

Editorial: Why the Taliban are moving into a Victorious Position in Afghanistan

By Dr. Geoffrey DT Shaw

How did it get to this: the Taliban are now controlling great swaths of Afghan territory yet again (really, they had never left but had simply gone dormant until the appropriate time)? Here is the answer by the most successful counter-insurgency soldier and thinker, Sir Robert Thompson: "In strategic terms if an insurgent movement, at a cost which is infinitely acceptable, can impose costs on the government which are not indefinitely acceptable, than although it may be losing every battle, it is winning the war." This answer is straight-forward enough and condemns the political and military leadership in the United States for gross/criminally-negligent incompetence as they knew this upon entering Afghanistan, as it was taught in their COIN schools for at least the preceding two decades (I know - I was there and helped teach it amongst many other more erudite scholars than yours truly). Besides all of this, the invasion of Afghanistan was a straight-forward military invasion with the intent on punishment that, idiotically, morphed into an activist-liberal/neo-con nation-building undertaking that failed and failed disastrously as Islamic State, along with a resurgent al Qaeda, are now involved there. More to the point, the Taliban were never an insurgency force but the ousted legitimate government of Afghanistan (it does not matter one wit, not one dot, not one iota, that the US government didn't like them as they had political legitimacy in the eyes of a substantial minority/small majority of Afghans and they never lost that authoritative political legitimacy). In Afghan perceptions, the day of the accursed 'ferrenghi' (infidel foreigner) was always going to come to a close and then the Talibs would re-assert their authority, if not sooner than the foreigners' exit. America is now perceived as weak in the region because, in fact and deed it is weak, as Washington failed to deal with the true source of the 9/11 attacks: organization based out of Egypt and, almost more importantly, funding out of Saudi. Moreover, unlike the British, who through sheer guts, determination and a savvy understanding of local politics - built a series of forts and roads in Waziristan - thus keeping the most dangerous part of the NWFT under a firm lock-down for a hundred years, the US government steadfastly refused to undertake the onerous and bloody task of demonstrating that they meant business by locking the country down. For to do so would have greatly increased casualties amongst US forces and, of course, the big domestic political lesson of the Vietnam War, which still haunts every American military adventure, is that you will get kicked out of office if you engage in long and bloody wars with seemingly no end in sight. It is far easier, and more appealing to blast away at Taliban strongholds with aircraft and drones rather than engage on the ground, and dig in on the ground for the long-haul while attempting to understand and work with the local culture rather than change it to some silly decadent Western rumination on what 'democracy' should be. Because of all this America, and her allies, have failed strategically and more often than they would like to admit, tactically, in effectively suppressing their adversaries in the region. Once again, America, while demonstrating it has enormous technical military power has, simultaneously demonstrated that it lacks the requisite wisdom and staying-power that all great powers in history have had to have in order to be effective: i.e., if you are going to undertake an important military task that will have a far-reaching regional impact then you had better count the cost soberly before doing so or stay at home and save your blood and treasure. This foolish engagement in Af/Pak has only encouraged America's regional adversaries as it was done by half-measures from the outset and defacto victory is now within the patient grasp of the Talibs. There is no such thing as war on the cheap and this is especially so when one observes the real and staggering fiscal costs of America's hi-tech engagements. Kennedy toyed with the

idea many years ago and ended up murdering the finest leader any Asian country has ever had, Ngo Dinh Diem, which led directly to America being ensnared in a conflict where the expense became astronomical (the Vietnam War) yet nothing was learned along the way, regardless of the amount of funding that went into the study of small wars and insurgencies as Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Hussein Obama carried on, and made worse, Kennedy's failed 'wisdom' of war-on-the-cheap. So, the 'corner' that successive American governments have painted themselves into since the Vietnam War has been as follows: how do we win a war without making it cost like the Vietnam War cost US society in blood, treasure, social acrimony, and the attending appearance of failure and weakness before our adversaries? The answer so far, from Somalia through to Af/Pak and Iraq, is that there is no answer because no US President will commit to what really has to be done.