

Uncomfortable truths

American military leaders, appearing before Congress, acknowledge strategic failures and uncomfortable truths in the 20-year U.S.-led combat mission in Afghanistan

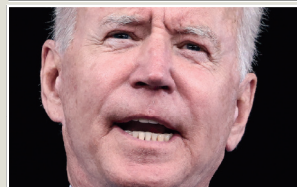
■ **2010:** UN estimates that Afghans are paying **\$2.5 billion** every year in bribes – almost 25% of Afghanistan's GDP



■ **2012-16 – Sex crimes:** U.S. soldiers are instructed to ignore practice called **bacha bazi**, literally “boy play” – rape of boys by Afghan security forces on U.S. military bases. **U.S. policy treats child sexual abuse as Afghan cultural issue, enraging village elders**

■ **2015 – Illusions:** Obama changes name of mission from **Operation Enduring Freedom** to **Operation Freedom's Sentinel**, creating illusion that U.S. operations are ending

■ **2017. Collateral killings:** U.S. change in rules of engagement leads to 330% increase in civilian casualties



■ **2020-21 – Deal:** President **Donald Trump** secures agreement with Taliban to withdraw all U.S. and allied troops. President **Joe Biden** (above) continues withdrawal plan

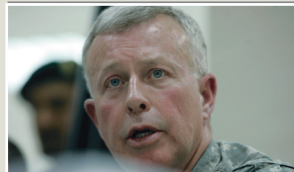


■ **Aug 30, 2021:** Last U.S. soldier to leave Afghanistan boards final C-17 flight from Kabul



■ **2008 – 9/11 millionaires:** Congress approves policy known as **Afghan First** – using local Afghan contractors to supply U.S. military bases. **Pentagon analysis finds \$43bn of \$108bn paid to contractors from 2010-12 ends up in hands of corrupt Afghan officials, Taliban or Haqqani network**

■ **Jan 2009 – All change:** President **Barack Obama** (top right) inherits war he does not want



■ **May 2009 – Alternative facts:** General **David McKiernan** (above) – top U.S. commander in Afghanistan – is fired after admitting conflict is “**stalemated**” and satisfactory outcome could take 10 years – way too long for his political bosses



■ **2003:** Secretary of Defense **Donald Rumsfeld** (inset right) declares end to “**major combat**.” NATO assumes control of international security forces (ISAF)

■ **2004: Hamid Karzai** (inset, far right) becomes first democratically elected president of Afghanistan. **U.S. does little to prevent corruption. Instead, it restores warlords to power**



■ **2007 – Progress:** Bush reassures Americans that “**over past five years, we've made real progress.**”

Bush's Office of National Drug Control Policy boasts of “**enormous progress**” made in elimination of opium poppy cultivation

Poppy crop (hectares)

2001	6,000
2007	193,000
2020	224,000

■ **Sep 14, 2001:** Within days of 9/11 attacks on U.S., Congress passes **Authorization for Military Force (AUMF)**

■ **Sep 18:** President **George W. Bush** (right) signs AUMF into law “**to bring Al Qaeda to justice.**” AUMF is used to justify rendition of terrorism suspects to **Guantanamo Bay** and use of UAVs for targeted killings



■ **Oct 7 – Operation Enduring Freedom:** U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan is backed by Britain, with pledges of support from Canada, Australia, Germany, France

■ **Dec 9 – Collapse:** Taliban surrenders. Al Qaeda leader **Osama bin Laden** (right) escapes to Pakistan. Legally, invasion is “**not a war**” – some NATO armies are authorized only to participate in peacekeeping operations

■ **Apr 2002 – Nation-building:** Bush calls for Afghanistan to be rebuilt. Exercise is cast as “**progressive**” – improving rights of women, education. However, Pentagon knows U.S.-backed government in Kabul and army are deeply corrupt. **Hundreds of billions of dollars are stolen**