

The Longest War? Afghanistan?



It's not a coincidence that the full force of cruel Sharia law bears down on the people of Afghanistan, while the democratic trial of the 13 November 2015 massacre unfolds in a French courtroom. But this concordance is drowned out by the discourse that envelops the Afghanistan withdrawal –the joyful condemnation of Joe Biden and the deafening repetition of unexamined clichés–

“The Americans have ended the longest war in their history.”

What does it mean “to end” a war? It sounds like the cancelation of the second season of a TV series ditched because of bad ratings. “The longest war?” More like a *drôle de guerre* ... this so-called “asymmetrical” conflict. “Twenty years of wasted blood and treasure ... for nothing.” “The Americans should finally learn that you can't bring democracy in the knapsacks of flatfooted soldiers.” Who do they think they are, trying to liberate a country that is benighted to the core? It's better to turn our backs on the masses and save

our humanitarian uplift for the refugees that will swell our raw immigrant population.

The Americans had to leave. They should have left a long time ago, because it was useless. But they mustn't abandon those freedom-loving Afghans ... in love with freedom that came out of nowhere during the two decades of useless American presence. Women with their heads uncovered that never experienced Taliban style sharia-sequestration, lapidation, mutilation, rape, execution? The Americans, that deserve no credit for their liberation, are honor bound to get them out, down to the last doe-eyed damsel.

I ask you how it is possible to capitulate and still maintain the power to pack up your arms, matériel, nationals and loyal locals, and fly out with your head high? What's this idea of a mutually respected withdrawal, like handing over the keys to the new administration in a Western style democracy? This illusion that a competent president, instead of the unanimously derided Biden, would have known how to dictate his conditions to the Taliban? Maybe that's what's meant by "ending a war: you write the last chapter, the actors walk on to the set, the camera rolls, the reels are packed up and sent for editing where it's all smoothed out and tightened up. With a good director, America and, by extension, the West would not have been humiliated. Surrender would have played out like victory. Tough luck. It was chaos. An unforgiveable mess.

"Of course, they had to leave. But not that way."

There's the reality of power acquired by action— the rescue operations. The surprising discovery, in the heart of the debacle, of strong bonds of friendship between Americans that served in Afghanistan and their local comrades. Individually, in groups and associations, with or without US government help, they scramble heroically to save their buddies. Coalition troops with their backs to the wall, disarmed by capitulation, risked their lives, and 13 lost theirs, to help

more than 120,000 people flee an Islamic dictatorship.

Then there's the reality of surrender in black & white: the February 2020 [Doha Agreement](#) , the formal handover of power to the Taliban, far more serious than the August debacle followed in real time by the medias It's easy to criticize a hasty airlift of unprecedented scope ... what about the style and the essence of an agreement drafted in cold blood that reads like a note scribbled by a loser with Mafia racketeers breathing down his neck? "Agreement for Bringing Peace in Afghanistan / Between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States of America as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America" This is not a garbled transcription, it's the title of the agreement. And the whole bit about the unrecognized Islamic Emirate is endlessly repeated in the 3 $\frac{1}{4}$ - page document signed on "February 20, 2020/ which corresponds to Rajab 5, 1441 on the Hijri Lunar calendar and to Hoot 10, 1398 on the Hijri Solar calendar."

The United States is committed, for itself and its allies, to cease combat, withdraw troops, evacuate bases, liberate prisoners, and lift sanctions ... at dates specified according to the two Hجري calendars. The Agreement ends on a vision of harmony (Part 3, paragraph 2): "The United States and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States of America as a state and is known as the Taliban seek positive relations with each other and expect that the relations [with] the new post-settlement Afghan Islamic government...will be positive. "

Two-state solution: the caliphate / dar al harb

In fact, it's not the sloppy withdrawal that hurts; it's the defeat of Western powers, with America in the lead, at the hands of the jihadists. That's what is at stake. That's "the longest war." Jihad. And it doesn't end with the retreat from Afghanistan.

What is the difference between the Doha Agreement, the JCPOA, the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, indirect negotiations with Hamas, the problem of *quartiers sensibles* [touchy neighborhoods]? Betray our Kurdish allies in Syria, withdraw from Gaza, implicitly recognize the jihadis, make concessions, swap prisoners, close our eyes, take the blows, count on Qatar and Pakistan to intercede between us and the Taliban and count on the Taliban to fight the local Daech chapter... isn't that the forever war? And where do we go to refuse it?

President Biden outlined his strategy against "terrorism." The retreat from Afghanistan marks the end of large-scale military operations. The threat, he said, has metastasized. We cannot concentrate our forces in a single country, a single region. From here on in, we will make pinpoint "over the horizon" operations. It's true. The kind of war that pits army against army on the battlefield is old fashioned. Citizens of democracies don't want it anymore and the enemy prefers to conquer territory with "terrorist" attacks against civilians and civilianized soldiers.

Israel, the exception

Except that there's one democracy that doesn't have the luxury of ending the longest war, a war as long as its existence as an independent nation and long before that. What Israeli family, people like you and me, has not been tragically touched by war and how many sleepless nights, days of endless anxiety, terrifying telephone rings do they endure? How many parents, relieved when their last soldier child is discharged, turn around and find themselves praying for the safety of their grandchildren, in this citizen's army of a country whose survival depends on the willingness to serve? Israel, threatened on all sides, obliged to defend itself militarily and then accused of using excessive force. Israel, on the front lines of the longest war in the history of the civilized world: jihad.

The botched, misfired, humiliating withdrawal from Afghanistan, (what would they say about D-Day?), is one in a long series of humbling retreats on all levels, domestic and international, of our democracies. For lack of a strategy to combat 21st century jihad, we sludge through muddy rhetoric. We miss the target. Our power spins in the void. And it's not because we're spineless dummies. We are faced with a monumental, immense, extraordinary, existential challenge.

This is why, and not to show that they love Jews and are sorry for the Shoah, the free world would do well to reconsider the place attributed to the State of Israel in the configuration of its values and its strength.

APPENDIX:

[It is impossible to judge the chaotic August 2021 retreat from Afghanistan without taking into account the strategy that led up to it. John Bolton covers this in precise detail in Chapter 13 of The Room Where it Happened. "From the Afghanistan Counterterrorism Mission to the Camp David Near Miss" / pp. 381-399, summarized below:]

Early 2019: Bolton and his colleagues agree on the mission in Afghanistan: prevent the resurgence of ISIS and Al Qaida, keep a sharp eye on the Iranian and Pakistani nuclear programs, and try to get the president to make decisions and stick to them. Trump wants to pull out the troops and leave Afghanistan to its demons. He likes to say that the war in Afghanistan cost more than rebuilding the twin towers ... the 3,000 dead on 9/11 count for nothing. Then Bolton learns from his longtime friend Zalmay Khalizad that Pompeo doesn't want them talking to each other because it interferes with his management of the Afghan dossier. Khalizad starts negotiating with the Taliban in July. Bolton and his colleagues in the Defense Department object. Pompeo, furious, tells them to butt out. Khalizad, he says, has a free hand.

Trump keeps mixing up President Ghani with his predecessor Kharzai. CNN airs leaked information on the talks, Trump says they're scumbags and should be put before the firing squad.

He keeps coming back to his idea that the DOJ should arrest journalists, throw them in jail, and force them to reveal their sources.

Trump, distracted as usual during consultations, suddenly blurts out: "I want to pull out ... pull out of everywhere."

And he slides into the riff about how it all too costs too much, we have to pull out of NATO, what are we doing in Africa, why are we throwing away money on Ukraine, we have to stop the war games in South Korea. Here's how he wants to handle the Afghan problem: "We'll pull out and we'll announce that if they do anything bad, we'll blow their fucking country into a million pieces." Pompeo keeps his hand close to his chest. And lets the Taliban dictate their conditions.

Trump and his advisers confer via videoconference. Trump says he understands what the Taliban want. They just want to get their land back. He keeps confusing Ghani and Kharzai and their respective personal fortunes. One after the other, the advisers give in to pressure. Even Esper, because the deal is "condition based." Bolton knows the Taliban won't respect any conditions.

Then Trump decides to invite the Taliban to Washington! Dazzled by the good press he expects from the "show," he can't wait to inform the media. It's fantastic. The Taliban can't wait to talk to him, they really want to make peace, it's going to be another one of his fantastic deals. Bolton says to himself: only Trump can think an American president should meet with those thugs.

The staff tries its best to organize the encounter. But how? Trump tells them to go easy on the security because he doesn't want to insult the Taliban's dignity. The meeting is scheduled for the 8th of September, 3 days before the

anniversary of the worst attack ever perpetrated on American soil... carried out with the help of the Taliban. Then the news hits the wires: Another attack in Kabul, ten dead including one American. Once again, a big operation ends in tweets. The president scolds the Taliban for spoiling it all. And, in the process, he reveals his disgraceful plan to invite them to Camp David.

Trump's goal was to bring the troop level down to zero by October (before the elections). He ignored recommendations from his advisers that wanted to maintain a sturdy counter-terrorism presence even if the troops pulled out. Bolton's idea was to draw down to 8,600 American troops, plus the allied forces, and wait it out, without a deal with the Taliban. They could repeat "conditions based" all they wanted. The truth was that America was pulling out. When the deal was announced [*after he had left the administration*], Bolton tweeted: "This is an Obama style deal. Legitimizing the Taliban sends the wrong signals to Isis and Al Qaida terrorists, and all of America's enemies."

Bolton writes: after I resigned, the administration resumed talks with the Taliban, compounding the mistake of the retreat from Syria, and concluding with an agreement almost identical to the one drafted before the attack in Kabul. It didn't keep Trump from declaring to the media, a few hours after my resignation (that he claimed was a dismissal): "He had his chance, he didn't do it." Trump will be responsible for the consequences of the retreat from Afghanistan. They might not be fully apparent until after he leaves office, but he alone is responsible, politically and militarily, for this strategy and what follows.

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