

Defeat in Afghanistan: Lessons Ignored, The Deeper Lesson: The American Culture of War

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Abstract

The purposes of this essay are first to acknowledge the defeat of the United States in Afghanistan, to recognize that the pain and suffer in the region will continue, and to note the expanding risks from terrorist organizations as a result of the withdrawal of U.S. forces. Still, the withdrawal was the right thing to do. Second, to note that the credibility, prestige, and honor of the United States have been damage, diminished. Nation and states that rely on the U.S. for security should be asking questions. However, it is important to ask the right questions. Third, to explain what the United States is and is not. The United States is not a cohesive, unified nation-state. It is a tribal-state with deep divisions that make it impossible to fight total war or major limited war. Fourth, to identify the lessons unlearned in the war in Afghanistan. The lessons from the war are not new. Finally, to identify the deeper, more important lessons for allies assessing the reliability, capabilities, and commitment of the United States of America. The United States, the state, may show up to fight, but the American peoples, the nations/tribes, will not.

Keywords: *Afghanistan, American Culture of War, Vietnam, United States, Petraeus, nation-state, tribal-state*

Acknowledgement and Consequences of the United States' Debacle in Afghanistan

Recently General Colin Powell, a veteran of the Vietnam War, former Secretary of State and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in conversation with journalist Bob Woodward stated:

Afghanistan you're never gonna win. Afghans are gonna win. They have hundreds of these (soldiers) willing to fight and die for this country of theirs. And they're doing it now, and they're going to win. That's why I don't have any problem with us getting out of there.

I agree with this assessment. It was wrong, not in the best interest of the United States, to make such an enormous investment in and commitment to Afghanistan. Still, the images of the United States' humiliating defeat in Afghanistan have been horrific, shocking, and disappointing to much of the world.

Desperate people trying to escape, hanging on to departing aircraft, falling to their death. American diplomats clearing out their embassy, fleeing by helicopter. The emergency redeployment of a brigade from the 82nd Airborne Division sent to stabilize the situation and retain control of the Hamid Karzai International Airport. Soldiers and marines trying to hold the airport perimeter against fearful, panic-stricken crowds of Afghans. Chaotic scenes of children and babies being handed over wire fences by crying, grieving parents. The Taliban's dramatic entry into the Presidential Palace, hours after President Ghani fled the country. The desertion and disintegration of the Afghan National Army and security forces, forces that the United States and its allies has spent two decades training and billions of dollars arming and equipping. Taliban fighters in control, patrolling the streets and Kabul. Taliban soldiers heavily armed, equipped with American weapons, driving through the streets in American military vehicles, and wearing American uniforms. Billions of dollars of American weapons, aircraft, and technologies (night vision goggles, communications equipment, GPS systems, etc.) left behind, now in the hands of the Taliban. A suicide bomber killing 13 American soldiers and marines and at least 170 Afghans, including women and children. And an American drone strike wiping out an entire Afghan family, including women and seven children. Internationally it has been gut wrenching to watch the events of 25-27 August 2021. For those who served, for soldiers and marines, not just Americans, but also soldiers of allied states, and their families, this has been a particularly difficult period, because they committed parts of their lives to the security of Afghanistan. They formed bonds of friendships with people the United States was trying to help, but ultimately betrayed and abandoned. After 2,452 American military deaths, and over 20,000 wounded, the United States

abandoned Afghanistan. Now it all seems a waste.

And the long-term consequences of the evacuation of Kabul may be worse than the evacuation of Saigon in 1975. Many Afghans now live in fear and are hiding, afraid that their support of the banished government and work with Americans will mean a death sentence. Many fear the return of Islamic Sharia Law. Already we have seen public execution, public beatings of women. We know that former police-women have been targeted, beaten, and executed, their bodies mutilated. Already women and girls have vanished from school and jobs and ways of life they have known for decades. Starvation and the complete collapse of the state now loom over the peoples of Afghanistan. Children are dying from malnutrition. Without significant external help, a humanitarian crisis is in the making. In other words, the tragedy has not ended. It is painful and sad to watch. There is and will continue to be death, pain, suffering, and physical and emotional damage to the peoples of Afghanistan and the region as a function of the debacle of the United States. We can anticipate that the threats from this region will grow, probably significantly. Defeat will expand the opportunities for Islamic terrorists. Intelligence agencies are already reporting growth in the threat from ISIS. Yes. It has been ugly, very ugly. And for many the peoples of Afghanistan, particularly women and girls, the ugliness is just starting. We all know what the Taliban was before 9/11. How did we get here?

Part II: Asking the Right Questions

Why do nations and states repeat the same failed behaviors? Why do people persist, continue to practice and implement failed strategies and flawed policies? It is comforting to believe that human beings are rational, logical beings who learn from mistakes and improve their performance over time. While comforting it is not true. Culturally imbued norms of behavior, culturally imbued ways of thinking and acting, culturally imbued values, attitudes, ethics, and beliefs, no matter how destructive or dysfunctional, frequently override commonsense, logic, reason, laws, treaty obligations, and cumulative learning. Again and again, in all human practices and interactions, culture is the dominant influencer. While it is important to assess performance and identify where improvements can be made, the more profound question is: why do states and nations continuously make the same mistakes and repeat failed practices? Why do they ignore the lessons of the past? Why do they ignore facts, empirical data, and even commonsense?

Political leaders, foreign policy experts, and military leaders in all parts of the world are today assessing America's defeat in Afghanistan. Let me state that a cold, dispassionate, objective analysis of failure is not a sterile, academic effort. It matters, and it should be done professionally and with integrity. Such an

assessment matters to the peoples of Korea, Germany and Japan, the peoples of Israel and Australia, and people in all parts of the Earth, particularly those nations and states that are in some way reliant on the United States for their security. I stress this point because too many nations, too many people look at the United States through rose-colored glass. They have embraced the myth of *American Exceptionalism*, “a Shining City on a Hill” that Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush liked to hold up to the world. This myth is part of a long-running American disinformation campaign. Time and again, the United States has abandoned allies, betrayed people who supported it, violated the sovereignty of other countries, violated its (own) laws and ethical proclamations, committed crimes against humanity, and lied to nations, states, and people. In April 1978, following another American debacle, General Westmoreland wrote:

South Vietnam no longer exists; it has been gobbled up by North Vietnam following blatant aggression. The flicker of freedom there has been extinguished probably forever. Our erstwhile honorable country betrayed and deserted the Republic of Vietnam after it had enticed it to our bosom. It was a shabby performance by America, a blemish on our history and a possible blight on our future. Our credibility has been damaged. In our national interest, that unhappy experience should not be swept under the rug and forgotten. *There are lessons to be learned and vulnerabilities in our national system that need careful examination.*

Afghanistan too has shown light on the value of America’s promise. Foreign governments should ask: is the United States a reliable partner, a reliable ally? Will the will of the U.S. government collapse under the right pressure, and will the U.S. again abandon an ally, betray a people? Will war in the Indo-Pacific have the support of the many American tribes/nations? Are the American tribes/nations capable of unified action in war? Is the United States a declining power, and if so, how rapid is that decline? Is the United States capable of maintaining consistent foreign and military policies, or will it change with every new President? With the rise of China, the answers to these questions is more important than during Cold War. Military capabilities cannot be built overnight. New alliances cannot be formed in weeks. Trust, legitimacy, respect, credibility all take time to form. The answers to these questions are important and should cause America’s allies to think critically about the nature of their relationship, the nature of the commitment of the government of the United States.

In France, the political leadership, has openly spoken of realigning its relationship with the United States of building-up European Armed Forces. In India the government is troubled by rise of the Taliban an ally of Pakistan, but has moved closer to the U.S., forming the “Quad.” In Australia political leadership

has decided to move closer to the English-speaking powers, forming the AUKUS alliance, which advances Australia's access to U.K. and U.S. nuclear submarine technologies, but may not enhance Australia's security. It was a cultural decision. *Nations and states reliant on the United States for security should have a Plan B, an alternate plan. They should engage in contingency planning (I am sure they already have). The United States has not always been a reliable, trustworthy ally, particularly with non-Western states.*

Part III: What is the United States of America?

Within a state there can exist multiple nations, cultural entities, and the greater the fragmentation of the cultural body, the nation, the less able the state is to conduct total war or significant limited war. Iraq is an example, a state, made up of three major nations, Shia, Sunni, and Kurds.

To answer the questions posed above, allies need to first understand what the United States is and is not. Today the United States could not fight World War II. The United States is no longer a cohesive modern nation-state. It is a state, like Iraq, made up of many nations, many tribes, that, in many cases, are incapable of working together to achieve even minor objectives, such as, getting the lead out of drinking water, or taking the COVID-19 vaccination. The United States, the state fought the war in Afghanistan. The American people, the nations did not. In fact, it is a mistake to say that America was defeated in Afghanistan. *The United States, the state, was defeated. The American peoples, the nations, were not defeated. They were never at war.* In the classic sense of the word, the United States should not be thought of as a *nation-state*, but more accurately as a *tribal-state*. The American people, the many American tribes, did not support the war and did not show up to fight it. With the help of contractors, PMFs, (Private Military Firms) essentially mercenaries, who have made trillions of dollars on war since 9/11, the state—the government and the armed forces—fought the war. In the first edition of, *The American Culture of War*, published in 2007, I wrote:

After the horrendous attack on the United States on September 11, 2001, the Bush Administration made no demands on the American people. It instituted tax cuts and told the American people to "go shopping." Out of more than 300 million Americans the burden of war fell on less than 1 percent of the American people. The war was not a national effort. In the years that followed the Vietnam War, with the end of the draft, the Armed Forces of the United States form a "military cluster" (0.5 of U.S. households) a professional fighting force with its own unique system and

set of values, ethics, and beliefs. They would fight the future wars of the United States. The most significant transformation in the American conduct of war since World War II and the invention of the atomic bomb, was not technological, but cultural, social, and political—*the removal of the American people from the conduct of war.*

In 2003, the United States initiated a second, unnecessary war in Iraq. In two long wars, the government of the United States failed to require military service from the American people. The American people don't show up to fight the wars of the United States. They have not shown up since the Vietnam War. The United States, with all its great power, was stretched thin in the type of combat power necessary to fight in Iraq and Afghanistan. The consequence was that soldiers and marines died and were unnecessarily wounded in an insurgency war that might have been avoided had the Bush White House and the Rumsfeld Pentagon deployed sufficient numbers of troops at the outset to win the peace. They did not deploy them, because they did not have them, given world-wide commitments; they believed a Revolution in Military Affairs had fundamentally changed the nature of warfare, and they were afraid to call upon the American people to serve. In 2007, General George W. Casey, Chief of Staff of the Army, before the Senate Armed Service Commit stated:

While we remain a resilient and committed professional force, our Army is out of balance for several reasons. The current demand for our forces exceeds the sustainable supply. We are consumed with meeting the demands of the current fight and are unable to provide ready forces as rapidly as necessary for other potential contingencies. Our Reserve Components are performing an operational role for which they were neither originally designed nor resourced. Current operational requirements for forces and limited periods between deployments necessitate a focus on counterinsurgency to the detriment of preparedness for the full range of military missions. Soldiers, families, and equipment are stretched and stressed by the demands of lengthy and repeated deployment with insufficient recovery time.... Overall, our readiness is being consumed as fast as we can build it.

What he really meant was that readiness was being consumed *faster* than the Army could build it. Out of 300 million Americans, less than one percent showed up to fight the war, and the U.S. government, the state, made no effort to call upon the nations to serve. The war went on for twenty years, in part, because the United States lacked the personnel to fully implement its own doctrine, and the American tribes were uncommitted. Since General Casey spoke these words, the

fragmentation, the disintegration of the American national fabric into uncooperative tribes has continued. Today the U.S. Army is significantly smaller than it was on the eve of the Korean War, and the state cannot call upon the American tribes to serve.

Part IV: The Lessons of the Wars in Afghanistan and Vietnam: Nothing New

What follows is divided into two parts: First, an assessment of lessons learned in Vietnam and Afghanistan. The main point here is that while there are lessons to learn from defeat in Afghanistan, there is nothing new. We already had the lessons. *We choose to ignore them.* Second, I would like to identify the deeper lessons from America's defeat.

In 2015 in an article titled, "Reflection by General David Petraeus, USA (Retired) on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq," Petraeus stated:

In fact, I will diverge now and give you the final lesson.... Before you invade a country, you have to truly understand the country in a granular and nuanced way, and need to have thought through all of the conceivable outcomes—"how does it end,"

For professional soldiers, for people who study war, this is commonsense. Many of the lessons of the Vietnam and Afghanistan wars are commonsense, or lessons delineated by Sun Tzu, in *The Art of War*, or Clausewitz in *On War*. Many of the lessons learned were, in fact, *lessons unlearned* from the war in Vietnam. Today many students of war are trying to analyze what went wrong in Afghanistan. How did the most powerful state on Earth fail to achieve its political objectives in Afghanistan? The analysis of what happened in Afghanistan will go through phases. We are now in the angry phase, when news commentators, retired generals, and others attack President Biden for his decision to withdraw, ignoring the fact that Donald Trump initiated the withdrawal process, probably under the influence Putin, and that the American tribes had withdrawn their support. It will take time for the deeply felt emotions to dissipate, and a more sober, objective analysis is forthcoming. However, we already have a fair assessment of what went wrong. For many students of war the Vietnam War and the twenty years of war in Afghanistan and Iraq provided many of the lessons.

General David Petraeus was the senior commander in both Iraq and Afghanistan. He became the CENTCOM commander, and is credited with reversing the situation in Iraq during the "Surge," under the Bush Administration. In this interview, Petraeus sought to delineate five "strategic lessons" from the

wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. They echo the lessons identified during the long war in Vietnam. In the wake of the Vietnam debacle, General Bruce Palmer, Jr. sought to delineate the “strategic lessons”. General Palmer served under General Westmoreland and was a Field Force commander in Vietnam. Palmer wrote:

One larger lesson concerns the national interest. From the beginning our leaders realized that South Vietnam was not vital to the U.S. interests. Yet for other reasons the nation became committed to the war.

Again, this is commonsense. Many of the strategic lessons from the American war in Afghanistan are fundamentally the same as those from the Vietnam War. In fact, when General Petraeus developed his famous *Counterinsurgency Manual*, he went back to the Vietnam War for lessons and inspiration. In the few pages permitted, I cannot produce a comprehensive list of lessons learned; however, let me highlight a few Petraeus emphasized:

before you decide to conduct an initiative an operation, or a policy ask whether that policy or initiative will take more bad guys off the street than it creates by its conduct.... We created hundreds of thousands of enemies in the end with those two policies.

And by the way, another huge strategic lesson—perhaps the top one is that a counterinsurgency campaign is inordinately more difficult if the host nation leadership is less than cooperative, and if the enemy enjoys significant sanctuary outside areas in which you can operate.

“Afghanistan does not equal Iraq.” I then laid out ten or so factors and showed how Afghanistan was arguably more challenging in a number of them at the very least: a lack of revenue generation; the major export crop was illegal; the effects on rule of law; the corruption problem; biggest factor was that the leaders of the Taliban and the other insurgent elements had sanctuaries in Pakistan that put them largely beyond our reach.

These *are not* brilliant new insights. In my book *The American Culture of War*, I endeavored to combine the lessons delineated by people such as Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, Generals William Westmoreland, Bruce Palmers, Admiral U.S. Grant Sharp, Journalist David Halberstam, and Niel Sheenan, Professors George Herring, Marilyn Young, and others into a list for my students. I have enclosed an abbreviate list of the strategic lessons of the Vietnam War that apply to the war in Afghanistan for consideration.

—The U.S. Army could train and equip the ARVN, but it could not create the quality and quantity of patriotism and nationalism that were necessary to produce

a modern nation-state. It could not develop in the time available the connectedness necessary for people to fight and sacrifice for an idea, and imagined community, the fledgling nation-state—Republic of Vietnam.

—The government of South Vietnam and the ARVN lacked the leadership, vision, cohesion, legitimacy, commitment, and consistency to organize and fight effectively against the Communist North. Corruption diminished the effectiveness and legitimacy of the government. The Saigon government became too dependent on U.S. leadership, resources, and know-how. It could not survive alone. The departure of American forces destroyed the confidence of the Saigon government and the ARVN.

—Geography and terrain precluded positive control of the borders of South Vietnam, meaning that North Vietnam Communist forces could infiltrate along a 1,000 mile-long front. There was no way to isolate the battlefield.

—The U.S. Army and Marine Corps fought the entire war on the strategic defense. There was no way to win. On the defense, all that was possible was not to lose. Victory, in the classic sense, required offensive operations of strategic importance.

—The PRC precluded major strategically offensive operations against North Vietnam. The geographic circumstances of Vietnam, a contiguous border with the PRC, meant that the Chinese could intervene with significant forces at any time.

—Tactically, the VC and NVA were faster than American ground forces, giving them the ability to disengage, to flee the battlefield and live to fight another day. They were lighter, carried less equipment. They had superior knowledge of the terrain and better intelligence. They did not rotate every twelve months, and thus had greater experience. They had networks of tunnel systems and networks of connections to the people that helped conceal their movement.

—Airpower, deployed under the doctrine of Graduate Response, did not and could not destroy the will of the people or the will of the Communist government in Hanoi. In fact, no airpower doctrine known, short of extermination warfare, would have been decisive in Vietnam. Airpower could not isolate the battlefield, destroy the enemy's means of production, stop the flow of men and material down the Ho Chi Minh trail, or stop the flow of resources from the PRC or Soviet Union.

These lessons from the Vietnam War are also applicable to the war in Afghanistan.

—The U.S. supported government in Kabul failed. Corruptions diminished its effectiveness, and destroyed its legitimacy. The United States tolerated this corruption, wasting billions of dollars. The government in Kabul, like the government in Saigon, became too reliant on the U.S. leadership, resources, contractors, and military for stability and security.

—The Afghan National Army and security forces failed. They became too

reliant on the U.S. The U.S. paid their salary, provided them weapons and training; however corruption damaged efforts to build a professional, loyal fighting force. The officer corps was not fully professionalized, many officers stole from their soldiers. Few Afghan soldiers fought out of patriotism, loyalty to the service or loyalty to the country. We could train people, but we could not make them fight.

—Pakistan provided an open border to the Taliban, as Petraeus noted. The government of Pakistan was not an honest broker. It played both sides. Its intelligence agencies and security forces secretly supported the Taliban and for many years hid Osama Bin Laden. Consequently, there was no way to complete the destruction of the Taliban, no way to isolate the battlefield.

—The nation-building effort failed. The U.S. was ignorant of Afghan languages, culture, and customs, as they were of the Vietnamese language and culture. You cannot win the hearts and minds of people you do not know or understand. Many corrupt Afghans played the Americans, took advantage of the ignorance of their language and culture, and walked away with billions of dollars. The U.S. could not build a nation-state in Vietnam, Afghanistan or Iraq.

—The U.S. Army and Marine Corps developed doctrine they could not employ. The counterinsurgency doctrine in Iraq and Afghanistan required more soldiers and marines than the United States could put in the field. The absence of the American people made it impossible to employ counterinsurgency doctrine, which required a significant number of soldiers.

The limitations of this paper mandate an abbreviated assessment. Still, what is evident is that the lessons were not new. In 2017, I wrote:

The inability of the government of Afghanistan to enforce the laws, to secure the people, and widespread corruption diminished the legitimacy of the Karzai government. By 2006 the Taliban had reorganized and were on the offensive and they had a new strategy. Given the geographic, political, cultural, ethnic, and economic situation in the region, the United States and its allies never had the wherewithal to complete the destruction of the enemy.

There are no new lessons.

Part V: The Deeper Lessons: The American Culture of War

To maximize security and a nation's combat power, that nation must understand the cultures of its enemies and its allies. The consequence for failing to understand your enemies' and your allies' culture and practices of war can be defeat.

What America's allies should study is not primarily the lessons of Afghanistan or Vietnam, but how and why the decisions for war were made and why American political and military leaders continue to ignore the lessons of war? Why did the United States Government, the state, make such a commitment to Afghanistan, to Iraq? The attack on 9/11 does not explain twenty years of war and nation-building and the expenditure of trillions of dollars. How the state went to war is equally important? In reassessing the United States as an ally, the state, and the tribes/nations must both be considered.

Ali A. Allawi, Iraq's first post-war civilian Minister of Defense, wrote:

In official Washington, the ignorance of what was going on inside Iraq before the war was monumental. None of the proponents of the war, including the neo-conservatives, and also no one in the institutes and think-tanks that provided the intellectual fodder for the war's justification, had the faintest idea of the country that they were to occupy.

No wonder that cynicism runs deep regarding America's true motives. Seizure of the oil fields, building Iraq as a base to subvert Iran, breaking up the country as part of a redesigned, fragmented Middle East, removing Iraq as a threat to Israel, these were all arguments held out as the "real" motives behind America's push into Iraq. There was no "American party" in Iraq, no people who were open advocates of an alliance with America.... America's only allies in Iraq were those who sought to manipulate the great power to their narrow advantage.

The United States was ignorant of the Iraq it invaded. It did not care. It did not matter. The decision for war was not primarily a function of the threat posed by Saddam Hussein's Iraq. It was a function of internal U.S. politics, the demands of multiple interests. (No weapons of mass destruction were found in Iraq. In this regard, the tens of billions of dollars spent on the fifteen intelligence agencies were a waste.). In a letter to President Clinton dated January 26, 1998, neoconservatives from an organization called The Project for a New American Century, advocated war to remove Saddam Hussein. The U.S., the state, elected to go to war. Obviously, these are significant issues. I can only sketch partial answers. Consider the conduct of the wars by the state, and second, the condition, the health of the many tribes/nations.

—Corruption. War in American is big business. An estimated \$8 Trillion has been appropriated since Osama Bin Laden's attack on 9/11. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and other operations, have made defense contractors fabulously wealthy. There is no way to account for this enormous sum of money.

Private military firms, heavily employed because the Army and Marine Corps were too small, did not fight to achieve the political objectives of the United States. They were there to make money, to maximize profits, and they did. The longer the war, the more money they made. These PMF lobbied the White House, the Pentagon, and Congress for lucrative contracts. They contribute hundreds of millions of dollars to the political campaigns of Presidents, Senators and Representatives. Retired generals and admirals are also insiders working with and for contractors. Many become wealthy. Dick Cheney, former Secretary of Defense and Vice President, was also the former CEO of Halliburton, a Defense contractor that was awarded tens of billions in no-bid contracts. *Political and military leaders profiting from the wars they initiate and execute is corruption.*

—Military leadership, generals and admirals failed. Leadership at the highest levels of the armed forces failed. The Generals continued to promote themselves and award themselves medals without achieving victory, without achieving the political objectives of the United States, without a realistic assessment of the situation. Tom Ricks, the author of *The Generals*, wrote: “In the wars of the past decade, hundreds of Army generals were deployed to the field, and the available evidence indicates that *not one was relieved by the military brass for combat ineffectiveness. This change is arguably one of the most significant developments in our recent military history—and an important factor in the failure of our wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.*”

—Militarism, outspending all other nations combined to maintain the largest and most advanced armed forces on Earth, possessing enormous military capacity creates a preference for military solutions, over diplomatic, economic or social solutions. One of the reasons the United States went to war in Iraq is: *it looked easy, and there was no threat to not using military force.* With the collapse of the Soviet Union the threat from near-peer powers went away. As a consequence, the operational tempo of the armed forces increased dramatically. Iraq’s military capacity versus the U.S. capacity caused political and military leaders to believe it would be a piece of cake, a short, victorious military campaign. And, most importantly, because it looked easy, there would be no need to call upon the American tribes to serve.

—American Military Methods and Practices. The United States invests heavily in military technologies. The Armed Forces have developed methods and practices designed to kill people most efficiently and effectively without risking American lives. American methods often alienate people and motivate them to fight against us, for example, the employment of drone strikes that kill innocent civilians too frequently. The United States has killed a lot of innocent civilians in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and other parts of the world with drone strikes.

—Cultural/Racial Affinity. Americans lacked cultural affinity for the peoples of Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq. These people lacked the value of, for example,

the British, or the Germans. These people were not part of Western culture or civilization; hence, it was easier to kill, betray, and abandoned them. The on-going immigration fight in the United States is in part a function of the American practice of devaluing some people. The former President of the United States, Donald Trump, referred to some countries as “Shithole” countries, and cut off all immigration from these countries. Trump enjoyed the support of the majority of white Americans tribes. Some American tribes are too inward-looking, too chauvinistic to succeed in an insurgency war. The United States cannot win the hearts and minds of people in foreign lands. And men of honor and integrity, men who obey the laws and sovereignty of other countries, men who respect human rights and the dignity of all people, do not always lead the United States.

Again, we can only scratch the surface here. While the defeat in Afghanistan is significant, a broader perspective is necessary. The debacle in Afghanistan is just one indicator of the health of the United States of America. Consider the following facts: The death of more than 750,000 Americans from COVID-19, the worse performance on Earth. The inability of large numbers of Americans to accept the science behind the vaccine and their refusal to get vaccinated, which means more deaths. The epidemic of drug usage. In 2020 an estimated 93,331 people died of drug overdoses. That is more than one and half times the number of Americans who died in the Vietnam War. The incarceration rate, the highest in the world. In California, there are more people in prison than in college. The epidemic of mass shootings. The epidemic of obesity and diabetes. The election of Donald Trump, a man who bragged about assaulting women. The effectiveness of the Russian disinformation campaign that influenced the outcome of the election in 2016, by exploiting tribal divisions. The January 6, 2021, Trump insurrection, attempted overthrow of American democracy. The rise of hate crimes. The United States of America is a *tribal-state*, at war with itself.

Conclusion

The tribes of America are deeply divided and incapable of consistent, coherent, major efforts in war. Seventy percent of Americans are unfit to serve in the Armed Forces of the United States. While the United States, the state, possesses enormous military capacity, it cannot call upon the American people to serve, which means it cannot fight a total war, and culturally it cannot win an insurgency war. In reassessing alliances, and the reliability and capabilities of allies, a complete picture is necessary.

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