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The Afghan Morass



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On learning that he was from Afghanistan, I asked my Afghan taxi driver in New York his opinion about the situation in his country. “Americans don’t get it,” he said. “They are not going to succeed in Afghanistan. My father was a warlord who fought the Russians, and I grew up in Afghanistan, so I know the situation there. I have a lot of respect for the Russian soldiers, who fought us fiercely. But I don’t have the same respect for the coalition soldiers who always overprotect themselves. They don’t seem to understand that

we have fought for centuries against foreign occupation in my country, and we have always succeeded.”

The taxi driver’s assessment confirmed the strength of the Afghan soldier, able to fight with the most primitive weapons against the greatest empires on earth. When these soldiers feel their land usurped by foreign forces, their strength is multiplied. And this is just one of the obstacles confronting U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan.

Matthew Hoh, a former Foreign Service officer and former Marine Corps captain who became the first U.S. official to resign in protest over the Afghan war, had declared, “Upon arriving in Afghanistan and serving in both the East and South (and particularly speaking with local Afghans) I found that the majority of those who were fighting us and the Afghan central government were fighting us because they felt occupied.”

More than 2,200 Americans have been killed in Afghanistan, and the U.S. has spent more than \$840 billion fighting the Taliban and paying for relief and reconstruction. The amount of money the U.S. has so far spent in Afghanistan is higher than what it spent, in current dollars, on the Marshall Plan, which help rebuild Europe after World War II.

Despite all these financial resources spent in Afghanistan, and even though the American military says that the Afghan government “controls or influences” 56 percent of the country, this control is limited to district and military quarters while the Taliban controls the rest.

According to Afghan official statistics, the Afghan security forces outnumber the Taliban by 10 to 1. However, as recently as the second week in September, dozens of police officers, soldiers and civilians were killed by Taliban insurgents in four well-coordinated attacks which even included one in Kabul.

In the deadliest attack, the insurgents killed over 30 members of the government security forces in Baghlan Province, located in the north of the country. The casualties among the Afghan security forces have been significant. According to the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction, a U.S. government agency, 6,785 Afghan police and soldiers have died in the first 10 months of 2016.

As there are increasing calls for the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan, the real dilemma for the U.S. is if it is worth to persist in what increasingly seems like an unwinnable war on this natural resources-plentiful country. The Taliban have indicated that they are ready for a second round of talks with the U.S.

It is now time for both parties in this cruel war to put and end to what has been like a hemorrhage in the body of the Afghan people. Those who have failed in the past should be

a sobering reminder to the troops now fighting in that country. Afghanistan has been called the graveyard of empires. It should more properly be called the end of an illusion.