

Learning Lessons

Afghanistan's

by Phyllis Chesler



The country in which I was once [plunged](#) by Habibullah Kalakani into barbarism.

With the last American soldier now [re-instituting](#) their Saudi-style rules about women never being able to leave their homes naked-faced or without a male minder. Broadcasts must be religious chants, intoned by men only. Taliban violence against journalists has increased significantly.

Granted, the United States has already spent too much blood and treasure in Afghanistan to justify our staying any longer, and yet: What about the women? The children? The dissidents? The gays? The inevitable ingathering of the terrorists?

As I've [told the Guardian](#).

What have we learned from all this? That Afghanistan cannot be modernized? That our own fast-fading ideals about the importance of freedom cannot be transplanted elsewhere? And what, now, is our responsibility to the people of Afghanistan?

[left on their own against the Taliban](#). U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken went further when he told CNN that "Afghanistan will become a pariah state" if it does "not respect the gains" made for Afghan girls and women.

Please allow me to say that the Taliban will not care. They view infidel nations as the real pariah states. They wish to live under 7th century Shari'a law as they define it.

What, if anything, must we learn from this well-intentioned misadventure?

Afghanistan has a long, long history of barbarism, and one that Westerners might not be able to defeat. Even Afghan Western-educated reformers have never been able to do so in a lasting way.

I also believe Americans must re-adjust our idealism and our hubris, even as we mourn that which we cannot do, at least not at this time. There is something intractable about Islamist regimes. Therefore, we should also offer shelter to as many girls and women as possible, whether or not they have worked with our forces on the ground.

Finally, America must make alliances with India, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Russia, and China in order to stem the potential tide of terrorism that may be harbored in Afghanistan, enriched by the Taliban-controlled opium trade, and possibly by the long-overdue mining of gas and precious minerals.

If we fail to understand this, and do not succeed in these tasks, surely we risk other Islamist attacks on civilians in the West.