

OMNI

AFGHANISTAN (AND PAKISTAN) NEWSLETTER

#23, August 22, 2017.

<http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/2017/08/omni-afghanistan-pakistan-newsletter-23.html>

**Compiled by Dick Bennett for a Culture of Peace
and Justice**

(#8 April 15, 2011; #9 June 10, 2011; #10 July 3, 2011; #11 July 13, 2011; #12 Sept. 5, 2011; #13 Oct. 2, 2011; #14 Oct. 15, 2011; #15 Feb. 14, 2012 ; #16 April 27, 2012; #17 May 3, 2012; #18 Oct. 20, 2012; #19 Jan. 14, 2013; #20 August 17, 2013; #21, Feb. 4, 2014; #22, Feb. 22, 2015)

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Contents Afghanistan and Pakistan Newsletter #23, August 22, 2017

President Trump's New Afghan Policy August 21, 2017

“Trump Affirms U.S.’ Role in Afghan Fight” August 22

“Trump Settles on Afghan Strategy Expected to Raise Troop Levels” August 20

The Peace Movement Opposes the War and Occupation: Remove US Troops

Beware Another Surge

Danny Sjursen, “Tread Carefully”

Veterans for Peace

VFP Calls for No More War

The Nation editorial (2015): Remove the Troops from Endless War

WAR CONTINUES

Complications of the Occupation and Civil War

(C-Span 8-21-17 offered a panel of specialists who presented highly complex pictures of Afghan and Pakistani relations and their internal relations to ethnic and terror groups. We're skimming surfaces here.)

Taliban in Afghanistan

The Guardian: "The War America Can't Win" (2017)

New York Times: Insider Attacks Aid Taliban: "Afghan Police Officer"

ISIS in Afghanistan

PBS *Frontline* (2015): Rise of ISIS

ISIS vs. Taliban

C-SPAN 8-21-17 Islamist State in Koresan Province ISKP

US in Afghanistan

Gerald Sloan (poem), After Dropping the Biggest Bomb in History

Thurston, Hollywood Distorting Afghanistan

Bacevich, Fiasco Within Fiasco

Gelvin, Trump Follows Saudi Arabia

Film: "War Machine" (2017), Black Comedy

Review of Anand Gopal's book on the US, Taliban, and Afghans: "the War Through Afghan Eyes" (2015)

Bombing the Doctors Without Borders Hospital in Kunduz 2015

Medecins Sans Frontieres MSF

Kathy Kelly, "Danger," Huffington Post

Human Rights Watch, "War Crimes Probe"

Common Dreams v. Pentagon Report

Koehler, Huffington, US Savagery

UN Report on Civilian Victims from US War

Opium: Taliban's Not So Secret Weapon

Koehler: The Savage, Trillion Dollar War Is NOT Over

Contents #22

FACTUAL INDICTMENT:

As of March 2016, there were approximately 28,600 DOD contractor personnel in Afghanistan, compared to 8,730 U.S. troops," They outnumber troops 3 to 1. According to the DOD, roughly 10% are providing security, and the majority are providing logistics and maintenance for U.S. and Afghan troops. The data also reveals the high economic costs: According to the report, from 2007 to 2015, the DOD spent roughly \$220 billion for private contracts in Iraq and Afghanistan.-----AlterNet, 8/19/16

The U.S. military cannot account for \$6.5 trillion given it by taxpayers. Meanwhile \$30 billion a year could end starvation and hunger worldwide, and \$11 billion a year could provide clean drinking water to everyone who needs it. All the green energy projects that could preserve life on earth would cost much less than the unaccounted money of the Pentagon. The Pentagon recently gave a no-bid contract for mercenaries and spies to fight ISIS in Syria. In 2001, the Pentagon could not account for \$2.3 trillion. Our "heroes" are bankrupting the U.S. ----CLG, 8/10/16

TRUMP'S AFGHAN POLICY SPEECH AUGUST 21, 2017.

“Trump Affirms U.S.’ Role in Afghan Fight.” *NADG* (August 22, 2017), 1A.

US will follow a “new strategy” away from a “time-based” approach to one linked to “results” and “cooperation” from the Afghan government and Pakistan. He offered no “blank-check,” and “pointedly decline to say whether or when more troops might be sent,” but with “few details” regarding “how that approach would differ substantively from the U.S. has already tried unsuccessfully.”

(So the US Afghan war continues business as usual, US endless war but not significantly increased in Afghanistan. The waffling policy is designed apparently to advance his campaign fundraising for the next presidential election already under way; see “[Trump ramping up for 2020 reelection](#)” - POLITICO.

Read below for further analysis. --Dick)

Trump Settles on Afghan Strategy Expected to Raise Troop Levels By Michael Gordon, et al. Aug. 20, 2017

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/20/world/asia/trump-afghanistan-strategy-mattis.html>

This report published the day before Trump’s speech on his policy August 21 contains the opinions of a wide range of Trumpets. --Dick

OPPOSITION TO US OCCUPATION OF AFGHANISTAN

“Tread Carefully: The Folly of the Next Afghan ‘Surge’”

BY Danny Sjursen, TomDispatch.com, posted June 29, 2017. *The author, a U.S. Army strategist who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, formerly taught history at West Point*

VETS FOR PEACE: SAY NO TO WAR, LEAVE AFGHANISTAN

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Veterans For Peace: No More Troops in Afghanistan

The Trump Administration announced it has given Defense Secretary Jim Mattis the authority to determine troops levels in Afghanistan. It is widely believed that Mattis favors sending several thousand more U.S. troops to Afghanistan. Why? Perhaps to break the “stalemate” as described by the Commander of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan, Army General John Nicholson when describing the war to the Senate Armed Services Committee. In his June 13th testimony, Secretary Mattis told the same committee, “We are not winning in Afghanistan right now.”

Veterans For Peace calls for a different direction than more war. We call on Congress to stop funding war and demand a plan for a peaceful solution. We call on the President to immediately begin **withdrawal of U.S. troops** and take a new direction towards **diplomacy and peace**. And we call on the people of the U.S. to resist war and demand policies that foster peace and prosperity at home and in Afghanistan.

It should be clear after 16 years and the death of tens of thousands of people that no one is a winner in Afghanistan. There is no clear concept of what it means to win there. In fact, it is no longer clear why the U.S. continues to keep troops in Afghanistan and now is on the brink of increasing the number of men and women in harm's way. [Read the Full Statement](#)

STOP THIS “ENDLESS WAR”

The Nation (Nov. 9, 2015), Editorial p. 3. Excellent thumbnail case for removing our troops from Afghanistan. (Digital version available to subscribers Oct. 22). --Dick

WAR CONTINUES

TALIBAN in Afghanistan

The war America can't win: how the Taliban took back Afghanistan

Sonny San Juan [via uark.onmicrosoft.com](#)

Aug 3, 2017 (1 day ago) to Delia, Karin, John

From: **Guardian US briefing** <info@mail.theguardian.com>

Date: Thu, Aug 3, 2017 at 8:47 AM

Subject: The war America can't win: how the Taliban took back Afghanistan

To: philcsc@gmail.com

[The war America can't win / How the Taliban is regaining control in Afghanistan](#)

[The Taliban controls places like Helmand, where the US and UK troops fought their hardest battles, pushing the drive toward peace and progress into reverse](#)

Afghan Police Officer Suspected of Helping Taliban Kill 10 Comrades

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/27/world/asia/afghanistan-taliban-attack-police.html?_r=0

By **TAIMOOR SHAH** and **MUJIB MASHALJAN**. 26, 2016

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — Ten police officers in the southern [Afghan province of Oruzgan](#) were poisoned by a rogue colleague and shot in the head by [Taliban](#) fighters the officer was working with, the second insider attack on the police in the province in less than two weeks, officials said Tuesday.

The recent insider attacks have added to the woes of an Afghan security force that suffered [record casualties](#) in the past year as the [Taliban](#) mounted strong offensives across the country, stretching the government's fighters thin. Officials say the situation in several districts of Oruzgan is fragile, as it is in neighboring Helmand Province, with government operations unable to break the Taliban momentum. MORE

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/27/world/asia/afghanistan-taliban-attack-police.html?_r=0

ISIS in Afghanistan

PBS *Frontline*, “ISIS in Afghanistan.” Nov. 17, 2015.

RISE OF ISIS 2015

- November 17, 2015, 6:38 pm [The Taliban Hunters](#)
- November 17, 2015, 1:59 pm [“The Most Risky ... Job Ever.” Reporting on “ISIS in Afghanistan”](#)
- May 26, 2015, 7:21 pm [The Rise of ISIS](#)

THE LATEST

[Why Afghanistan’s Children Are Used as Spies and Suicide Bombers](#)

[November 17, 2015, 8:38 pm ET](#) · by [Priyanka Boghani](#)

In a country that has experienced nearly endless conflict for more than 30 years, Afghan children have regularly been recruited to join armed groups on both sides of the battle line.

[ISIS is in Afghanistan, But Who Are They Really?](#)

[November 17, 2015, 6:13 pm ET](#) · by [Priyanka Boghani](#)

It appears ISIS-allied fighters are gaining a foothold in Afghanistan, but just how similar are they to the group’s branches in Iraq and Syria?

[WATCH: A Conversation With Teens in Training as ISIS Suicide Bombers](#)

[November 16, 2015, 2:34 pm ET](#) · by [Patrice Taddonio](#)

As ISIS expands its reach into Afghanistan, it is training children and teenagers to become the next generation of jihadis.

[ISIS in Afghanistan: School of Jihad](#)

[November 1, 2015, 8:51 am ET](#) · [by Priyanka Boghani](#)

The emergence of ISIS in Afghanistan has introduced a new level of brutality to the conflict, beyond what has been practiced by the Taliban.

[Coming in November on FRONTLINE](#)

[October 30, 2015, 3:01 pm ET](#) · [by Patrice Taddonio](#)

This November, explore an unsolved string of murders from the past, and the dangerous new rise of ISIS in Afghanistan.

[After Mullah Omar, What Comes Next For the Taliban?](#)

[July 30, 2015, 4:00 pm ET](#) · [by Priyanka Boghani](#)

News of Mullah Omar's death comes at a time when the Taliban faces internal power struggles and increased factionalism, even as it continues its brutal and deadly fight against the Afghan government.

Complications of the Civil War: ISIS vs. Taliban 2017

ISIS/TALIBAN, SUNNI/SUNNI?

“Afghan Taliban, ISIS Clash; Dozens Killed.” *NADG* (April 27, 2017).

I was astonished by this headline and quickly assumed it was sectarian antagonism, Sunni vs. Shi'a. I knew ISIS was Sunni, but unsure about Taliban. Several sources on line weren't helpful; nobody seemed to want to be specific. But eventually I found one source that stated firmly that Taliban (the extreme fundamentalists of the Pashtun ethnic group of eastern Afghanistan and western Pakistan) is Sunni. So we have two powerful Sunni groups in Afghanistan warring with each other over whose fundamentalist version will prevail? The last sentence of this brief news report partly explains the phenomenon: “The Islamic State affiliate is largely composed of disgruntled former Taliban fighters.” --Dick

C-SPAN PANEL ON MIDDLE EAST 8-21-17

One panelist labeled the main IS power in Afghanistan as ISKP: Islamist State in Koresan Province, a breakaway group from the Taliban. ISKP is small and is being hammered, but it has created much violence.

Neither of these commentators suggested that the infighting weakened the Taliban or IS insurgency against the US. But surely the CIA is there working to see it happen. --Dick

US NATION-WRECKING IN AFGHANISTAN

AFTER DROPPING THE BIGGEST BOMB
IN HISTORY ON AFGANISTAN

By Gerald Sloan (2017)

The ant reconnoitering my empty cup
is likely disappointed I don't use sugar,
in compliance with Orwell's eleven rules
for perfect tea, which is very un-British,
not to mention un-American, with our

tendency to sweeten everything,
including killing. Thank god the social
insects are not susceptible to doublethink,
as we go about our respective routines,
more or less adapted, meaning insane.

[“How Hollywood Keeps Getting Afghanistan Wrong”](#)

By **Robert W. Thurston**, History News Network, posted June 25

The author is a professor emeritus of history at Miami University.

[“A Small Fiasco Inside a Colossal Fiasco”](#) (on the war in Afghanistan)

By **Andrew J. Bacevich**, *Boston Globe*, posted June 23

The author is a professor emeritus of history and international relations at Boston University.

“The Trump Doctrine in the Middle East Is to Follow Saudi Arabia’s Lead”

By **James L. Gelvin**, History News Network, posted June 25

The author teaches modern Middle East history at UCLA.

WAR MACHINE

If you like your comedy blacker than black, you won't want to miss this "Dr. Strangelove"-style look at the war in Afghanistan starring Brad Pitt. Traverse City Film Festival 2017.

Anand Gopal

NO GOOD MEN AMONG THE LIVING:

America, the Taliban, and the War through Afghan Eyes. 2015.

<http://us.macmillan.com/nogoodmenamongtheliving/anandgopal>

REVIEWS

[*American Empire Project*](#)

Picador

•



National Book Awards Finalist

PULITZER PRIZE FINALIST

NATIONAL BOOK AWARD FINALIST

WINNER OF THE RIDENHOUR PRIZE

"Essential reading for anyone concerned about how America got Afghanistan so wrong. A devastating, well-

honed prosecution detailing how our government bungled the initial salvo in the so-called war on terror, ignored attempts by top Taliban leaders to surrender, trusted the wrong people, and backed a feckless and corrupt Afghan regime . . . It is ultimately the most compelling account I've read of how Afghans themselves see the war." --*The New York Times Book Review*

In a breathtaking chronicle, acclaimed journalist Anand **Gopal traces the lives of three Afghans** caught in America's war on terror. He follows a Taliban commander, who rises from scrawny teenager to leading insurgent; a U.S.-backed warlord, who uses the American military to gain wealth and power; and a village housewife trapped between the two sides, who discovers the devastating cost of neutrality. Through their dramatic stories, *No Good Men Among the Living* stunningly lays bare the workings of America's longest war and the truth behind its prolonged agony.

April 5, 2015

Tomgram: Anand Gopal, How to Create an Afghan Blackwater

The other day, as I was reading through the *New York Times*, I came upon [this headline](#): "Powerful Afghan Police Chief Killed in Kabul." His name was Matiullah Khan. He had once been "an illiterate highway patrol commander" in an obscure southern province of Afghanistan and was taken out in a "targeted suicide bombing" on the streets of the capital -- and I realized that I knew him! Since I've never been within a few thousand miles of Kabul, I certainly didn't know him in the normal sense. I had, you might say, edited Matiullah Khan. He was one of a crop of new warlords who rose to wealth and power by hitching their ambitions to the American war and the U.S. military personnel sent to their country to fight it. Khan, in particular, made staggering sums by essentially setting up an "Afghan Blackwater," a hire-a-gun -- in fact, so many guns -- protection agency for American convoys delivering supplies to far-flung U.S. bases and outposts in southern Afghanistan.

He became the protector and benefactor of a remarkable Afghan woman who is a key character in Anand Gopal's [No Good Men Among the Living: America, the Taliban, and the War Through Afghan Eyes](#), which I edited and published in the [American Empire Project](#) series I co-run for Metropolitan Books. I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that Gopal covered the Afghan War for years in a way no other Western journalist did. He spent time with crucial allies of Afghan President Hamid Karzai and with a Taliban commander, with warlords and American Special Ops guys, politicians and housewives. He traveled rural Afghanistan as few American reporters were capable of doing. In the process, he made a discovery that was startling indeed and has yet to really sink in here.

In a nutshell, in 2001, the invading Americans put al-Qaeda to flight and crushed the

Taliban. From most of its top leadership to its foot soldiers, the Talibs were almost uniformly prepared, even eager, to put down their weapons, go back to their villages, and be left in peace. In other words, it was all over. There was just one problem. The Americans, on Washington's mission to win the Global War on Terror, just couldn't stop fighting. In their inability to grasp the situation, they essentially forced the Taliban back onto the battlefield and so created an insurgency and a war that they couldn't win.

Reaction to Gopal's book, published last April, was at first muted. That's not so surprising, given that the news it brought to the table wasn't exactly going to be a popular message here. In recent months, however, it's gained real traction: the positive reviews began coming in; Rory Stewart made it his [book of the year pick](#) at the *New Statesman* ("Anand Gopal has produced the best piece of investigative journalism to come out of Afghanistan in the past 12 years"); it was a National Book Award [finalist](#) and is a [finalist](#) for the New York Public Library's Helen Bernstein Book Award For Excellence in Journalism.

See also Review by Ted Nee Walker, "The Strength of Mercy & Love," *The Catholic Worker* (June-July, 2015). --Dick

- [Work with MSF](#)
- [Donate](#)

Kunduz Hospital Airstrike

Fires burn in the MSF emergency trauma hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan, after it was hit and partially destroyed by missiles 03 October 2015.

On Saturday 3 October 2015 the [MSF Trauma centre in Kunduz was hit several times during sustained bombing by coalition forces](#), and was very badly damaged.

Twelve staff members and at least 10 patients, including three children, were killed; 37 people were injured including 19 staff members.

[Read full details in our fact-sheet](#)

The Danger of Care

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kathy-kelly/the-danger-of-care_b_8754738.html

12/08/2015 09:04 pm ET | Updated Dec 08, 2015

-
- [Kathy Kelly](#) Co-coordinator, Voices for Creative Nonviolence

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"Why did they attack us? We were trying to serve people." --Khalid Ahmad, age 20, a survivor of the U.S. Attack on Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Kunduz Hospital.

Here in Kabul, I've been with fellow activists to see Khalid Ahmad, aged 20, who survived the U.S.'s October 3 attack on the Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan. The attack killed 31 people and the U.S. is refusing to allow an independent investigation. Kunduz is about 210 miles from here. Two hospitals close to Kunduz couldn't handle Khalid's injuries, and so the relatives rushed him to the [EMERGENCY hospital](#) in Kabul where he is now recovering from a severe shrapnel injury to his spine. . . .

The U.S. military played no role whatsoever, during or afterwards, in attempting to rescue, evacuate or transport victims of the attack.

Here in the Kabul hospital, Luca Radaelli, who coordinates medical treatment for all of the EMERGENCY NGO's Afghan facilities, told us that their Kabul hospital was already full when news came through of the attack. They had quickly opened new wards to begin receiving 91 traumatized survivors from Kunduz.

Luca has worked in Afghanistan for close to seven years. Each year, he and his colleagues have said that the situation is worse than ever before. "And now I'm

telling you," Luca said, "never have we seen so much suffering. Health care systems in the provinces are collapsing. We expend a lot of energy, but it seems more and more like a drop in the ocean."

His colleague, Michaela, medical coordinator for the Kabul hospital, told us how difficult it has been, emotionally, for all of the staff to know, amid the stress of working in a war zone, that the U.S. military might at any time destroy their facilities, kill and wound their colleagues, and incinerate their patients. Like the MSF hospitals, this hospital is a politics-free zone as well: they allow no weapons in their facility, accept all who arrive with severe injuries, and don't raise questions or suspicions.

It's crucial for U.S. people to acknowledge, in this context, that killing suspects, anywhere, at whatever distance from any battlefield, and surrounded by however many innocent civilians, is a hallmark of the United States' drone assassination campaign.

MSF staff continue to demand an independent investigation of the attack on the Kunduz hospital, but the U.S. military insists that its internal investigation will be sufficient. Its policy on incurring collateral damage, despite universally recognized prohibitions against killing civilians and targeting hospitals, remains unchanged. Until U.S. citizens decide to care in greater numbers, it is unclear how anything here can change.

After events like the Kunduz attack, the U.S. military generally asserts that protection of civilians is impossible in wartime. This argument becomes the excuse for so seldom even making an attempt to protect civilians. When the U.S. government chooses to wage war, high principles are cited, vaunting the U.S. responsibility to protect U.S. people from harm. But the U.S. doesn't acknowledge that innocent men, women and children will be killed, maimed, traumatized and displaced. The U.S. government refuses to undertake even a tiny fraction of the ongoing risk that the brave carers, the humanitarian relief workers in Kabul and Kunduz, have taken to protect the safety of people actually in need.

The choice to be perfectly safe or to be fully human now faces every person in the United States and in any country governed by countries waging wars on behalf of their supposed security. "If we care about people," concludes Luca, "we cannot choose war."

Kathy Kelly (Kathy@vcnv.org) co-coordinates Voices for Creative Nonviolence (www.vcnv.org) While in Kabul, she is a guest of the Afghan Peace Volunteers (ourjourneytosmile.com)

Taimoor Shah reported from Kandahar, and Mujib Mashal from Kabul, Afghanistan.

Backing MSF, Human Rights Watch Says US Must Consent to War Crimes Probe

<http://www.commondreams.org/news/2015/12/21/backing-msf-human-rights-watch-says-us-must-consent-war-crimes-probe>

'We believe that there is a strong basis for determining that criminal liability exists,' group states in new letter to Gen. Carter

By [Nadia Prupis, staff writer](#)

The bombing in October killed at least 42 patients and staff. (Photo: MSF)

There is "strong" evidence that the U.S. military attack on a Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan two months ago constituted a criminal act, and should be investigated as such, Human Rights Watch said Monday in a [letter to Defense Secretary Ashton Carter](#) (pdf).

"The attack on the MSF hospital in Kunduz involved possible war crimes," said the advocacy group's Washington director Sarah Margon. "The ongoing U.S. inquiry will not be credible unless it considers criminal liability and is protected from improper command influence."

The [30-minute airstrike on October 3](#) killed at least 42 patients and staff and wounded several others. In November, the Pentagon released the summary of its internal inquiry into the bombing, which blamed the attack on "human error"—a conclusion that human rights groups [rejected](#) and which MSF said provided "more questions than answers."

The Pentagon's report, as well as the military's "poor record prosecuting alleged war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq," demonstrates the urgent need for an investigation conducted by an independent source, rather than the government or the army, HRW said.

"It is essential that you publicly and explicitly clarify that ongoing investigations into the Kunduz attack include a thorough inquiry that considers the possible criminal liability of U.S. personnel, including at the command level," the letter to Carter states. "We believe that there is a strong basis for determining that criminal liability exists.... We also call on you to take all necessary steps to ensure that the investigation is independent and not subject to undue command influence."

Carter said the Pentagon's inquiry was "thorough and unbiased," but numerous critics questioned the legitimacy of the government investigating itself for possible war crimes.

"U.S. military commanders who oversaw the Kunduz military operation shouldn't be deciding who gets prosecuted for the MSF hospital attack," [Margon said](#) Monday. "The U.S. government should recognize that its resolution of this horrific incident will have repercussions for U.S. military operations far beyond Afghanistan."

MSF has also repeatedly called for the U.S. government to submit to an inquiry conducted by the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission, which was created under the Geneva Conventions in 1991. The commission [has said](#) it was ready to carry out an investigation, but could only do so with the U.S. government's consent.

'More Questions Than Answers': MSF Not Buying Pentagon Probe into Hospital Attack

www.commondreams.org/news/2015/11/25/more-questions-answers-msf-not-buying-pentagon-probe-hospital-attack

Published on Wednesday, November 25, 2015 By [Lauren McCauley, staff writer](#)

"The frightening catalogue of errors outlined today illustrates gross negligence on the part of U.S. forces and violations of the rules of war," said MSF director general Christopher Stokes. (Photo: Andrew Quilty/Foreign Policy)

Doctors Without Borders is challenging the Pentagon over the findings of internal probes into the bombing of a hospital in the Afghan city of Kunduz on October 3, saying the military's conclusions offer "more questions than answers" and that claims of "human error" simply don't correspond to the available facts.

The pair of investigations, which [trickled](#) out by way of the [mainstream](#) media, reduced the [attack](#) on the Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) hospital to series of human errors and technical glitches. The findings claim to show that despite the medical charity's documented efforts to alert commanders to the onslaught, those signals did not reportedly reach the trigger team until it was "too late," resulting in the deaths of at least 31 civilians and injuring 28 more.

Among observers—including the head of MSF—the findings have raised some eyebrows as well as questions such as: What about the hour-long attempts to stop the bombing? How does this compare to MSF's [own investigation](#)? Why are these damning reports being released the day before Thanksgiving? And what does this say about the competency of the U.S. military?

"The U.S. version of events presented today leaves MSF with more questions than answers," [said](#) Christopher Stokes, MSF general director.

Responding to the news that gunmen erroneously relied on a physical description of the compound to carry out the attack and had intended to strike a building 450 yards away, Stokes continued: "It appears that 30 people were killed and hundreds of thousands of people are denied life-saving care in Kunduz simply because the MSF hospital was the closest large building to an open field and 'roughly matched' a description of an intended target."

"The frightening catalogue of errors outlined today illustrates gross negligence on the part of U.S. forces and violations of the rules of war," he added, reiterating the organization's call for independent and impartial investigation into the attack.

A series of tweets from journalists who covered the ongoing story of the attack further captured the cynicism surrounding the release:

We, the Pentagon Jury, find ourselves . . . (breath held in suspense) . . . NOT GUILTY of deliberately targeting MSF hospital (exhale gasp). MORE see the link above.

[Robert Koehler](#). Cowardice and Exoneration in Kunduz.

05/05/2016 04:51 pm ET | **Updated** May 06, 2016

writer

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-koehler/cowardice-and-exoneration_b_9852384.html

ASSOCIATED PRESS

“The people are being reduced to blood and dust. They are in pieces.”

The doctor who uttered these words still thought the hospital itself was a safe zone. He was with Doctors Without Borders, working in Kunduz, Afghanistan, where the Taliban and government forces were engaged in hellish fighting and civilians, as always, were caught in the middle. The wounded, including children, had been flowing in all week, and the staff were unrelieved in their duties, working an unending shift.

Their week ended at 2 a.m. last Oct. 3 when - as the world knows - a U.S. AC-130 gunship began strafing the hospital, the crew apparently acting on the mistaken belief that this was a Taliban compound. The strike lasted for an hour, continuing even though the humanitarian organization contacted the Pentagon and pleaded that it stop.

A total of 211 shells hit the hospital. The Intensive Care Unit was wiped out. Every patient in the unit except for a 3-year-old girl was killed, some burning to death in their beds. A total of 42 people - patients, staff and doctors - died because of this lethal mistake. MORE see link above

Robert Koehler is an award-winning, Chicago-based journalist and nationally syndicated writer. Contact him at koehlercw@gmail.com or visit his website at commonwonders.com.

[Civilian casualties are rising in Afghanistan, says](#)

[UN](#). Reuters (10/19) . >From UN News Wire, UN Foundation.

UN: Civilian Casualties in Afghanistan, Google Search, August 22, 2017

[Afghanistan: civilian deaths at record high in 16-year war, says UN ...](#)

<https://www.theguardian.com> › World › Afghanistan

Jul 17, 2017 - The number of **civilian deaths** in the **Afghan** war has reached a record high, continuing an almost unbroken trend of nearly a decade of rising **casualties**. The number of **deaths** of women and children grew especially fast, primarily due to the Taliban's use of homemade bombs, which ...

[UN condemns jump in Afghan civilian deaths | Afghanistan News | Al ...](#)

www.aljazeera.com/.../condemns-jump-afghan-civilian-deaths-170717085257088.ht...

Jul 17, 2017 - The **UN** has condemned an increase in **civilian deaths in Afghanistan** in the first half of 2017, with 1,662 killed and more than 3,500 injured.

[UNAMA first quarter 2017 civilian casualty data - United Nations ...](#)

<https://unama.unmissions.org/unama-first-quarter-2017-civilian-casualty-data>

Apr 27, 2017 - KABUL - The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) urges all ...
The decrease in civilian casualties recorded by UNAMA is chiefly ...

[Afghanistan More Deadly for Women and Children, U.N. Says - The ...](#)

<https://www.nytimes.com/.../afghanistan-civilian-deaths-united-nations-report.html?...3>

Jul 17, 2017 - Civilian deaths are mounting, a U.N. report finds, with 1662 killed in the first ...
KABUL, Afghanistan — Afghanistan has grown more deadly this ...

OPIUM WAR

“How a Pink Flower Defeated the World’s Sole Superpower: America’s Opium War in Afghanistan” By [Alfred W. McCoy](#).

www.commondreams.org/views/2016/02/22/how-pink-flower-defeated-worlds-sole-superpower-americas-opium-war-afghanistan

In the almost 15 years of continuous combat since the U.S. invasion of 2001, pacification efforts have failed to curtail the Taliban insurgency largely because the U.S. could not control the swelling surplus from the country’s heroin trade. (Photo: Reuters)

After fighting the longest war in its history, the United States stands at the brink of defeat in Afghanistan. How can this be possible? How could the world’s sole superpower have battled continuously for 15 years, deploying 100,000 of its finest troops, sacrificing the lives of 2,200 of those soldiers, [spending](#) more than a trillion dollars on its military operations, [lavishing](#) a record hundred billion more on “nation-building” and “reconstruction,” helping raise, fund, equip, and train an army of 350,000 Afghan allies, and still not be able to pacify one of the world’s most impoverished nations? So dismal is the prospect for stability in Afghanistan in 2016 that the Obama White House has recently [cancelled](#) a planned further withdrawal of its forces and will leave an estimated 10,000 troops in the country indefinitely.

Were you to cut through the Gordian knot of complexity that is the Afghan War, you would find that in the American failure there lies the greatest policy paradox of the century: Washington’s massive military juggernaut has been stopped dead in its steel tracks by a pink flower, the opium poppy.

For more than three decades in Afghanistan, Washington’s military operations have succeeded only when they fit reasonably comfortably into Central Asia’s illicit traffic in opium, and suffered when they failed to complement it. The first U.S. intervention there began in 1979. It succeeded in part because the surrogate war the CIA launched to expel the Soviets from that country coincided with the way its Afghan allies used the country’s swelling drug traffic to sustain their decade-long struggle. (continued at link above)

BUSH/OBAMA’S WAR “OFFICIALLY” ENDED IN 2014 BUT CONTINUED Right On

Robert C. Koehler. **Skulking Away from a Failed [dehumanizing]**

War. <http://commonwonders.com/world/skulking-away-from-a-failed-war/>

Wednesday, December 31st, 2014,

“The only good Talib is a dead Talib.”

These words, uttered half a decade ago by the head of intelligence for the NATO coalition force in Afghanistan, summon a far earlier American savagery. As the American empire affects to close the door on its war with Afghanistan, the words also serve as a sort of doorstep propping open our further intervention in this broken country.

The war isn't really ending. Some **18,000 foreign troops** will stay in Afghanistan, almost **11,000** of them American, under a new mission called “**Resolute Support.**” U.S. forces will also have “a limited **combat role as part of a separate counterterrorism mission,**” according to the Wall Street Journal. Incredibly, we're not letting go. We're just disappearing the combat mission into global background noise.

We're **continuing to dehumanize** part of humanity on the pretext of saving it. The updated version of “the only good Indian is a dead Indian,” redirected to the Taliban, was quoted a few days ago in a *Der Spiegel* article called “**Obama's Lists: A Dubious History of Targeted Killings in Afghanistan.**” The article goes into detail about the administration's infamous “kill lists” and the hunting of upper- and mid-level Taliban leaders via helicopter and drone — assassination by Hellfire missile — which is an extermination methodology guaranteed to kill lots of innocent civilians along with (or instead of) the targeted Taliban operative. But, you know, that's war.

The official “end” to the Afghan war, while it doesn't mean the end of combat operations, does offer us a moment of disturbing reflection on what has been accomplished these last 13 years, during the first of our wars allegedly to eradicate, but in fact to promote, terror. We poured **at least a trillion dollars** into the war, which claimed some 30,000 lives, over two-thirds of them civilians. The first thing that occurs to me is that, officially, these statistics mean nothing.

U.S. Army General John Campbell, commander of the International Security Assistance Force, exemplified this by smothering the human toll of the war in simple-minded verbiage during a secret ceremony held last weekend in a gymnasium at ISAF headquarters in Kabul: “Our new resolute mission means we will continue to invest in Afghanistan's future,” he said. “Our commitment to Afghanistan endures.”

By the way, the ceremony, commemorating the war's shutdown, was secret because authorities feared the possibility of a Taliban attack. The United States and NATO, as everyone knows, are the losers, despite the bloated enormity of their military superiority. The Afghanistan war, like the Iraq war, was an utter failure even in terms of U.S. interests and geopolitical objectives.

But any honest reflection requires a far more serious, all-encompassing look at the war's results.

War is torture on a national scale. The nation of Afghanistan and its people are, of course, the primary losers in our “investment” in their future — our investment in **nation-wrecking.**

For instance: “What has happened in Afghanistan over the last 13 years has been the flourishing of a **narco-state** that is really without any parallel in history,” Matthieu Aikens said during a recent interview on Democracy Now.

Aikens’ article, “**Afghanistan: The Making of a Narco State**,” which ran recently in *Rolling Stone*, points out that, since the U.S. invasion, opium production in Afghanistan has doubled and the country now accounts for about 90 percent of the world’s heroin traffic. Opium is about 15 percent of the country’s gross domestic product, Aikens said — even though Afghanistan is at the bottom of the drug trade economically. “Afghan farmers only touch 1 percent of the value of the global opium trade,” he said.

Before 2001, opium production had been declining in Afghanistan, but, Aikens told Democracy Now, “the U.S., in its quest for vengeance against the Taliban and al-Qaeda, partnered with the very warlords whose criminality and human rights abuses had created the conditions that led to the rise of the Taliban in the first place. And in many cases, these are the same individuals who were responsible for bringing large-scale opium cultivation to Afghanistan during the war against the Soviets.”

War is also humanity’s spiritual cancer.

Up and down the ranks, **dehumanization** of the enemy rules. “The only good Talib is a dead Talib.” This is the thinking that justifies mass bombing raids and kill lists. It also infects the souls of rank-and-file soldiers, such as the “Kill Team” described by Mark Boal in another extraordinary *Rolling Stone* story, this one published in March 2011.

“Among the men of Bravo Company,” Boal writes, “the notion of killing an Afghan civilian had been the subject of countless conversations, during lunchtime chats and late-night bull sessions. For weeks, they had weighed the ethics of bagging ‘savages’ and debated the probability of getting caught. Some of them agonized over the idea; others were gung-ho from the start. But not long after the New Year, as winter descended on the arid plains of Kandahar Province, they agreed to stop talking and actually pull the trigger.”

Boal’s article details the killing — and dismemberment — of Afghan civilians purely for sport and revenge. The details are gruesome: “Then, using a pair of razor-sharp medic’s shears, he reportedly sliced off the dead boy’s pinky finger and gave it to Holmes, as a trophy for killing his first Afghan.”

What a mockery the reality of war makes of the rhetoric that blesses it. The American empire holds a secret ceremony to skulk away from a failed mission. But this war isn’t over. It won’t be over until we vow, as a nation, not to start the next one.

*Robert Koehler is an award-winning, Chicago-based journalist and nationally syndicated writer. His book, **Courage Grows Strong at the Wound** (Xenos Press), is still available. Contact him at koehlercw@gmail.com or visit his website at commonwonders.com.*

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Dick’s recasting of Koehler’s opening.

The Deceit:

U.S. Army General John Campbell, commander of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan in 2014, said at ISAF headquarters in Kabul: “Our new resolute mission

means we will continue to invest in Afghanistan's future." The new mission was called "Resolute Support."

The Reality in 2014: what our **trillion dollars investment** purchased:

His statement smothered the **human toll** of the war in simple-minded, self-servicing verbiage.

Afghanistan during the last 13 years has become a flourishing a **narco-state** that is without any parallel in history. Since the U.S. invasion, opium production in Afghanistan has doubled and the country now accounts for about 90 percent of the world's heroin traffic

Thus it **dehumanized** Afghans on the pretext of saving it.

And **deluded** the US public into thinking the **trillion dollars** actually helped Afghanistan.

It **covered up** from the public the **US savagery** in the war and the long history of US wars without mercy. The intelligence head for the NATO coalition said: "The only good Talib is a dead Talib." Remember "the only good Indian is a dead Indian," which we enacted before the world by almost completely eradicating the Native Americans, reduced from more than 12 million to fewer than a million at one point.

It suppressed Obama's "targeted" Killings in Afghanistan with its infamous "kill lists" and the hunting of upper- and mid-level Taliban leaders via helicopter and drone — assassination by Hellfire missile — which also kills innocent civilians.

It **falsely** suggested the war's purpose was to to eradicate **terror**, but in fact it promoted terror. **Torture** flourished in Iraq. And war is torture on a national scale. The frequent bombings terrorized the nation.

The nation of Afghanistan and its people are, of course, the primary losers in our "investment" in their future — our investment in **nation-wrecking**.

BOOKS AND FILMS REVIEWED OR CITED IN PREVIOUS NEWSLETTERS

Contents of #18, Oct. 20, 2012

Films, Help Local Afghan Initiatives

Film, *Rethink Afghanistan*

From Hell and Back Again New Documentary

Little America

Contents of #19 Jan. 14, 2013

2 Books on the Taliban by Antonio Giustozzi

Neo-Taliban Insurgency 2003-2007 (2007)

Decoding the Neo-Taliban (2009)

2 Books by Linschoten and Kuehn

Myth of Taliban/Al-Qaeda

Poetry of the Taliban

New Children's Book:

The Sky of Afghanistan, Child's Dreams of Peace

Contents of #20 August 17, 2013 What Is the "Taliban"?

Rashid, *Pakistan on the Brink* (of chaos)

Contents #21

Graeme Smith, *The Dogs Are Eating Them Now*, Memoir, #22, Feb. 14, 2014

Contents Afghanistan-Pakistan Newsletter #22, 2015

<http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/2015/02/afghanistanpakistan-newsletter-22.html>

Occupation of Afghanistan

Anand Gopal, *America, the Taliban, and the War through Afghan Eyes*

Graeme Smith, *The Dogs Are Eating Them Now*, Memoir, Post-

Mortem of How the War and Occupation Unravelled

Post-Invasion/Occupation/Withdrawal/Continuation Chaos and Suffering

Kathy Kelly, US Extends War in Afghanistan

US/NATO End Official Occupation

Raghavan, Armed Forces Remaining in Afghanistan

Pentagon Secretary Nominee Open to More Troops Feb. 2015

US War in Afghanistan Waged by Contractors Feb. 2015

Matthieu Aikins, Afghanistan Again a Major Opium Producer

Answer Coalition Report

Sign Ho's Petition

Chris Hedges, The Children

Nahigyan, Cost of the War\$\$

Dick, Resurgent Taliban an Old History

Ann Wright, Petition to Fox News to Stop Attacking Sgt.
Bergdahl

Drake, Sgt. Short PTSD?

Pakistan

Two New Books Rev. by Ahmad in *The Nation* (Dec. 29, 2014)

Fair, *Fighting to the End*

Shah, *The Army and Democracy*

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END AFGHANISTAN-PAKISTAN NEWSLETTER #23

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