empire building, to Cold War gamesmanship, Afghanistan has been a center of conflict since long before American citizens bothered to take notice.

And this is another of our experimental remix episodes in which we sprinkle in some classic clips [00:00:30] from our own archives, in addition to the kind of the new material you're used to. So be sure to let us know what you think of this experiment.

Clips today are from The Intercept; CounterSpin; The Michael Brooks Show; The Rachel Maddow Show; Democracy Now; On The Media; The Daily Show with Jon Stewart-- yes, I said Jon Stewart; and Newsbeat.

Afghans Try to Flee U.S.-Caused Crisis - The Intercept - Air Date 8-18-21

[00:00:52] **AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** During most of the 1980s, the CIA secretly sent billions of dollars of military aid to Afghanistan [00:01:00] to support the Mujahideen, or holy warriors, against the Soviet Union, which had invaded in 1979.

[00:01:07] **PRESIDENT RONALD RAEGAN:** During the past 18 months, the Mujahideen fighting inside the country have improved their weapons, tactics, and coordination.

The result has been a string of serious defeats for the Soviet elite units, as well as many divisions from the Kabul army.

[00:01:25] **AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** The U.S.-supported jihad succeeded in driving out the Soviets, but the [00:01:30] Afghan

factions, once allied to the U.S., eventually gave rise to the oppressive Taliban and Osama Bin Laden's Al Qaeda.

[00:01:43] **PETER JENNINGS:** That's the scene at this moment at the World Trade Center. Don Dahler from ABC's Good Morning America is down in the general vicinity. Don, can you tell us what has just happened?

[00:01:52] **DON DAHLER:** Yeah, Peter. The second building that was hit by the plane has just completely collapsed. The entire building has just [00:02:00] collapsed as if a demolition team set off –When you see the old demolition of these old buildings. It folded down on itself, and it is not there anymore.

[00:02:08] **PETER JENNINGS:** The whole side has collapsed there?

[00:02:09] **DON DAHLER:** The whole building has collapsed.

[00:02:12] **VANESSA GEZARI:** The United States was attacked by Al Qaeda on Sept. 11, 2001. We're about to hit the 20-year anniversary of those attacks. They were horrific.

[00:02:23] **PRESIDENT GEORGE W BUSH:** This group and its leader, a person named Osama Bin Laden, are linked to many other organizations in [00:02:30] different countries.

The leadership of Al Qaeda has great influence in Afghanistan, and supports the Taliban regime in controlling most of that country.

[00:02:39] **VANESSA GEZARI:** They caught America almost totally by surprise, in terms of the public. The security state was actually expecting these attacks. So, that's a whole other story. But I think the public was really caught off guard by it.

It was so surprising to people. I think that is part of why the notion [00:03:00] of going to war as an answer to the 9/11 attacks was compelling for a broad range of the public.

[00:03:09] **PRESIDENT GEORGE W BUSH:** And tonight the United States of America makes the following demands on the Taliban: Deliver, to United States authorities, all the leaders of Al Qaeda who hide in your land.

The Taliban must act and act immediately. They will hand over the terrorists, or they will [00:03:30] share in their fate.

On my orders, the United States military has begun strikes against Al Qaeda terrorist training camps and military installations of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. These carefully targeted actions are designed to disrupt the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base of operations, and to attack the military capability of the Taliban regime.

[00:03:58] **VANESSA GEZARI:** What happened was, [00:04:00] essentially, an invasion that should have been, arguably, a police operation. Ostensibly, the U.S. government went there to go after Bin Laden and the Taliban who sheltered him. But, what's really striking about what we're seeing now, and actually the negotiation process that has been underway between the United States government and the Taliban in Doha for the better part of 10 years [00:04:30] now, is that there was an opportunity to have that kind of a negotiation in the first months after the invasion of Afghanistan in October, 2001.

And the response of the United States to that was, "We don't negotiate with terrorists."

And so, what's happening now is really painful to watch on a lot of levels. One reason that it's painful to watch is that [00:05:00] tens of thousands of people have died, who did not need to die, in this war. And that's not even speaking about the other kinds of damage, the billions of dollars that have been spent.

We have this military, we have this giant defense infrastructure that the people who are involved in that world, and in that infrastructure, and there are many of them, need to feel relevant. They need to [00:05:30] justify the gigantic budget that we have for these kinds of operations, and for our military. And, it, just, it feels so wasteful and heartbreaking, to think that this was really a chance for people to spend money and play with their toys, essentially. If you have a lot of guns, and you don't use them, what are they good for?

Phyllis Bennis and Matthew Hoh on Afghanistan Withdrawal - CounterSpin - Air Date 8-20-21

[00:05:52] **JANINE JACKSON - HOST, COUNTERSPIN:** We read about a 20 year war. And I understand that, but I wonder if you [00:06:00] would take a minute to draw a bigger historical picture, because it's meaningful for the people

who should be at the center of the story, and yet somehow never quite really are; namely, the Afghan people. This is more than 20 years for them.

[00:06:18] **MATTHEW HOH:** Absolutely. Thank you for bringing up this point. I think the commentary that puts this war in a 20 year perspective is indicative of [00:06:30] why the United States has failed so miserably in Afghanistan.

The United States has wanted this war in Afghanistan to be about Al-Qaida, and 9-11. And certainly that's what Joe Biden tried to do in his remarks the other day.

And, the reality is, that this is a living legend of the Cold War. This war begins. I think, maybe, you could fairly start it in 1973, when the king is deposed. And since that time, same year I was born, 48 [00:07:00] years ago, there has been nothing but political chaos or violence-- war-- in Afghanistan

And the majority of that has been instigated, to a degree, and supported greatly, by outside nations, chiefly the United States.

And what makes a tragedy about Afghanistan even more tragic is, so much of this war, so much of this violence, this suffering... It's got almost nothing to do with the Afghans [00:07:30] themselves. The United States and the Soviet Union, in 1970s, look at Afghanistan as a forum of competition; who is going to get Afghanistan to reflect their color on the map? Is Afghanistan going to be blue or is it to be red? And so I think that's why you have these circumstances that unfold from that.

In 1979, before the Soviet Union invades, the Carter administration launches a policy of [00:08:00] supporting Islamist rebel groups in Afghanistan, because in Zbigniew Brzezinski, Jimmy Carter's National Security Advisor, in Brzezinski's vision, the idea would be that we would utilize these Islamist rebel groups in Afghanistan to cause problems in Afghanistan to bait the Soviet Union into invasion and give them their own Vietnam. And this occurs six months before the Soviet Union invades.

And so, the Soviet Union does that. And the Soviet Union, of course, is certainly responsible for its actions; [00:08:30] and one of the things we know about the Soviet Union's decision to invade Afghanistan in 1979 was, that it was in many ways influenced by the American removal from Iran. You can find this in discussions from the notes, from the politburo, from the time. But the Soviets

are worried that, because the Americans lost their bases in Iran, that the Americans are now going to go into Afghanistan.

So, even from this vantage point, you're right, 40 some odd years later, you can still [00:09:00] see, in our current decision-making, how little of the United States decisions about Afghanistan have been about the Afghans themselves. Certainly, 9-11, where you're talking about an organization of less than 400 people-- Al-Qaeda-- 400 people worldwide. The 9-11 attacks, where none of the hijackers were Afghans; almost all of the planning, the training, the support for the attacks, came from Pakistan, from Germany; the hijackers met [00:09:30] in Malaysia and Spain, possibly in the UAE or Qatar; and then of course, we had hijackers here in this country for 18 months before the attacks-- the most important training the hijackers received were in American flight academies and martial arts academies.

But somehow, it's about Afghanistan. And the United States, of course, is not the only one who is culpable in this; the Pakistanis, the Iranians, Indians, the Russians, et cetera; many different nations [00:10:00] have been playing-- what used to be called in the 19th century-- the great game; treating Afghanistan as if it is a real life version of the game risk. And the Afghan people have just endured unbelievable suffering because of that.

[00:10:14] **JANINE JACKSON - HOST, COUNTERSPIN:** And I was, actually, just going to invoke the game Risk. It's all, like, an abstract chess game, as it were.

And U S media, sort of, present it that way, and had no hesitancy to move the goalposts: "We're punishing Al-Qaeda... No, we're saving women... [00:10:30] No, we're building a nation state..." It's as if the goal doesn't matter, because you're just supposed to get behind whatever the U S is doing.

Right now, U S media news consumers are seeing chaos and calamity, and it's being reported as being caused by the withdrawal of U S troops. So, a binary mindset says, "No, I don't like chaos. Put the troops back." [00:11:00] Unfortunately, the general run of media coverage doesn't really stay at a level much more subtle than that.

So, I want to ask you, how do we gird ourselves? What should we be holding in mind as this very war-framed conversation swirls around us in the coming days and weeks?

[00:11:24] **MATTHEW HOH:** I think we want to think that the events that are occurring right now, we have complete [00:11:30] agency. And they're not influenced by the past, not influenced by history. And I think we have to be very much aware of that.

So in the case of, as you hear people say, why should we leave Afghanistan? I wish I was joking about this, but commentators-- serious commentators, as people in DC would describe them-- if we're not in Afghanistan, then the Chinese will be.

That's what the Soviet union said: "If we're not in Afghanistan, the Americans will be. That's what the British said in the 19th century: ".If we're not in [00:12:00] Afghanistan, the Russians will be." It turns out the Russians never had any plan to invade Afghanistan in 19th century, but the British invaded Afghanistan at least three times because of that.

So I think it's important to tie ourselves to history, to understand how the same things keep unfolding.

One of the things I think is important too, is that... Look, Joe Biden was in office, he was a U S Senator when the Vietnam War ended. Just because something happened 50 years ago, it doesn't mean that our people who are [00:12:30] in power making these decisions aren't the legacies of that, just as I described the Afghan War as being a living legacy of the Cold War; it still exists.

Take a man like Donald Rumsfeld. He was the Secretary of Defense when the Vietnam War ended. I had this experience, one time, when I was in the Marine Corps, and Donald Rumsfeld came up to me, and he pointed at a portrait of Eisenhower that myself and a friend were standing in front of. And he said, "You know how old I am? I'm so old, I used to work with that guy."

And so [00:13:00] you can understand, that man who was in charge... was in charge of the Defense Department... was in charge of the Defense Department at the end of Vietnam had worked with Dwight Eisenhower; dwight Eisenhower is old enough to have known, and worked with, Civil War veterans!

So, we're not actually that far removed from history.

So, to think that what occurred in the 1970s in Afghanistan; what occurred in 1980s, in Afghanistan; what occurred in the 1990s doesn't have repercussions

now, is one of the reasons why I think that the media coverage, and [00:13:30] people's understanding, of the war is so very basic, is so limited.

Certainly, there is a legacy to this, there are events that occurred, there are reasons for this. Why would the Taliban have such popular support from the Afghan people? Maybe there's a history to it.

Look, in this country, we talk about... if anyone was to say to any of us that the Civil War is a forgotten relic of American history, and doesn't influence current culture, politics, society, [00:14:00] whatever; we would say,. "You're absolutely crazy!"

we have a media that reports about Afghanistan as if only what has occurred within the last week or last month matters. Take, just for example..., the Doha agreement signed between the Taliban and the United States was signed in February, 2020.

That was almost 18 months. There has been very little immediate discussion about what happened in those 18 months, when negotiations were supposed to be [00:14:30] occurring between the Taliban and the Afghan government. It's almost as if that time doesn't factor or matter. The reporting will say, basically, Doha agreement signed February 2020; May 1st, 2021, Biden says we're pulling troops out.

No discussion whatsoever about, how come nothing occurred? Why weren't negotiations successful? What prompted this to play out this way? Where the Taliban, in my opinion basically said, "Hey, we've given you 18 months to [00:15:00] negotiate. We're just going to take it now."

And, as well as, too, just that type of discussion where the Taliban has agency, where the Taliban needs to be understood as an army and a political organization that is not the narrative we have of these troglodytes in caves.

The Afghan Pentagon Papers & An Illicit History Of The War - The Michael Brooks Show - Air Date 12-14-19

[00:15:19] **MICHAEL BROOKS - HOST, THE MICHAEL BROOKS SHOW:** There was just a major piece of reporting in the Washington Post basically documenting that throughout the entire Bush, Obama, and Trump eras

there [00:15:30] has been systemic lying and disinformation on the part of the US government and different administrations on what exactly is happening in Afghanistan.

Multiple shifting rationales for why we're there. Constant efforts to spin and formulate successes that are not existing. And basically you have a war now that's longer than Vietnam, I believe Afghanistan is the longest ongoing war in US history that has consumed an incredible amount of lives, US [00:16:00] soldiers, endless Afghani civilians. We are in a situation, where basically the Ashraf Ghani government controls about half of the country, the rest is by various factions of the Taliban.

This has deepened and created all sorts of new problems in terms of the US and Pakistani relationship. It has been a boon in some respects for the Pakistani intelligence services, ISI who play a double [00:16:30] game with the CIA and the Taliban. Everybody's should read Steve Coll's *Directorate S* book. It's also had an enormously damaging effect on central Asia and in Pakistan.

The war, of course, has been conducted most aggressively under Obama with the drone program in Pakistan that killed a significant amount of Pakistani civilians and caused a new layer of instability there. We don't know the exact amount of civilians because the drone program, civilian casualty rates have never been properly measured, but we [00:17:00] do know that all civilian casualty rates are skyrocketing under Trump.

I'm going to quote a little bit from Juan Cole, who wrote a great piece, *We didn't Need the Documents: America's Trillion \$ Failure in the Afghanistan War has been Obvious All Along*. Basically, a lot of reporting of Whitlock's articles focused on US government lies and misrepresentations about progress on the war front, but this was all along obvious to anyone who knows anything serious about Afghanistan and Pakistan. Our Madison [00:17:30] avenue, advertising culture gives the us government the tools to pull the wool over people's heads. Government spokesman in the forever wars have just two categories, progress and slow progress. An epochal disaster like losing a whole province is slower progress than we would like.

And he goes on to just talk about the various massive blunders here. Let's go through a little bit of history here. This is George W. Bush—remember, after [00:18:00] September 11, this goes back to the 1980s, all of these relationships were formed during the US, Saudi, and Pakistani support of the Mujahideen fighting against the Soviet Union.

Then Afghanistan is abandoned. It's multi warlord factions. The Taliban rise in the mid 90s, and initially there's actually some really positive overtures with the United States because there's pipeline deals to be had. Osama bin Laden is there. They're hosting him in [00:18:30] Al-Qaeda and he's got a huge amount of money to dispense and still, almost certainly different links to various parts of the Saudis.

So this is George W. Bush after September 11th. There's of course not going to be any strategic response. There's not going to be any humane response. There's going to be a massive bombing and onslaught against Afghanistan. And really importantly, this whole war on terrorism framework, even though we don't use that language anymore, is still, 20 years later, how we conduct all of our global military policy. This is [00:19:00] still the framework upon AUMF, which has never been reformed. There was just a massive military spending bill that, of course the Democrats totally rolled on that given to all Saudi demands on their genocide in Yemen, that would allow the Trump administration to use AUMF money and authority to attack Iran and does nothing to hold any of this back. This is George W. Bush launching it back after the September 11th attacks, several weeks after. [00:19:30]

Good afternoon.

[00:19:33] **PRESIDENT GEORGE BUSH:** On my orders to do United States military has begun strikes against the Al Qaeda terrorist training camps and military installations of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. These carefully targeted actions are designed to disrupt the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base of operations and to attack the military capability of the Taliban regime.

[00:19:59] **MICHAEL BROOKS - HOST, THE MICHAEL BROOKS SHOW:** Now this went [00:20:00] on for multiple years and after initially claiming success by essentially putting Northern Alliance into power, dispersing, the Taliban and Al Qaeda, and again, a huge amount of civilian casualties, Afghanistan just kept going and it was not successful. In fact, it was destabilizing Pakistan. There was all sorts of - not all sorts of reporting, it was still pretty under reported then - of problems in the Karzai government. Then Barack Obama comes along and he's not an anti-war candidate, he's an [00:20:30] anti-dumb war candidate. So the invasion of Iraq is dumb and not intelligent, not a war crime, and we need to focus on the smart war in Afghanistan, which is pretty clear to anybody, very early on, with any historical awareness is unwinnable, but Obama still makes a Machiavellian calculation to surge troops in Afghanistan under military pressure and with political calculation.

[00:20:56] **PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA:** This review is now complete. And as [00:21:00] Commander-in-Chief, I have determined that it is in our vital national interest to send an additional 30,000 US troops to Afghanistan. After 18 months, our troops will begin to come home. These are the resources that we need to seize the initiative while building the Afghan capacity that can allow for a responsible transition of our forces out of Afghanistan.

I do not make this decision [00:21:30] lightly. I opposed the war in Iraq, precisely because I believe that we must exercise restraint in the use of military force, and always consider the long-term consequences of our actions. We have been at war now for eight years at enormous cost in lives and resource. Years of debate over Iraq and terrorism have left our unity on national security issues in tatters and created a highly polarized and partisan backdrop for [00:22:00] this effort. And having just experienced the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, the American people are understandably focused on rebuilding our economy and putting people to work here at home.

[00:22:12] **MICHAEL BROOKS - HOST, THE MICHAEL BROOKS SHOW:** Now Obama would actually make an, a very odd play, which is he would promise to pull those troops out after 18 months of going in, and then you heard a lot in this time period with general McChrystal and general Petraeus, basically about replicating what they did in Iraq, which was sold as a surge that was [00:22:30] effective, but really what it was going to Sunni leadership across the country and saying, look, we're going to protect some of your rights economically and otherwise, and here a bags of cash, which was much more persuasive than the surge, but not replicatable in Afghanistan for a variety of reasons, including a huge amount of broader political illiteracy about even, just as an example, the different ethnic factions inside the Afghan context.

It continues on. We're [00:23:00] rolling right through including, of course, an accelerated drone warfare and the relationship of Pakistan. And then this guy became.

[00:23:07] **PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP:** Thank you very much, Mr. President. 52 compared to thousands, and we're doing a tremendous job, and as you know, a big part of that job is ISIS. Certainly the biggest and Al Qaeda. And we uh, we've got them down very low numbers, we'll have that totally taken care of in a very short period of time. And we'll see what happens. The [00:23:30] Taliban wants to make a deal, we'll see if they want to make a deal. It's gotta be a real deal, but we'll see, but they wanna make a deal. And they only want to make a deal because you're doing a great job. That's the only reason they want to make a deal.

So I want to thank you, and I want to thank the Afghan soldiers or really uh, I've spoken to a lot of you today and you say they're really fighting hard. I was very impressed with that, actually, so I want to thank you.

[00:23:53] **MICHAEL BROOKS - HOST, THE MICHAEL BROOKS**

SHOW: So that's Donald Trump, who, of course, in the first couple of months in his administration [00:24:00] authorized an operation that killed multiple civilians right out of the gate when he became president and then also dropped a massive payload bomb in Afghanistan in 2017.

[00:24:12] **MATT LECH - CO-HOST, THE MICHAEL BROOKS SHOW:** The mother of all bombs. That's only because they don't have a father of a bombs.

[00:24:17] **MICHAEL BROOKS - HOST, THE MICHAEL BROOKS**

SHOW: And then Lindsey Graham, the ultra-hawk, has been saying, according to India Media Reports, that this could all end if the Pakistanis would just stop supporting the Taliban, which is basically like saying yes, this could all end [00:24:30] if we had immediate world peace, or if the United States stopped supporting the intelligence services in Pakistan that support the Taliban. These things slightly complicated, unfortunately, and there's a nexus of relationships that don't work for anybody.

Three months ago negotiations with the Taliban were canceled and they are resuming again, as of yesterday. Talks between the United States and the Taliban resumed this weekend, three weeks after president Donald Trump abruptly [00:25:00] canceled negotiations aimed at ending America's longest war. News of the talks came just before the Washington Post obtained a report of more than 2000 pages of government documents that they say it shows how US officials for years have misled the public about the war in Afghanistan.

War presidents - Rachel Maddow - 12/1/2009

[00:25:17] **PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA:** And as Commander in Chief, I have determined that it is in our vital national interest to send an additional 30,000 US troops to Afghanistan. We're in Afghanistan to prevent a [00:25:30] cancer from once again spreading through that country. But this same cancer has also taken root in the border region of Pakistan. To abandon this area now, and to rely only on efforts against Al-Qaeda from a distance, would

significantly hamper our ability to keep the pressure on Al Qaeda and create an unacceptable risk of additional attacks on our Homeland and our allies.

[00:25:54] **RACHEL MADDOW - THE RACHEL MADDOW SHOW:**

Tonight at 8:00 PM Eastern, this year's Nobel peace laureate escalated the war in Afghanistan, [00:26:00] for the second time in just the first year of his presidency. In March, she will recall this president announced that his new administration had concluded a careful policy review of the options available in Afghanistan then, and had decided to send 21,000 more troops. To put that first escalation in context, this is what American troop levels were like eight years ago, the first December after we invaded. See that little tiny blip down there on the left? This is how they changed over time, all through the Bush administration, and through frankly, the [00:26:30] election of Mr. Obama.

This is what's happened during president Obama's first year in office. And this is what he's just announced he's going to do by next summer. And then nine days after that, he flies to Oslo to get his Nobel peace prize. The president's speech tonight at West Point in a way is an awkward bookmark to the previous president's famous West Point speech, when the Afghanistan war was only eight months old, not eight years old.

[00:26:59] **PRESIDENT GEORGE BUSH:** Our war on [00:27:00] terror is only begun, but in Afghanistan it was begun.

[00:27:07] **RACHEL MADDOW - THE RACHEL MADDOW SHOW:**

Turns out that wasn't very true. And eight years later, the next president is stuck explaining his choice among all the, frankly, pretty bad options available to fix Bush's supposedly begun war.

That president Bush bragging at West Point about how awesome he thought things had gone in Afghanistan at that point is not what that speech is remembered for. President Bush bragged in a lot of places about how [00:27:30] awesome he thought things had gone in Afghanistan, even as both Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar, the leader of the Taliban, not only survived, but survived unscathed and stayed in business as militant leaders just now relocated eastward slightly. If Omar went from Khandahar to Quetta in Pakistan, that means he moved slightly less than the distance between Wichita and Topeka.

No, president Bush's West Point speeches remembered not because he was uniquely wrong in his comments there about Afghanistan itself. He [00:28:00] was wrong a lot about his comments about Afghanistan itself. That speech is

remembered because it was at West Point where he unveiled what may have been the single most radical thing about his presidency.

[00:28:13] **CHARLES GIBSON, ABC NEWS:** Do you agree with the Bush doctrine?

[00:28:17] **SARAH PALIN, FMR. ALASKA GOVERNOR:** In what respect Charlie?

[00:28:20] **CHARLES GIBSON, ABC NEWS:** The Bush -- what do you mean? What are you interpret it to be?

[00:28:23] **SARAH PALIN, FMR. ALASKA GOVERNOR:** His worldview?

[00:28:24] **CHARLES GIBSON, ABC NEWS:** The Bush Doctrine, enunciated in September, 2002 before the Iraq war.

[00:28:28] **RACHEL MADDOW - THE RACHEL MADDOW SHOW:** President Obama [00:28:30] tonight spoke at the site where president Bush unveiled the Bush Doctrine, the proclamation that the United States would no longer reserve the right just to wage war against countries or forces that threatened us, but that we would wage war to stop the emergence of threats in the future.

[00:28:48] **PRESIDENT GEORGE BUSH:** If we wait for threats to fully materialize, we will have waited too long. The war on terror will not be won on the defensive. [00:29:00] We must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans and confront the worst threats

[00:29:07] **RACHEL MADDOW - THE RACHEL MADDOW SHOW:** Before they emerge, we must confront threats that might happen someday.

And thus was born, not only the justification for, in the name of 9/11, attacking a country that had nothing to do with 9/11, but also the maximalist Bush doctrine concept of America at war globally, indefinitely, against anyone, at our own discretion.

[00:29:29] **PRESIDENT GEORGE BUSH:** Our security [00:29:30] require transforming the military you will lead. A military that must be ready to strike at a moment's notice in any dark corner of the world. We must uncover terror cells in 60 or more countries. All nations that decide for aggression and terror will pay a price.

[00:29:50] **RACHEL MADDOW - THE RACHEL MADDOW SHOW:** The Bush doctrine was probably the single most radical thing about the Bush presidency, because it dropped the requirement that the United States actually be [00:30:00] threatened before we'd start a war with someone, instead saying that if we just thought we might be threatened sometime in the future, that would be justification enough for us now to start a war.

It is a really radical concept, if you think about it, not only about war, but about us, about America. And it may have survived the Bush presidency. President Obama tonight explaining his second escalation of the war in Afghanistan, announcing that the 32,000 Americans who were in Afghanistan when he took office will become a [00:30:30] hundred thousand by next year. A war reborn, and what the president is describing as his own image, his own strategic terms, but which is justified fundamentally by what sounds like the Bush doctrine, the administration admitting that we are not actually threatened now as a nation by Afghanistan.

[00:30:51] **OBAMA ADMINISTRATION:** Obviously the good news that Americans should feel at least good about in Afghanistan is that the Al-Qaeda presence is very [00:31:00] diminished. The maximum estimate is less than a hundred operating in the country, no bases, no ability to launch attacks on either us or our allies.

[00:31:09] **RACHEL MADDOW - THE RACHEL MADDOW SHOW:** No ability to attack us or our allies. Afghanistan poses no threat to us.

And yet our war there as being doubled and tripled in size. Why? It's because we think there might be a threat from Afghanistan in the future, if a safe haven for terrorism there re-emerges in the future. In other [00:31:30] words,

[00:31:31] **PRESIDENT GEORGE BUSH:** if we wait for threats to fully materialize, we will have waited too long.

We must take a battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans and confront the worst threats before they emerge.

[00:31:46] **RACHEL MADDOW - THE RACHEL MADDOW SHOW:** Is the massive escalation of the war in Afghanistan announced tonight, president Obama's own implementation of the preventive war Bush doctrine that Sarah Palin couldn't understand, and that no one's really been able to justify.

[00:32:00]

This war is not about threats to the United States from Afghanistan. To the extent that it is justified by preventing threats to us from emerging from Pakistan, sometime in the future, that's preventive war. That's the Bush doctrine in all it's Orwellian extremism.

To the extent though, that this war is not about some potential future threat, but a real current one, like the president described tonight, a current one that he didn't say it bluntly, but he meant it, one that exists in [00:32:30] Pakistan. To the extent that our a hundred thousand troops in Afghanistan are there simply to backstop and contain the real war against the real threat next door in Pakistan, then tell me this: how are we fighting our war in Pakistan? We're fighting it using the CIA, which effectively functions as a fifth secret branch of the US military.

The Afghanistan Papers Docs Show How Bush, Obama, Trump Lied About Brutality & Corruption of War - Democracy Now! - Air Date 8-19-21

[00:32:49] **AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** I'm Amy Goodman with Nermeen Shaikh, as we continue to look at the situation in Afghanistan and the U.S. withdrawal. On Wednesday, president Biden defended his handling of the withdrawal [00:33:00] in an interview on ABC News with George Stephanopoulos.

[00:33:04] **GEORGE STEPHANOPOULOS:** No mistakes?

[00:33:05] **PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN:** No, I don't think it could have been handled in a way that -- we're going to go back in hindsight and look, but the idea that somehow there was a way to have gotten out without chaos ensuing, I don't know how that happens.

[00:33:20] **AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** But just last month on July 8th, Biden rejected the idea a Taliban takeover in Afghanistan was inevitable. Several top Democrats have vowed to probe Biden's [00:33:30] Afghanistan exit strategy. A report from the special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction said the U.S., quote, "struggled to develop and implement a coherent strategy over the last 20 years." In 2020, while on the campaign trail, then-candidate Biden acknowledged U.S. officials had lied to the public about the war in Afghanistan.

For more, we're joined by Craig Whitlock, investigative reporter for the Washington Post long covered Afghanistan, the author of the new book, just out: *The Afghanistan Papers: A [00:34:00] Secret History of the War*. It goes beyond Biden to look at how the past three presidents — Trump, Obama and George W. Bush deceived the public year after year about the longest war in US history.

Welcome back to *Democracy Now!*, Craig. The whole debate and congressional Congress now saying they're going to look at this exit strategy, obscures what the US did in Afghanistan for the past 20 years, [00:34:30] and that's what you so deeply look at in *The Afghanistan Papers*. First, describe what they are.

[00:34:36] **CRAIG WHITLOCK:** The Afghanistan papers are hundreds of interviews, notes, and transcripts of interviews that the special inspector general for Afghanistan had conducted with key officials, who played important roles in the war over 20 years.

These were documents that, were not made public until the Washington Post had to sue the government to obtain them under the Freedom of Information Act. [00:35:00] It took us three years to obtain these documents, but what they show is, as you stated earlier, the public narrative was that the U.S. was always making progress. All these presidents said we were going to win the war. And yet in private, these officials were extremely pessimistic. They said they didn't have a campaign plan, they didn't have a strategy. They didn't understand Afghanistan and thought the war was unwinnable.

[00:35:29] **NERMEEN SHAIKH:** Craig, I guess [00:35:30] the critical question is given all of the research that you did and what you found revealed in the Afghanistan papers, were you surprised at all that, Afghanistan fell so quickly to the Taliban really in a matter of days, provincial capital after provincial capital and then Kabul on Sunday.

[00:35:46] **CRAIG WHITLOCK:** I was surprised that it happened so quickly. That said, I think it was pretty obvious that the Afghan government really didn't have any popular support, or very little. It's certainly been well documented that the Afghan [00:36:00] security forces, the army and the paramilitary police, had real problems that the US government had tried, had spent more than \$85 billion to train and equip this force, and yet it was barely functioning at the end.

I think what we saw in the last week were just commander after commander in the Afghan forces saw which way the wind was blowing, knew the Afghan

government wasn't going to last. And so they switched sides very quickly, either under threat from the Taliban or, [00:36:30] for offers of money.

The Afghans, this is not uncommon for them. They know they've had to suffer under 40 years of civil war or fighting with outside powers. And to survive they've had to very quickly judge who's going to win and how they should end up on the right side.

[00:36:47] **AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** Craig Whitlock, there are two issues here, over this 20 years. And if you could take us back through time, because again, what we are not getting is the brutality of the U.S. [00:37:00] war and occupation, and the Taliban, continually saying their main goal was to throw out the foreign invader. Talk about what the U.S. covered up. Then there's the issue of the corruption of the government and the U.S. involvement with that, the Afghan government. But the record of the massacres, the working with warlords, the [00:37:30] oppression caused by the occupation.

[00:37:33] **CRAIG WHITLOCK:** Yeah, it's a pretty, it's not a pretty history, the U.S. involvement in Afghanistan. As you mentioned, involvement with the warlords, part of the problem was that the population in Afghanistan saw the United States as allying itself with warlords who had pretty brutal records during the 1990s and certainly a long and deep history of corruption.

And here was the United States partnering with them, and frankly spending billions of dollars on the [00:38:00] Afghan government, which went into the warlords' pockets. So, the population didn't see the United States as bringing democracy and equal rights to Afghanistan. They saw them as propping up a corrupt and illegitimate government.

The Taliban certainly has a very brutal record. I don't mean to minimize that in any regard, particularly how they treat women and girls. But in the end, many Afghans, particularly in rural areas, said, "Look, we don't like the Taliban, but we really hate our own government. At least the [00:38:30] Taliban, we see them as Afghans. They're more sympathetic to our religious beliefs and they're not here to help with the foreigners." So, I think, in the end, a lot of people saw the Taliban as the lesser of two evils.

[00:38:45] **AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** And let's go back to the very beginning, right? When George W. Bush invaded Afghanistan, in that period when Rumsfeld was the defense secretary, you had the Taliban saying they would surrender in [00:39:00] December, if just, Mullah

Mohammed Omar was allowed to live with dignity in Kandahar, where they established the Taliban. Rumsfeld said no. You have, even before that in October, when Afghanistan said we will hand over Osama bin Laden. Bush said no.

[00:39:24] **CRAIG WHITLOCK:** I do think the Taliban offers to hand over bin Laden were maybe a bit overstated. They had [00:39:30] many opportunities to do that. And I think they weren't sincere.

The question I think you're raising, which is an important one, is there were opportunities to try and bring the Taliban into the fold after the U.S. invasion in 2001. The Taliban government was toppled relatively quickly, but, in retrospect, that was the moment to try to bring these factions together in Afghanistan, to try and have some kind of stable consensus of the political system.

Instead, the United States thought it [00:40:00] had won a clear-cut military victory. It thought it had not just defeated the Taliban, but vanquished them. It lumped them together in the same boat with al-Qaeda as terrorist groups. And so it just saw no need to negotiate with them.

The problem was that over time, the Taliban gradually came back because, unlike al-Qaeda, they were really woven into the fabric of Afghan society. This wasn't a group you could eliminate, you could vanquish. They had too much support in certain [00:40:30] parts of the country. And I think that was the miscalculation the Americans made from the beginning was the need to bring stability to Afghanistan. You had to bring all the actors into the fold.

[00:40:44] **AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** We're talking to Craig Whitlock and he's author of the new book, *The Afghanistan Papers*.

The Intercept reports, Craig, that military stocks outperformed the stock market overall by 58% during the Afghanistan [00:41:00] war, including Boeing, Raytheon, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, and General Dynamics. Quote, "[F]rom the perspective of some of the most powerful people in the U.S., the Afghanistan war may have been an extraordinary success. Notably the boards of directors of all five defense contractors" in Afghanistan.

If you can talk further about, the US poured -- and I'm sure it's much more than this -- the LA Times saying "[A]t a cost of [00:41:30] \$83 billion, Afghan security forces collapsed so quickly and completely [that] the ultimate

beneficiary of the American investment has so quickly and completely" turns out to be the Taliban. So the US knows exactly what they have.

In *The Afghanistan Papers*, what did you find in the relationship of military contractors also driving this war forward? It wasn't just Bush. It was Obama. [00:42:00] Then Trump and Biden certainly knew about the Obama years because he was vice president at that time. And he's the one who said, yes, you have been lied to, the American people.

[00:42:09] **CRAIG WHITLOCK:** That's right. And the height of spending during the war was during the Obama administration, when he sent a surge of 100,000 US troops to Afghanistan in 2010, 2011, 2012. That's when we were spending just enormous amounts of money in Afghanistan, not just to wage the war, but to try and build up the country.

And [00:42:30] frankly, *The Afghanistan Papers* shows far more money than the country could possibly hope to absorb. It just didn't have the capacity to use all this money. A lot of the money was also siphoned off by corruption, by Afghan warlords, by defense contractors. And by defense contractors, that could be anything from major American contractors who were profiting off the war, to local contractors in Afghanistan, international ones that supplied supplies, ammunition, [00:43:00] food, transport. The war was a very expensive war to wage in a landlocked country, halfway around the world. And the United States spent more than a trillion dollars on its operations there. There's not a whole lot to show for that, but a lot of people, whether it's Afghans or defense contractors or, frankly, warlords and the Taliban, profited off that war for 20 years.

The Pentagon Papers Of Our Time with Craig Whitlock - On the Media - Air Date 12-20-19

[00:43:25] **BOB GARFIELD - CO-HOST, ON THE MEDIA:** On the very same day that the war in Afghanistan began, [00:43:30] the spin began too.

[00:43:31] **REPORTER:** Ari Fleischer, the president's spokesman, came out in a very terse, direct statement, said we are beginning another front in our war against terrorism so that freedom can prevail over fear.

[00:43:43] **PRESIDENT GEORGE W BUSH:** We did not ask for this mission, but we will fulfill it. The name of today's military operation is Enduring Freedom.

[00:43:51] **BOB GARFIELD - CO-HOST, ON THE MEDIA:** Freedom? Not really, but in enduring, oh yeah.

[00:43:56] **REPORTER:** The air campaign is in its 20th day today. The bombing campaign is [00:44:00] causing more civilian casualties and more public protests... President Bush addressed more than 10,000 soldiers at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, home of the 101st airborne division...

[00:44:09] **PRESIDENT GEORGE W BUSH:** We fight now, and we will keep on fighting until our victory is complete.

[00:44:14] **SPOKESPERSONS:** The mission is not only important, it is also achievable. We can and will accomplish this mission.

So far, we believe we have been making gradual, but important progress.

Progress has been made [00:44:30] to try to advance security.

[00:44:31] **REPORTER:** Then secretary Robert Gates says progress in the war with Afghanistan is exceeding his expectation.

[00:44:36] **PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA:** We can say with confidence that America will complete its mission in Afghanistan and by the end of next year our war in Afghanistan will be over.

[00:44:49] **BOB GARFIELD - CO-HOST, ON THE MEDIA:** And though premonitions of a Vietnam-like quagmire were voiced early and often, back in 2001, then-secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld cracked jokes [00:45:00] about the very premise.

[00:45:01] **SECRETARY OF DEFENSE DONALD RUMSFELD:** It looked like nothing was happening. Indeed, it looked like we were in a --altogether now -- quagmire.

[00:45:11] **BOB GARFIELD - CO-HOST, ON THE MEDIA:** But as Washington Post investigative reporter Craig Whitlock revealed, a once- secret internal history of the war found that the quagmire was and is real. The Afghanistan Papers, as the Post is calling this monumental reporting project,

was three years in the making. [00:45:30] The project was initiated in the Pentagon by the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. But it took two lawsuits and untold records requests to eventually yield the 2000 pages that document 400 interviews with generals, diplomats, aid workers and Afghan officials. And like the Pentagon Papers that 48 years ago laid bare the government's strategic blunders and lies about Vietnam, this federal [00:46:00] reporting project reveals the efforts of three administrations over nearly two decades to spin expensive, bloody failure into success.

[00:46:09] **CRAIG WHITLOCK:** For many years, both under Bush and Obama, and somewhat under Trump, the generals would always stick to the same talking points: we're in a tough fight. There are challenges. We don't know how it's going to go exactly. But we're making progress. We're turning the corner. Sometimes it would say we're winning. And that contrasted [00:46:30] just 180 degrees from what some of the same people were saying in what we call the Afghanistan Papers.

[00:46:37] **BOB GARFIELD - CO-HOST, ON THE MEDIA:** This is Major General Jeffrey Schloesser briefing the press in September, 2008, after calling for reinforcements.

[00:46:44] **MAJOR GENERAL JEFFREY SCHLOESSER:** We are not losing it. The enemy cannot win. Uh, Even given what we have here now.

[00:46:51] **REPORTER:** When you said you are not losing, are you saying that you are winning?

[00:46:55] **MAJOR GENERAL JEFFREY SCHLOESSER:** Look, I, you know, the truth is, is that I, I, [00:47:00] I feel like, you know, we're making some steady progress. It's a slow win I guess is probably a, what we're accomplishing right on over here. [laughter] Slowly. Slowly.

[00:47:11] **BOB GARFIELD - CO-HOST, ON THE MEDIA:** It was a laugh line even a decade ago. But if the press was skeptical, is it fair to say, Craig, that we were institutionally also uncritical in passing these Pollyanna evaluations from the government along?

[00:47:26] **CRAIG WHITLOCK:** I think the problem is sometimes we would feel [00:47:30] obliged to carry along the comments from people like General Schloesser as he said them.

Now, usually we would include contexts. We would note that at the time General Schloesser was saying this, that US troops were suffering a lot of casualties, that field commanders who were asking for reinforcements, that bombings by the Taliban were on the increase. So I think the news media in Afghanistan and covering the Pentagon did a faithful job in chronicling the setbacks and the [00:48:00] failures and the problems. What I think again is different about these Afghanistan Papers is it's the people who were responsible for the policy. Finally, we're getting admission from people in charge that all those things they said all along weren't true.

[00:48:16] **BOB GARFIELD - CO-HOST, ON THE MEDIA:** It seems like one of the complications was that success was a moving target. Were we there to eradicate Al-Qaida? Were we there to rout the Taliban? To build security infrastructure? To build democratic [00:48:30] institutions? To fight corruption? To empower tribal leaders? To build physical infrastructure like roads and schools? Encourage women's rights? Wipe out the opium trade? Win hearts and minds of the Afghan populace? Not so much mission creep, but like 10 different missions, some mutually exclusive.

[00:48:50] **CRAIG WHITLOCK:** That's right. Back in 2001, there was enormous public support for President Bush's decision to retaliate for 9/11, and to [00:49:00] extinguish the Al Qaeda threat as best we could. That mission was largely accomplished within six months in Afghanistan.

But we stayed. And that's when things started to go awry. The people who were in charge of the war, in charge of the policy, admit that we lost our way. How would we know when we accomplished all these other objectives? They last forever. We're never going to turn Afghanistan into Switzerland. There's no doubt that women are treated very poorly in Afghanistan, but that [00:49:30] wasn't why we originally sent troops. And it's not realistic to say we're going to have a victory against the Taliban.

[00:49:37] **BOB GARFIELD - CO-HOST, ON THE MEDIA:** How many lives and how much treasure have been expended in 19 years, tilting at these nine or 10 windmills?

[00:49:48] **CRAIG WHITLOCK:** 2300 US military personnel have been killed in Afghanistan, more than 20,000 wounded. More than 3000 US defense contractors have been killed, [00:50:00] about 1500 NATO and coalition troops have lost their lives.

The Afghans have taken by far the biggest brunt of this war. 50,000, 60,000 Afghan security forces have lost their lives. The casualty numbers for the Afghan army and police are so high that the government keeps that number classified there where you would be so demoralizing if they put the true numbers out.

But the best estimates are that more than 160,000 people have lost their lives [00:50:30] since 2001 due to the fighting in Afghanistan.

[00:50:33] **BOB GARFIELD - CO-HOST, ON THE MEDIA:** For only a trillion dollars.

[00:50:36] **CRAIG WHITLOCK:** Or more is probably more accurate. The best estimates we've spent close to a trillion dollars on the military operations and trying to rebuild Afghanistan. Those don't take into account the indirect costs such as VA care for our troops who came back wounded, and since there's more than 20,000 of those, we're going to be caring for those people for many years. The cost of the interest we had to take on [00:51:00] the debt, the cost of intelligence operations, all these things it's really hard to add up, but at a minimum we've spent a trillion dollars. But the real costs are going to be many times that.

[00:51:11] **BOB GARFIELD - CO-HOST, ON THE MEDIA:** We didn't just go in there killing people, although we killed a lot of people. We poured a lot of cash into Afghanistan, have spread it out among tribal leaders and various kinds of infrastructure programs and government agencies. And it had the effect [00:51:30] of taking the smoldering embers of corrupt culture and turning it into a 70-alarm blaze.

[00:51:34] **CRAIG WHITLOCK:** It did over time. President Bush tried very hard to get the United Nations and other allies to take on the task of trying to build up Afghanistan. That didn't work very well. So after a few years, the Bush administration started spending some more money because they realized that Afghanistan was such a fragile state, that the Taliban could come back and take power again.

And then when President Obama took office, [00:52:00] he took the complete opposite approach of Bush, which was, we need to get the population on the side of this Afghan government. So we're going to spend out the wazoo, forgive my description. People in these interviews we obtained said people back in Washington didn't care what they were spending it on, as long as they could show that they had spent it.

A congressional delegation came to Afghanistan, and was asking how were they doing with these rebuilding projects? There was one military officer who [00:52:30] said, did the Congressman, you're asking me to spend \$3 million a day in this Afghan district, the size of a U S county. Could you do this at home? And the congressmen said, no, of course not. And he says you're asking me to do this in a place with mud huts and no windows. Afghanistan was never a place that had a clean well-run government. But now with these billions and billions of dollars flowing in, the opportunities for corruption were [00:53:00] unavoidable.

Spencer Ackerman Today's Crisis in Kabul Is Direct Result of Decades of U.S. War & Destabilization - Democracy Now! - Air Date 8-20-21

[00:53:02] **AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** Spencer Ackerman. Talk about the role the U.S. war and occupation, the brutality of the U.S. airstrikes, the torture at Bagram, the night raids, played in gaining new recruits for the Taliban.

[00:53:18] **SPENCER ACKERMAN:** The United States tends not to attribute its brutality to any of the circumstances that it comes to [00:53:30] bemoan when they manifest in the world.

And Afghanistan is certainly a tragic example of that. The fact that after 9/11, the United States, in its political and journalistic and intellectual elites, generally speaking, refused to accept that there was a direct and tragic and awful historic consequence of its destabilization of Afghanistan in the 1980s, to the degree that [00:54:00] Taliban facilitation of Osama bin Laden in the country helped the execution of the 9/11 plot, which, it's important to note, did not involve Afghans, and was not staged from Afghanistan, nor was it even planned in Afghanistan; it was far more, planned in Germany.

Nevertheless, that was an early foreboding of what we would see over the next 20 years, not just in Afghanistan, but throughout the war on terror; a disconnection, an unwillingness to face that, America's violent [00:54:30] and Imperial actions breed their own next generation of enemies.

That was on display once the United States went back into Afghanistan. And throughout the Afghanistan War, even during periods where counter-insurgency

campaigns, at least on paper, paid lip service to the idea that protecting Afghan lives and property and so forth, was going to ultimately be [00:55:00] decisive in the war.

It never acted that way. It never acted as if what... the point of the war was the protection of Afghan lives. It, more often, acted in such a way that it did not draw distinctions between Afghan lives and Afghan enemies.

And amongst the major reasons for this is not necessarily, like, a specific decision to target Afghan civilians, but an [00:55:30] inability to understand the country, understand its dynamics, and understand the rather complicated relationships, in many ways, between people who fight for the Taliban, and the Taliban itself, or people who aid the Taliban under threat to their own life, or threat to their family, or simply seek to endure the war, as so many people throughout so many wars, simply aspire to, simply by not taking action that harmed the Taliban, because they understood the consequences that [00:56:00] could... that they could experience.

Over time, all of these things strengthened the Taliban, made the Taliban seem like, once again, a viable alternative to the United States, and then, on a different level, the United States's contribution-- and not just the United States alone-- contribution to the misery in Afghanistan came through the corruption that it always blamed on the Afghans, but was a [00:56:30] significant driver of itself; development experts, development aid, and development money poured into Afghanistan far beyond a consideration of what a devastated Afghan economy could, in fact, absorb.

And some of this money was very deliberately flooded in from the CIA to pay off warlords to ensure that they would, ultimately, be responsive to American interests, which would often be violent interests; which would often be things like-- as the joint special operations command would [00:57:00] perform throughout the Afghanistan War, army special forces in particular throughout the Afghanistan War-- raids on people's houses, suspected of being aiding or facilitating the Taliban.

And again, the Taliban-- not even al-Qaeda. Not the thing that attacked the United States, certainly not the core of al-Qaeda that plotted planned and executed 9/11.

The United States was now in extended war [00:57:30] with a one-time harbinger-ally of Al-Qaeda, rather than the thing itself responsible for all of Afghanistan, but never acting responsibly toward the Afghan people.

30,000 speech - The Daily Show

[00:57:43] **JON STEWART - HOST, DAILY SHOW:** We begin tonight in 2007, a war in Iraq was going badly. So president Bush proposed a bold new strategy, a surge, nearly 30,000 troops flash forward, present day. The war in Iraq seems to have stabilized, but the war in Afghanistan is going badly.

[00:58:00] This time, the problem will be tackled by a bold new leader with the audacity to change hope into what we were waiting for, which yes, we can.

What shall his answer be?

[00:58:15] **PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA:** I have to that it is in our vital national interest to send an additional 30,000 us troops to Afghanistan.

[00:58:23] **JON STEWART - HOST, DAILY SHOW:** What the 30, what is 30,000 troops? The military equivalent of two [00:58:30] Advil, no matter what the problem there, I would've got a prime there and Afghanistan there at the 30,000 troops.

If it doesn't work, call my service.

They've gotten to him. Maybe he's giving the same surge speech that Bush gave nuts. That's crazy. Joan, that can't be happening. If that were the case, he would open with some type of nine 11 reference on

[00:58:54] **PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA:** September 11th, 2001 19 men hijacked for [00:59:00] airplanes and use them to murder nearly 3000.

[00:59:03] **JON STEWART - HOST, DAILY SHOW:** I said, oh, don't worry.

He said nine 11. You'll get your nickel.

it's a nickel, at least

we didn't even have to Photoshop his chest.

At least Obama's not dipping into bushes. Well-worn bucket. Oh, fear.

[00:59:29] **PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA:** [00:59:30] I am convinced that our security is at stake in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Al Qaeda and other extremists seek nuclear weapons. And we have every reason to believe that they

would use them. We have apprehended extremists within our borders who were sitting.

From the border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan to commit new acts of

[00:59:47] **JON STEWART - HOST, DAILY SHOW:** terror.

I'm [01:00:00] sorry, what was that? I didn't hear anything after you said extremists within our borders. If you're really challenging channeling Bush, let me hear some of that. Absolutely. Our cause is just our resolve unwavering, our causes,

[01:00:15] **PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA:** just our resolve on Waverly.

[01:00:26] **JON STEWART - HOST, DAILY SHOW:** why don't you reference vague and unnamed critics [01:00:30] defensively knocked them down.

[01:00:32] **PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA:** There are those who suggest that Afghanistan is another Vietnam. I believe this argument depends on a false reading of history. What?

[01:00:42] **JON STEWART - HOST, DAILY SHOW:** Alright, we're almost home. All you need now to fill out your Bush card is a not so subtle Freudian gaff

[01:00:48] **PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA:** today. After extraordinary costs, we are bringing the Iraq war to an, a responsible

[01:00:54] **JON STEWART - HOST, DAILY SHOW:** end. Irresponsible. How are you going to sell healthcare? As [01:01:00] far as my healthcare plan? All your doctors and nurses will be paid for.

I met nurses. Dammit is there at least something in the speech that shows you're a different kind of war president,

[01:01:14] **PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA:** you can't simply afford to ignore the price of these wars? Our true commitment in Afghanistan can not be open-ended because the nation that I'm most interested in. Is our own, these additional American and international troops will allow us [01:01:30] to begin the transfer of our forces out of Afghanistan.

In July of 2011,

[01:01:36] **JON STEWART - HOST, DAILY SHOW:** our resolve is unwavering, but it turns out our discover card is over there.

So bottom line last night. All right. He wasn't necessarily Bush, but he certainly wasn't the communist. Kenyan Obama. We've heard so much about lately.

The Afghanistan Papers with Steven Miles - News Beat with Rashed Mian and Christopher Twarowski - Air Date 12-23-19

[01:01:58] **RASHED MIAN - CO-HOST, NEWS BEAT:** Joining us to [01:02:00] discuss the Afghan papers, and what this all means, is Stephen Miles, executive director of Win Without War, which advocates for a more peaceful, progressive foreign policy. Stephen, thanks for coming on.

[01:02:10] **STEPHEN MILES:** Glad to be here.

[01:02:11] **RASHED MIAN - CO-HOST, NEWS BEAT:** Steve, I want to put this into perspective: the Afghan War is the longest such conflict in American history, yet government officials have rarely if ever said it was failing. So, how does this reporting jive with public comments made by U.S. Generals and senior government officials about the war?

[01:02:27] **STEPHEN MILES:** First of all, I'm glad you're doing the show. I think not enough attention [01:02:30] has been paid to this issue. And I think the shocking and damning thing of the reporting is what you just alluded to; the private conversations, the private thoughts of these government officials, were completely at odds with what they said publicly.

While in public, they were saying, "We're making progress. We're turning over a new leaf. We're on our. On the verge of victory," behind closed doors, they were admitting, they didn't know what they were doing, they didn't know who the enemy was, the war wasn't working, and there was no sign that there was anything that was going to change.

[01:02:58] **RASHED MIAN - CO-HOST, NEWS BEAT:** Thanks, Stephen. Now I'm going to read [01:03:00] one of the more revelatory and damning sections from the Washington Post report. It states, "Several of those

interviewed described explicit and sustained efforts by the U S government to deliberately mislead the public. They said it was common at military headquarters in Kabul and at the White House to distort statistics to make it appear the United States was winning the war, when that was not the case."

What's your reaction? And, should anyone be [01:03:30] held responsible for intentionally misleading the public, and, perhaps, even members of Congress?

[01:03:36] **STEPHEN MILES:** Well, first, it's hard to hear those words. I think we need to recognize that there are men and women in uniform who are not with us today because those words were said, not in public, but in private.

I think it's hard because we know that there are countless Afghan lives that have been lost and forever changed because of the lies that were said.

And I think we need to be honest that these were lies. They were public lies to distort [01:04:00] the truth, and to prevent a change of policy. Absolutely, people need to be held to account for that.

I think one thing that's often lost here, through this time, is that, it wasn't as if no one was saying these things. There were advocates like us. There was others on the outside. There was brave folks who resigned in protest; I think of Matthew Ho who resigned from the State Department over Afghanistan; I think of Danny Davis who was in active duty, and came back from Afghanistan, and said, "We are not being honest with the American public."

And every time the policy tried to [01:04:30] change, these lies would come out stronger. They would take new force. Congress would be on the verge of doing something to end this war, to bring our troops home, to force a settlement for peace. And instead, they would get talked down by the administration and by military leaders who knew what they were saying was untrue.

But, nonetheless, said, "No, don't pull the rug out from under us. We're so close. We're turning the page. There's going to be victory."

They were lying. And the result is years and years of war that didn't have to happen. Years and years of war [01:05:00] that costs lives, that cost this country hundreds of billions of dollars, trillions over the course of the war.

People need to be held to account for that. And I think one of the things that we see is when they're not held to account... there's a lot of talk these days about the disillusionment with Washington, that, kind of, the reality of how that fueled the

rise of Trump, and these sorts of things. When folks see no accountability for the lies, not only with this floor, but the lies that got us into Iraq and other conflicts over the last two decades, you can understand why people feel disillusioned.

[01:05:29] **RASHED MIAN - CO-HOST, NEWS BEAT:** [01:05:30] Yeah. And one of the other stunning acknowledgements, from my perspective, was from Ryan Crocker, who was the veteran diplomat who served as U.S. Ambassador a half dozen times, including in Afghanistan, during the period of 2011 to 2012. During one of his interviews for this project that the post is reporting on, he said that the single most successful project, ironically, and I guess, inadvertently, was the development of mass corruption inside Afghanistan, which, sort of, undercut efforts at building a trustworthy system of government.

So, if senior officials were aware, a decade [01:06:00] into the war, that it was largely failing, both on the ground, and its ill-fated attempt at nation building, why do you think there was no significant shift in strategy?

[01:06:09] **STEPHEN MILES:** That's a great question. I think we need to be honest that the Congress bears a significant responsibility here. Some of these members of Congress have been around a long time, frankly, and they should know better than to believe what they hear from military officials, and others, who have been shown to lie repeatedly in some of these instances.

The name the Washington Post used, "The Afghan papers," [01:06:30] hearkens back to "The Pentagon Papers" for a reason. This is a complete historical echo to what happened in that time period, during the Vietnam War. Not very many members of Congress are left, who were there for part of that, but certainly a lot of members of Congress are here who understood that they were lied to throughout the Iraq War.

That the kind of, "We've got the insurgency on the run, that the last throws of," Dick Cheney and others; these lies persist and they're constant. And Congress bears responsibility, not because they don't know that it's happening, but, frankly, [01:07:00] because they lack the political will, they have complete moral cowardice, when it comes to confronting these things.

It's easier for them to perpetuate the status quo. It's easier for them to do what they did less than a week after the Afghan papers came out, which is, give tens of billions of dollars right back to the people prosecuting this war. It's can

support thousands of U.S. Troops in this war, do nothing to adjust or change policy in any way.

It's easy for them to push that on the status quo, and it's harder for them to do the thing that's right; [01:07:30] to stand up, take responsibility. And I think we have to be honest, that a lot of that blame lies with Congress.

[01:07:35] **RASHED MIAN - CO-HOST, NEWS BEAT:** On that note, what do you say to... to members of Congress? Many critics believe lawmakers have largely abdicated their responsibility by failing to repeal the AUMF, and debate the merits of this, and other, wars. You just mentioned part of this... are they also to blame?

[01:07:52] **STEPHEN MILES:** I think Congress needs to do its job. I think it's that simple. There are members, Congress right now who were in elementary school when the 2001 [01:08:00] AMF was voted on. There are men and women fighting in Afghanistan, right now, who were not born when Congress voted on this war.

It is unconscionable that they have not done their job. And, I think we need to be clear and we need to call this out for what it is. If members of Congress are too afraid to vote on this war, then they have no business sending other people to fight and die in this war. It is a complete abdication of moral responsibilities, a complete abdication of power.

The good news is, they can fix it. It's [01:08:30] pretty easy. Nothing is standing in their way. No one can blame Mitch McConnell. No one can blame Donald Trump. All they have to do is begin to do the basic job of oversight.

Now, we should be honest, we have a role to play here. Too many Americans, forget it... have forgotten about this war. Too many Americans have allowed this to go on in perpetuity, without demanding that it stop. We know, from public opinion polling, for years and years, that this war is unpopular. The American public wants it to end. They want it to be over. It's why you see Donald Trump rushing to try [01:09:00] to bring more troops home before the election. People want this war to stop.

We need to make our voices heard. We need to make our power felt. And we need to not just wait for Congress to do its job. We need to demand that they do it.

Summary 8-24-21

[01:09:12] **JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** We've just heard clips today, starting with the intercept, laying out some history of meddling in Afghanistan. CounterSpin made the connections going back to the cold war to explain foreign invasions of Afghanistan. The Michael Brook show in 2019, looked back at the ever shifting Afghanistan policy [01:09:30] from Bush through Obama, Andrew.

The Rachel Maddow show in 2009, trace the legacy of the Bush doctrine through to Obama's decision to add more troops to Afghanistan. In the early years of his administration democracy now looked back at the Afghanistan papers, revealing the decades of lies about the execution of the war in Afghanistan.

On the media in 2019 reported contemporaneously on the Afghanistan papers and democracy now explore the [01:10:00] role of the destabilization of Afghanistan over decades, helping to create the next generation of anti-American fighters. That's what everyone heard. I also heard bonus clips from the daily show with Jon Stewart back in 2009, who drew a direct comparison between the surge of 30,000 troops directed by Bush and Obama speech years later explaining his rationale for making the exact same decision.

And Newsbeat in 2019, discuss the tradition of misleading the [01:10:30] public on the war and the abdication of the duty of members of Congress to put an end to it, to hear that. And all of our bonuses. Delivered seamlessly into your podcast feed, sign up to support the show at Best of the Left dot com slash support or request a financial hardship membership, because we don't make a lack of funds, a barrier to hearing more information.

Every request is granted. No questions asked and now we'll hear from you.

Final comments on questioning a theory of change before supporting an idea

[01:10:57] **JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** Thanks to all those who called into the voicemail [01:11:00] line or wrote in their messages to be played as a VoicedMails. If you'd like to leave a comment or question of your own to be played on the show, you can record a message at 202-999-3991, or write me a message to Jay@BestoftheLeft.com.

So we just heard from Rich and he said lots of uncontroversial things about the need to have democracy and how politicians should also be in favor of democracy. So I'm just going to zero in on the one piece that has to do with the [01:11:30] campaign he's trying to launch, and that he didn't fill in much detail on. He talked about wanting to remove Joe Manchin from the Democratic party. And I know what that sounds like, but he might mean running a primary campaign against Manchin and removing him electorally that way.

But regardless of what he means, this is a perfect opportunity to bring up the importance of a theory of change. And I take any opportunity I can [01:12:00] get to remind everyone about the importance of having a theory of change.

So that I think is the first question to ask and he didn't fill us in, so I'm not making any assumptions about Rich's plan or goals or whether he has a theory of change or not. And if he does, whether it's good or bad or anything. But my first question is, what are we talking about, exactly? What is the theory of change behind the campaign to make Manchin not be a Democrat? Is it that we want to defeat him electorally in the [01:12:30] primary campaign? Or is it just a goal to have him remove the "D" from after his name? And depending on the answer to that question, there's a whole cascade of further questions about, okay, then what will then happen? What is the next step? If the initial goal is accomplished, what comes next, and how does this series of events lead us to a place where we would much prefer to be, as compared to our [01:13:00] current status quo?

If it is defeating him electorally in a primary campaign, then presumably that means that a different candidate will have won the seat and they will be, to some degree, more progressive than Joe Manchin is, more willing to work with with the rest of the party, stopping holding up progress in a variety of ways.

However, if the answer is the other way, and we just want him to stop being a Democrat, but continue to be an office, [01:13:30] then I am very curious about the theory of change behind that and how that positively impacts the country going forward. He mentioned that Joe Manchin is an impediment to progress in a variety of ways, and he is a member of the party, but is stopping the party from doing what nearly every other member at least says they would like to do, whether that's true or not. We've actually addressed that on the show before. A lot of people might actually like Joe [01:14:00] Manchin's existence in the party because he's willing to take the heat and prevent things from happening, so that those other people don't have to take votes that their constituents would appreciate, but their funders might not.

And so they can say yes, yes, I'm very much in favor of this thing that Joe Manchin won't let us do. Gosh darn it! And they are never forced to turn that vocalization into a vote. [01:14:30] It can definitely get squishy, if there wasn't Joe Manchin there, they might have to invent him is what I'm saying. So if we just had Joe Manchin not be a Democrat anymore, what would be the concrete benefits, leaving the speculation about what other politicians might do, leaving that aside, that's not what I'm getting at. But if he just wasn't a Democrat any more, how would that help the progressive movement?

So these are all the kinds of questions that you need to be asking yourself or others who put forward plans like this, [01:15:00] to understand how they have sort of set a goal, a future goal, and then worked backwards to a reasonable strategy that has a reasonable chance of working out if the effort goes to plan.

So if the effort is to push Joe Manchin out of the Democratic party, but he's still in office, I don't know where we go from there. That feels like a dead end to me. The only immediate results that I can think of is that the Democrats would then, [01:15:30] or very possibly, lose control of the Senate, lose the chairmanships and control of what is to be debated, what is to be voted on, those sorts of things. So possibly Rich's aim, and this is what needs to be explained further, is if we can push Joe Manchin to become an Independent who caucuses with the Democrats, then that, I guess at least wouldn't create harm [01:16:00] to progressive goals, legislative policy goals, and could then just be a sort of symbolic victory over a politician who's too conservative to be in the Democratic party. Maybe there's more to it. Maybe it's not just symbolic, but I would need someone who's thought longer about it to explain the theory of change, which is the whole point.

So anyway, that's just a little example of the kinds of questions that need to be asked and, and how strategies need to [01:16:30] be stress-tested against questions. I'm not saying that Rich hasn't already done all of this. He just didn't explain his theory in detail to us. Which gave me the opportunity to step in and do it as maybe just a demonstration exercise. So hopefully we'll hear back from him on more of his thoughts.

If anyone else has thoughts on this, or literally anything else you might want to comment on or question, keep the comments coming in at 202-999-3991, or by emailing me to [01:17:00] Jay@BestoftheLeft.com.

Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to Deon Clark and Erin Clayton for their research work for the show and participation in our bonus episodes. Thanks to the Monosyllabic, Transcriptionist Trio, Ben, Ken, and Scott for their

volunteer work, helping put our transcripts together. Thanks to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work on our social media outlets, activism segments, graphic design, web mastering, and occasional bonus show co-hosting. And thanks to those who support the show by becoming a member or purchasing [01:17:30] gift memberships at BestoftheLeft.com/support or from right inside the apple podcast app, if that's your style. Membership is how you get instant access to our excellent bonus episodes, in addition to there being extra content and no ads in our regular episodes. For details on the show itself, including links to all of the sources and music used in this and every episode, all that information can always be found in the show notes on our website and likely right on the device you're using to listen.

So coming to you from far outside the [01:18:00] conventional wisdom of Washington, DC, my name is Jay!, and this has been the *Best of the Left* podcast coming to you twice weekly, thanks entirely to the members and donors to the show, from BestoftheLeft.Com.