

College of the Holy Cross

CrossWorks

Washington Semester Program

J.D. Power Center for Liberal Arts in the World

11-4-2023

The Gift That Never Stops Giving: A Comparison of US Aid and Reconstruction in Afghanistan, Post-War Europe, and Ukraine

John Chadwick Canty Jr.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://crossworks.holycross.edu/washington>



Part of the [International and Area Studies Commons](#), and the [International Relations Commons](#)

The Gift That Never Stops Giving: A Comparison of US Aid and Reconstruction in Afghanistan,
Post-War Europe, and Ukraine

Jack Canty

Washington D.C. Program

November 4th, 2023

Supervised by Professor Christopher Murray

The American war in Afghanistan spanned twenty years, four presidents, two generations, and more than \$2 trillion of aid. The US entered Afghanistan in 2001 to avenge the September 11th terrorist attacks and exact vengeance against Al-Qaeda, who planned and organized the attacks, and the Taliban, who harbored AL-Qaeda. With the Taliban crumbling within a matter of months, the US was left controlling a country of 41 million that had been ravaged by twenty years of war and six years of barbaric Taliban rule. The US then set to work setting up an Afghan government that could both uplift the Afghan people out of poverty and prevent terrorist groups from using Afghanistan as a base to launch further attacks against the US and its allies. Twenty years later, the very same Afghan government collapsed in 11 days to the same Taliban who the US had sought to defeat. Much has been made since 2021 concerning how the Taliban achieved victory so easily, but this discussion often overlooks the important, albeit mundane, aspect of the US and its partners' aid efforts to rebuild Afghanistan. While there is much literature concerning the US war in Afghanistan, synthesizing disparate sources, combined with researching primary sources such as contemporary newspaper and government reporting, into a single paper will provide a comprehensive study of this issue. An analysis of US aid to Afghanistan over twenty years and four presidents indicates that a lack of real accountability and transparency, comprehensive planning for the long-term, and decisions based upon the reality of the situation proved fatal to the American effort to rebuild Afghanistan. These fatal defects to the US effort to rebuild Afghanistan were driven by perpetually rotating personnel, which annually lobotomized institutions, incentivized instant gratification over long-term goals, and inhibited

thorough management of aid distribution and reconstruction projects, a lack of ownership by the Afghan government over the methodology for aid, divorcing policy priorities from the reality on the ground, and a thorough deficiency of understanding the Afghan socio-political landscape, restricting the US's capacity to coherently link its reconstruction and aid programs in Afghanistan.

The larger issue at stake here is that the errors made in Afghanistan are not unique, but rather the latest iteration of chronic mistakes made by the US in other conflicts such as Vietnam. My case study can add to the historiography of American aid and interventions by analyzing the sustainability, accountability, and transparency of US aid both in Afghanistan and preceding interventions. To that end, this paper will analyze other instances of American aid and interventions abroad, particularly the Marshall Plan and ongoing US aid to Ukraine. This paper will allow the author to answer the following questions: How was the money distributed by American agencies? What decision-making process existed to decide how the money was allocated between Congress, the White House, and government agencies? How was the spending made transparent or was it obscured by government officials over the four presidential administrations? Was there any accountability process that existed among the various agencies or administrations for mistakes that were made? How does this converge and diverge with other interventions such as Vietnam or Europe?

During my time working in Congressman Bryan Steil's office, I was exposed to the discourse surrounding political aid in Congress and given a behind-the-scenes look at how decisions to approve foreign aid are made in Congress. Congressman Steil has been vocal about promoting accountability and transparency in US aid to Ukraine as its war with Russia grinds

on.¹This focus on accountability and transparency in US foreign aid met with my pre-existing interest in the US intervention in Afghanistan, especially in what led to the Afghan government collapsing so quickly in August 2021. Thus, this paper analyzes US aid to Afghanistan from 2001 to 2021 through the lens of transparency and accountability while comparing and contrasting it to past instances of US interventions and aid programs such as Vietnam and post-war western Europe.

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. Section I analyzes the US intervention in Afghanistan, breaking it down by the four presidents that presided over the war. Section II will examine the Marshall Plan. Section III will examine US aid to Ukraine in its ongoing war with Russia and possible lessons that can be derived from Afghanistan and the Marshall Plan which can be applied to enhance transparency and accountability in future aid to the country. Section IV will conclude the paper.

Throughout its history, Afghanistan has often depended upon foreign aid to sustain itself. This pattern began in the 19th-Century with British subsidies to Amir Abdur Rahman Khan as their proxy in Afghanistan with the amir taking in about 28.5 million rupees during his reign from 1880 to 1901.² When this ended in 1919 as the consequence of the Third Anglo-Afghan War³, Afghan rulers looked to the US and the USSR as new sources of revenue, with two-thirds of its 1973 annual revenue coming from foreign loans and grants.⁴ During the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, not to mention after, the USSR distributed massive quantities of aid to prop up their Afghan client government. During the Taliban's first reign over Afghanistan,

¹U.S. Congress. House. Rules Committee, *Amendment to Rules Comm. Print 118-10 Offered by Mr. Steil of Wisconsin*. 117th Cong., 2d session., H Rep. 118-10.

https://amendments-rules.house.gov/amendments/STEIWI_020_xml230628103211695.pdf

² Barfield, 153.

³ Ibid., 181.

⁴ Ibid., 205.

they relied upon the UN and other foreign donors to distribute humanitarian supplies to stave off famine-induced revolts among the populace.

Section I

President George W Bush (2001-2009): The Faucet spurts & dribbles

The United States was catapulted into the twenty-year war by Al Qaeda's attack on its soil, planned and supervised from Afghanistan. Four simultaneous attacks saw roughly 3,000 Americans killed and about 6,000 more injured⁵. Al Qaeda's attack upon the heart of America-the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon-fostered a deep fear of imminent further terrorist attacks and fed a desire for vengeance against the Al-Qaeda perpetrators sheltered in Afghanistan by the Taliban⁶. In that atmosphere, President Bush and his Cabinet perceived an imperative to attack Al-Qaeda, not only to avenge the attacks but also to allay the American people's fears of further terrorist plots⁷. Facing an obstinate Taliban that refused to turn bin Laden and his cohorts over, Bush launched Operation Enduring Freedom, the US invasion of Afghanistan, on October 7th, 2001⁸. While the initial military campaign on the ground would succeed spectacularly, toppling the Taliban forces and uprooting Al-Qaeda in just under six weeks,⁹ Bush's administration saw the gestation of defective decision-making processes that would haunt the US until its withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021.

⁵ Carter Malkasian, "The American War in Afghanistan; A History"(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 53.

⁶ Ibid., 54.

⁷ Ibid., 58.

⁸ Abid Amiri, "The Trillion Dollar War; The U.S. Effort to Rebuild Afghanistan, 1999-2021" (Quantico: Marine Corps University Press 2021), 53.

⁹ Craig Whitlock, "The Afghanistan Papers; A Secret History of the War" (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021), 3.

With the Taliban overthrown and in full retreat, America now possessed a country devastated by twenty years of continuous war. But what to do next? This issue bedeviled Bush and his advisors for several reasons. First was the sheer speed of events. The sudden nature of the September 11th attacks combined with the rapid success of the US military in Afghanistan against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda coupled by the perception of urgency by the public for immediate action meant that there was very little time to think ahead for civil and military leaders in terms of strategy¹⁰. This was compounded by the fact that the US had next to no prior institutional knowledge of Afghanistan¹¹. The US Embassy in Kabul had closed in 1989 and the US had simply not been focused on Afghanistan prior to 2001. Another component was the initial ideological opposition from Bush and his Cabinet to nation-building. Bush had campaigned against foreign interventions and remained narrowly focused on counter-terrorism operations until 2003¹². This ideological opposition combined with the invasion of Iraq in 2003 to divert attention, resources, and soldiers from securing and rebuilding Afghanistan¹³. A combination of these factors generated the chronic deficiencies in US efforts in Afghanistan.

The US's aid commitments reflected the mismatch between the priorities of policymakers in Washington DC and the reality of Afghanistan. Of the \$22.1 billion dollars that was provided between 2001 and 2008, 75.4% was spent on Afghan security sector reform (\$12.9 billion), infrastructure (\$1.7 billion), and counternarcotics (\$960 million)¹⁴. This reflects the Bush administration's broader focus on counter-terrorism. However, there was significant waste in how funds for the security sector were spent. The most blatant instance of this waste is the

¹⁰ Ibid., 11.

¹¹ Thomas Barfield, "Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History" (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 275.

¹² Whitlock, "The Afghanistan Papers: A Secret History of the War," 31.

¹³ SIGAR, "Why The Afghan Security Forces Collapsed," (Arlington: SIGAR, 2023) 2.

¹⁴ Amiri, "The Trillion Dollar War," 75.

selection for camouflage pattern to be used for ANA uniforms¹⁵. The chosen camouflage pattern-Spec4ce Forest-was not only proprietary, meaning the US would have to spend extra money to obtain permission to use it, but it was a forest pattern, not particularly suited to a country that is 98% desert. The decision to use a proprietary woodland camouflage pattern was apparently made by the DoD with the input from the then-Minister of Defense Abdul Rahim Wardak, who approved of it for aesthetic reasons. The DoD rushed the selection and approval process, neglecting to thoroughly test the uniform. In total, more than \$28 million dollars was spent to procure the uniforms whereas using any of the more than twelve non-proprietary patterns owned by the US government at the time would have cost about 43% less.

This mismatch in priorities and lack of long-term planning was also evident in how the Afghan army was built. With the Taliban appearing to be a spent force in 2001, Rumsfeld, despite pressure from Bush¹⁶, moved slowly to build a professional army for the Kabul government until 2002. The army was to be built on the American model of an all-volunteer military with a strong non-commissioned officer corps, a military culture that Afghan armies had not adhered to historically¹⁷. Rumsfeld, concerned about the costs of setting up a national army and focused on hunting Al-Qaeda cells, set a target goal of 50,000 soldiers, later negotiated to 70,000¹⁸ to be achieved by 2009. This was over the objections of the Afghan government, who wanted an army of 100,000-120,000 to better secure the country. And yet, Rumsfeld's penny-pinching persisted. He insisted that US funding would be kept at minimum necessary levels, that Afghan recruits be trained in 10 weeks, well under the 6 to 12 months advocated by military trainers,¹⁹ and that it be light infantry.²⁰ The army's birthing problems were exacerbated

¹⁵ Ibid., 79.

¹⁶ Malkasian, "The American War in Afghanistan," 90.

¹⁷ Whitlock, "The Afghanistan Papers," 57.

¹⁸ Malkasian, "The American War in Afghanistan," 92.

¹⁹ Ibid., 92.

²⁰ Units lacking heavy weapons, armor, and with a reduced number of vehicles.

by routine US personnel rotations. American trainers would rotate every year, erasing any institutional knowledge and policy continuity.²¹ This meant that the Afghan army's growth moved at a glacial pace, chronically underfunded,²² under-resourced, and unable to secure Afghanistan's territory, a weakness that would haunt them in 2006 when the Taliban launched a stunning offensive in Helmand province.

Not to be outdone, efforts to ameliorate the infrastructure sector similarly largely fell through. After two decades of war, reconstructing and expanding Afghanistan's infrastructure was a vital step towards reviving its national economy. But the lack of ownership by the Afghan people over infrastructure projects stymied progress. The US, along with other donor countries, decided what infrastructure projects would be built and how they would be built with little thought given of how it would be sustained. This choice not only increased costs since money would have to be spent on security and management, diverting money from the project itself, but divorced the physical act of construction from its political and economic objective, to build support of the Afghan government among the Afghan people and to provide economic opportunities for local communities²³. This is illustrated in the effort to rebuild the Kabul-Kandahar section of the Ring Road in 2002²⁴. USAID hired Louis Berger Group (LBG) for the job and the road itself was completed in 2003 for \$311 million, where the highway was handed over to the Afghan government. But in the subsequent years the project's major deficiencies arose. While the road did promote economic activity, the Afghan government proved, owing to a lack of resources, unable to both police and maintain the highway. Thus, it became a nexus for extortion, Taliban attacks, and drug smuggling, all the while costing the

²¹ Whitlock, "The Afghanistan Papers," 58.

²² Whitlock, "The Afghanistan Papers," 55. The daily wage for enlisted personnel in 2003 was \$2.50.

²³ Barfield "Afghanistan," 316.

²⁴ Amiri "The Trillion Dollar War," 85.

World Bank \$72 million annually since 2006 after it stepped in to fund road maintenance. USAID, under intense pressure from above to demonstrate immediate results, prioritized short-term goals-building infrastructure-over the long-term goal of ensuring that the Afghan state could support such infrastructure.

The lack of accountability and transparency over how the funds were to be spent once delivered allowed corruption to take root. In 2012, LBG was found guilty of deliberately overbilling the US government for the project and for bribing the Taliban to defend the road project²⁵. LBG did this by utilizing an Indian subcontractor to conduct the physical construction work. The Indian subcontractor then subcontracted further to local Afghan warlords, who paid the Taliban to not attack the work site using funds provided by LBG. The beneficiaries of the highway were thus mainly warlords and the Taliban, who would set up checkpoints along the route to extort passing vehicles.

The highway project demonstrated how the Afghan people were left out of the decision-making and execution process. The US intended for the highway to create jobs in rural areas and engage local leaders in designing and implementing the road²⁶. Instead, the contract was outsourced to international firms, generally ignoring local communities, who then designed and built the road. The international companies employed foreign workers instead of locals, further increasing the project's costs. Since local communities were locked out of the process, they did not feel compelled to support the project. This side-stepping of the Afghans points both to a willful ignorance of Afghanistan's socio-political environment, choosing speed over sustainability, and short-term focus that would frequently boomerang future efforts.

²⁵ Ibid., 89.

²⁶ Ibid., 91.

Not all aid efforts fell through however. Notably, the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), created by the World Bank, and the National Solidarity Program run by the Afghan government proved to be two successful programs that delivered sustainable results to the Afghan people while reinforcing the legitimacy of the Afghan government. The ARTF was created in 2002 and proved to be a facile and efficient way for limiting corruption among donor funds.²⁷ With comprehensive monitoring, accountability, and transparency at every level of the funds circuit, there were vanishingly few opportunities for graft and the funds went towards paying government salaries and funding infrastructure projects. The World Bank also supported technical assistance programs that substantially improved the Afghan Ministry of Finance's capacity to collect taxes and manage funds by 2012. It did this by using externally funded advisors who worked with extant Afghan civil officials, rather than replacing them with foreigners who would cost more. Not to be outdone in terms of effectiveness and simplicity, the National Solidarity Program performed exceedingly well. Under the Program, village committees decided how to spend grants of up to \$20,000, with them usually deciding to build a new infrastructure piece such as a bridge or generator. Spending was transparent as all accounts were published on the village mosque's wall, making the program highly resistant to corruption. The program was entirely funded by international donors but wholly run by the Afghan government, strengthening the government's authority and legitimacy. It was also more cost-effective, with a single school under the program costing \$20,000 compared to the average USAID-funded school costing \$350,000, if they were built at all. These programs succeeded as they embodied transparency, accountability, and sustainability all the while reinforcing the political legitimacy of the Afghan government.

²⁷ David Loyn, "The Long War: The Inside Story of American and Afghanistan since 9/11" (New York: St Martin's Press, 2021), 72.

The year 2006 proved to be a turning point for the US effort in Afghanistan. Large, coordinated assaults by well-equipped Taliban in Helmand and Kandahar provinces quickly disproved the notion that the Taliban was a spent force²⁸. Bush, chastened, abruptly reversed course and increased funding towards Afghanistan²⁹. Intense pressure was put upon government officials to spend the large amounts of money that was handed to them quickly³⁰. This pressure is active in the US procurement of G222 transport aircraft for the AAF. In 2006, the DoD agreed to buy 20 refurbished G222s from Alenia North America to equip the AAF from 2009 to 2013³¹, totalling \$549 million³². Over the next five years however, the planes proved to be unreliable and dangerous to fly. Due to this, the DoD canceled the contract in March 2013, selling the aircraft to a scrapyard for \$40,257³³. It turned out that there had been numerous red flags to Alenia's proposal. A former USAF officer who had advocated for procuring the G222 clearly possessed a conflict of interest as he had been significantly involved while in uniform and, once retired, had been Alenia's main contact for the program, violating restrictions on former government officials.³⁴ Alenia also had developed no sustainment plan-providing spare parts-for the aircraft in their proposal, not to mention confirming the G222's airworthiness before transferring the planes to Afghanistan³⁵. This serious error by the US can be traced back to the pressure placed upon government officials to quickly spend money. The contract was paid for with funds from the Afghan Security Forces Fund (ASFF), which was set to expire in September 30, 2008³⁶. Numerous officials testified that they were under intense pressure to award a contract before the

²⁸ Malkasian, "The American War in Afghanistan," 129.

²⁹ SIGAR, "What We Need to Learn," 28.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

³¹ SIGAR, "G222 AIRCRAFT PROGRAM IN AFGHANISTAN: ABOUT \$549 MILLION SPENT ON FAULTY AIRCRAFT AND NO ONE HELD ACCOUNTABLE," (Arlington: SIGAR, 2021), 1.

³² *Ibid.*, 9.

³³ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

funding expired, contributing to their decision to award Alenia the contract. Despite all of this, no one, not Alenia, not the retired USAF officer, not government officials, was held accountable for their misdeeds.

President Barack Obama (2009-2017): The Faucet Handle Breaks Off

Obama's presidency encompassed the core of America's war in Afghanistan from 2009 to 2017. On the campaign trail, Obama had argued for the US to reorient its efforts from the ongoing conflict in Iraq back to Afghanistan. He asserted that the Afghan war was the, "good war"³⁷, a mission to defeat terrorists that threatened to attack US civilians and allies. But Obama and his cabinet faced strong limitations in their policy options. The 2008 recession, having badly shaken the US economy, loomed as the top domestic policy priority in the minds of Americans, with many worried that foreign wars such as those in Iraq or Afghanistan would distract the government from addressing the ongoing financial crisis.³⁸ In addition, Obama-reinforced by Vice President Biden's sentiments-personally harbored a wariness of becoming indefinitely enmeshed in foreign interventions. Obama also feared that if he didn't impose a strict timeline on the US intervention in Afghanistan, the military could strong-arm him into extending or escalating the war in the future.³⁹ To that end, Obama prioritized building up the capacities of the Afghan government so that the US could begin withdrawing its troops from the country. Obama planned to deploy an additional 30,000 US troops to Afghanistan for eighteen months for a total of 100,000 soldiers, after which they would begin withdrawing.⁴⁰ The surge was not meant to defeat the Taliban on its own, but to disrupt their operations and thereby give the Afghan government breathing room to build up its capabilities. The military surge was to be

³⁷ Obama and afghanistan. in New York Times Company [database online]. New York, 2009 (accessed October 22, 2023).

³⁸ Malkasian, "The American War in Afghanistan," 219.

³⁹ SIGAR, "What We Need to Learn: Lessons from Twenty Years of Afghanistan Reconstruction," 30.

⁴⁰ How Obama came to plan for 'Surge' in afghanistan. in New York Times Company [database online]. New York, 2009 (accessed October 22, 2023).

accompanied by a similar surge in aid money, with annual spending almost tripling from \$6 billion in 2008 to \$17 billion in 2010.⁴¹ While it is understandable that Obama and his advisors were doing what they could with what they had, the decisions made would continue to inhibit the US intervention in Afghanistan.

Obama's 2009 surge caused spending, which had already been growing under Bush since 2006⁴², to metastasize to unimaginable proportions. The strict eighteen-month timeline generated an atmosphere that prioritized rapidity of action above all else. This meant that by 2010, US aid was roughly equal to Afghanistan's GDP, first outpacing and then overwhelming the ability of American agencies to monitor it all.⁴³ Numerous US officials and aid workers testified that they felt overwhelming pressure to spend money so that their superiors could show immediate results, encapsulating the atmosphere as, "spend, spend, spend"⁴⁴. Output-money spent-rather than the impact achieved became the primary metric of success.⁴⁵ This impetus for short-term gain was actually a manifestation of the old cycle begun under Bush's administration; short-term goals are accomplished through short-term solutions, engendering new problems that are then addressed by further short-term goals.⁴⁶ As will be seen, this cycle applied to both military and civilian efforts, with similar effects.

Of the \$76 billion given by the US between 2008 and 2016, 85% was allocated to governance-related projects⁴⁷. Only 1.27% went to education. In particular, \$53 billion, comprising 69% of the 85% allocated, went towards security sector reform⁴⁸. This money

⁴¹ Whitlock, "The Afghanistan Papers," 158.

⁴² SIGAR, "What We Need to Learn," 28.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴⁷ Amiri, "The Trillion Dollar War," 141.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 142.

ultimately would accomplish very little. Not only was it siphoned off by corruption⁴⁹ but little attention or resources were paid towards constructing an independent military adapted to Afghanistan's needs⁵⁰. The Afghan Air Force (AAF), initially supplied with Russian-manufactured Mi-17 helicopters, were largely replaced with UH-60 Black Hawks beginning in 2015. These helicopters were well-suited to Afghanistan's geography. Beginning in 2015 however, owing to the lack of ability to source spare parts due to international sanctions from Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, the DoD decided to replace the Mi-17s with UH-60 helicopters based on it being American-made and already possessing an established supply chain⁵¹. However, the helicopters weren't suited to Afghanistan's high altitudes and required frequent and complex maintenance compared to Mi-17s. In addition, the US did not establish a program to train Afghan maintenance staff, meaning US contractors performed over 70% of AAF aircraft maintenance until the government's collapse.

In stark contrast to the debacle of the AAF's helicopter fleet is the A-29 program. Lasting from 2013 to 2018, United States Air Force (USAF) personnel effectively trained AAF pilots and maintenance personnel on how to utilize the 20 A-29 Super Tucano attack aircraft supplied by the US to Afghanistan⁵². This success derived from **long tours of duty** by US personnel coupled with **sustained mentoring** of their Afghan counterparts⁵³. Beginning in January 2015, USAF personnel selected to be trainers had to attend the Air Force's Air Advisor Academy to

⁴⁹ Ibid., 142.

⁵⁰ Malkasian, "The American War in Afghanistan," 227. The brigades of the ANA were virtually identical to those of the US Army; Each possessed 3 infantry battalions and 1 artillery battalion.

⁵¹ SIGAR, "Afghan Air Force: DOD Met the Initial Date for Fielding UH-60 Helicopters, but the Program Is at Risk of Not Having Enough Trained Pilots or the Capability to Maintain Future UH-60s," (Arlington: SIGAR, 2019), 3.

⁵² James Cunningham and Joseph Windrem. "What Happened to the Afghan Air Force?" Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs. January 7, 2022.

<https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2891279/what-happened-to-the-afghan-air-force/>

⁵³ SIGAR, "Afghan Air Forces: The U.S. has Reduced its Advising for Vetting AAF & SMW Recruits & the Afghan Ministry of Defense does not have the Resources needed to Vet all Recruits or Personnel," (Arlington: SIGAR, 2022), 2.

obtain teaching certifications and were assigned to three-year tours as part of the 81st Fighter Squadron. The trainers conducted introductory training with their class of Afghan pilots in the US. The students and trainers then were deployed to Afghanistan where the American trainers continued mentoring and training Afghan pilots. After their three-year tour ended, the advisors would return to the US to train the next class of Afghan pilots. The program delivered sustained success by allowing trainers to enforce consistent standards and establish an effective rapport with their Afghan counterparts. One sign of the success of the program was that by 2018, Afghan-piloted A-29s hit their targets with 88% accuracy on combat missions. This program stands as a model on effectively developing a partner country's military capabilities.

On the infrastructure side, excess reigned supreme. Since one of the key components of Obama's strategy was to strengthen the Afghan economy and government, the DoD conflated battlefield success with the amount of money spent; the quicker and larger the cash expenditure, the greater the victory⁵⁴. How much money was spent on a project became a regularly used metric for success that grew utterly divorced from reality⁵⁵. This conflicted with USAID's methodical approach, creating interagency friction that produced an environment where neither side possessed much appetite to cooperate. In addition, to meet the timetable, many US projects bypassed the Afghan government to work directly with sub governmental groups⁵⁶. This divorced the reconstruction process from its political goals of building support for the government and providing economic opportunities to locals while undermining Kabul's domestic image by making it appear ever more as a puppet for foreigners, something the Taliban would heavily emphasize in their propaganda.

⁵⁴ Whitlock, "The Afghanistan Papers," 164.

⁵⁵ SIGAR, "What We Need to Learn," 43.

⁵⁶ Barfield, "Afghanistan," 316.

There are multiple instances that illustrate waste but two programs, one large and one small, exhibit the worst tendencies of US aid to Afghanistan. The first was a plan to electrify Kandahar city and its surrounding areas.⁵⁷ Since electricity in Kandahar was scarce, US officers presumed that delivering electricity would build support to the Afghan government. To do that, they wanted to rebuild the Kajaki Dam which had been rendered nonfunctional during the civil war. Progress had been slow since 2004 as the Taliban controlled the area that the dam was in. Despite objections by USAID officials who questioned the underlying reasoning-why would supplying energy to Afghans who're accustomed to living without it win their loyalty? Why build something that the Afghan government clearly couldn't sustain? Why build in the middle of Taliban-controlled territory?-the military pressured USAID officials⁵⁸ into funding⁵⁹ the project in 2011.⁶⁰ But since repairing the dam would take years, the DoD purchased diesel generators that could begin operations in months, with a total cost of \$256 million for five years. The Us would ultimately spend \$775 million for dam repairs, diesel generators, and other electrification projects in the area. While power generation did triple, the system was entirely dependent on US subsidies. But this wasn't the only way money fell through the cracks.

While larger fiascos such as the dam commanded greater attention, smaller projects perpetuated the spending frenzy. Many of such projects can be traced back to the Commanders' Emergency Response Program (CERP)⁶¹. CERP allowed military commanders in the field to sidestep normal contracting rules and spend up to \$1 million on infrastructure projects. Under intense pressure to spend their allotted money that they would frequently copy paperwork from previous projects. Of the \$2.3 billion appropriated in 2015, the DoD could only provide financial

⁵⁷ Whitlock, "The Afghanistan Papers," 162.

⁵⁸ SIGAR, "What We Need to Learn," 32. The DoD pressured USAID to fund unsustainable projects.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁶⁰ Whitlock, "The Afghanistan Papers," 160.

⁶¹ Whitlock, "The Afghanistan Papers," 166.

details for roughly \$890 million worth of projects. Money was handed out with little if any thought towards coordination, accountability, or overall usefulness.

The immense financial waste was made possible by abysmal monitoring and evaluation on the part of the US. None of the three agencies-DoD, USAID, Department of State-that were responsible for reconstruction made monitoring and evaluating aid a priority.⁶² This stemmed from an unwillingness to admit mistakes, inadequate staffing, and the tendency to reward those who oversaw the most expensive programs. Superiors were unwilling to hear negative feedback and take the blame for failures on their watch.⁶³ Not only were many projects built in highly insecure regions, inhibiting regular inspections, but project proposals flowed at such a high rate and in such volume that it grew impossible for USAID staff to keep track of them all⁶⁴. Personnel turnover among USAID staff and its contractors was so frequent that those who drew up or approved project plans rarely stayed long enough to see them to completion.

All of these problems would be bad enough if they weren't both compounded by and generating a pervasive culture of corruption in the Afghan government and economy. US aid and development projects fostered corruption among Afghan officials that would then hamper future efforts. The US prioritized the survival and stability of the Afghan government to the extent that fighting corruption was never seriously pursued among high-level officials⁶⁵. This lack of pressure meant that the Afghan government never conducted a serious effort to hold corrupt officials accountable.⁶⁶ This is especially apparent in the Al Ansari Money Exchange case.⁶⁷ In 2010, Afghan anti-corruption agents raided the firm's-one of Afghanistan's largest financial institutions-headquarters. The agents, trained and advised by the US, suspected the firm

⁶² SIGAR, "What We Need to Learn," 84.

⁶³ Whitlock, "The Afghanistan Papers," 205.

⁶⁴ SIGAR, "What We Need to Learn," 43.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁶⁶ Amiri, "The Trillion Dollar War," 135.

⁶⁷ Whitlock, "The Afghanistan Papers," 188.

laundered money-up to \$2.78 billion between 2007 and 2010-from insurgents and drug traffickers. The legal case was firm, with 45 employees arrested and mountains of evidence. But the case was never pursued. Months after the raid, agents wiretapped a conversation in which a senior aid to President Karzai accepted a bribe to block the prosecution. And when that aid was arrested in July 2010, Karzai personally ordered the aid's release and all charges were dropped. The US backed down, fearful of further antagonizing Karzai. While such desires to maintain relations are understandable at the time, such systematic corruption among the government proved cancerous.

The Obama administration's cash infusion provided innumerable opportunities for corruption. The US military supply chain itself grew into a protection racket.⁶⁸ A DoD analysis of transport contracts from 2010 to 2012 worth \$106 billion concluded that at least 18% was paid to insurgents-including the Taliban-for safe passage of supply convoys while an additional 15% was skimmed off by corrupt Afghan government officials and criminals.

Presidents Trump (2016-2020)&Biden (2020-2021): The Faucet Rusts & Implodes

Trump's presidency signaled the beginning of the end of the US war in Afghanistan. Trump entered as President in 2016 as a skeptic of the value of America's presence in Afghanistan, having repeatedly criticized the war since 2011.⁶⁹ Despite this early rhetoric, what was really remarkable was how little Afghanistan was mentioned during the 2016 presidential campaign. There were only a handful of instances where Afghanistan was discussed during debates or speeches by the candidates. Once Trump took office, he initially desired to withdraw all US forces and end America's intervention in Afghanistan.⁷⁰ His advisors, knowing that the

⁶⁸ Whitlock, "The Afghanistan Papers," 187.

⁶⁹ Amiri, "The Trillion Dollar War," 163.

⁷⁰ Whitlock, "The Afghanistan Papers," 242.

Afghan government couldn't survive without a continued US military presence and aid⁷¹, were able to lead him away from total withdrawal to a reduced but indefinite American presence.⁷²The US would send 3,900 additional soldiers to bring the US military presence up to 14,000, increase air strikes and special operations missions, and work towards achieving a political settlement with the Taliban. Such a plan was projected to cost \$45 billion annually.⁷³The US intervention under Trump would see the United States political aim, continuing that of the late Obama administration, shift to propping up the Afghan government and counter-terrorism operations.⁷⁴In doing so, the chronic systemic weaknesses that had been baked into the Afghan government and military by Bush and Obama would flare up into the spotlight.

As part of the US shift in strategy, the Trump administration cut developmental aid to Afghanistan to historic lows, even when compared to Bush. Only about \$2.4 billion of USAID funds were appropriated for Afghanistan development from 2017 to 2019.⁷⁵This reduction in aid money seriously hampered the ability of the already precariously volatile Afghan economy as international aid money composed 75% of the annual Afghan government budget and accounted for 40% of its annual GDP.⁷⁶The Afghan economy and state finances were directly linked to foreign, particularly American, aid and the country's GDP sharply dropped from 2017 to 2019⁷⁷. The fragility of Afghanistan's economy was made especially apparent when COVID-19 ravaged the country in 2020. Government-imposed restrictions economically hurt up to 15 million Afghans, with one in five households seeing their income decline by at least 75% and the

⁷¹ Ibid., 244.

⁷² Malkasian, "The American War in Afghanistan," 406.

⁷³ Whitlock, "The Afghanistan Papers," 244.

⁷⁴ Malkasian, "The American War in Afghanistan," 406.

⁷⁵ Amiri, "The Trillion Dollar War," 168.

⁷⁶ Zerden, "Establishing a Humanitarian Financial Corridor for Afghanistan." Lawfare. November 15, 2021. <https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/establishing-humanitarian-financial-corridor-afghanistan>

⁷⁷ Amiri, "The Trillion Dollar War," 196.

national economy contracting by 7.4% in 2020.⁷⁸ The national poverty rate shot up from 54.5% in 2017 to 72% in 2020. All of this goes to show that for all the billions of dollars and years of work that Bush, Obama, and Trump had directed towards developing the Afghan domestic economy self-reliance and the Afghan state's capacity to fund itself from domestic revenue, the product was a country that was eternally reliant upon input from outside. Education and infrastructure, having been a distant priority compared to building up Afghanistan's security forces, could not adequately meet the country's needs. The components needed to sustain Afghanistan's government and military-an educated workforce, adequate and sustainable infrastructure, vibrant private sector for employment-had been starved of the necessary resources to fully develop.

Corruption, the cancer that both metastasized due to and harmed American efforts, flourished under Trump. With a reduced number of American personnel, oversight of US security assistance dropped in tandem.⁷⁹ This reduction in oversight capabilities made it progressively more difficult to identify and tackle corruption in the Afghan security forces. Army and police officers would sell their equipment to the Taliban and craft "ghost soldiers"; padding units rosters with fake names to siphon off the salaries for their own benefit.⁸⁰ The endemic graft had the cumulative effect of hollowing out the Afghan military. Soldiers had superior equipment to the Taliban, but not enough ammunition to effectively use them. Morale dried up as supplies and funds failed to materialize due to embezzlement. ANA units fled from outnumbered Taliban fighters who possessed inferior equipment in Helmand in 2016 and Kandahar in 2017.⁸¹ This is not to say that the collapse of the Afghan military was preordained. With continued American

⁷⁸ Ibid., 170.

⁷⁹ SIGAR, "What We Need to Learn," 36.

⁸⁰ Malkasian, "The American War in Afghanistan," 390.

⁸¹ Ibid., 387.

airstrikes, intelligence, and special operations forces, they stood and fought in 2019, beating back the Taliban from seizing any major cities.⁸² Afghan forces, by being forced to shoulder more of the responsibility for fighting the Taliban, were able to address some of the chronic flaws that undermined their military. One was leadership. The Americans under General Scott Miller pressed President Ghani to appoint ministers and generals that the US had assessed to be capable. Continual weapons shipments to the ANA allowed it to sustain combat operations and blunt Taliban attacks against cities. The Taliban may have controlled much of the countryside, but the Afghan government held onto the cities. All was not lost quite yet.

Biden's administration deliberately precipitated the utter implosion of everything the US had constructed in Afghanistan over 20 years. Every decision and action taken by Biden displayed both an astonishingly blithe failure to plan ahead and a pigheaded refusal to face reality coupled with a seemingly utter disregard for anyone who wasn't him. Since at least 2009, he had been skeptical of the American intervention, arguing for immediate withdrawal and had displayed total indifference to the fates of Afghan interpreters⁸³. As presidential candidate, Biden had vowed to withdraw most US troops from Afghanistan but retain a small presence for counter-terrorism operations⁸⁴. This was a lie. In his first week after taking office, Biden asked his cabinet how quickly they could withdraw from Afghanistan.⁸⁵ On February 3rd, 2023, Biden convened his national security team to debate how the US would leave Afghanistan. While he took suggestions from his staff members, he reportedly had made up his mind months ago.⁸⁶ This was in spite of at least five separate reports from national security officials that warned of the

⁸² Ibid., 435.

⁸³ Jerry Dunleavy and James Hasson, "Kabul: The Untold Story of Biden's Fiasco and the American Warriors who Fought to the End," (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2023), 10.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 21.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 22.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 23.

Afghan government's collapse if the US totally withdrew.⁸⁷Disregarding all of his advisors, Biden planned to withdraw during the summer, when the fighting was heaviest and the Taliban most active.⁸⁸Biden overestimated the capability of the Afghan government to defend itself, with predictable and tragic results.⁸⁹

Biden and his cronies repeatedly utilized the artificial argument that their hands were bound by the 2020 Doha Agreement between Trump and the Taliban.⁹⁰They claimed that he had to abide by the treaty, but this is patently false. For all of its flaws, the Doha Agreement was condition-based. The withdrawal of American troops hinged upon the Taliban fulfilling obligations delineated to them by the treaty, namely to forswear their relations with Al-Qaeda and negotiate with the Afghan government for a lasting peace. As of Biden's inauguration, the Taliban had not met these key conditions. Biden disregarded the leverage he wielded from the treaty by choosing to withdraw unconditionally, causing any incentive for the Taliban to cooperate to evaporate into thin air.

SIGAR, the chief government watchdog over US reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, explicitly identified Biden's decision to withdraw US troops and contractors in 2021 as the central cause for the Afghan security forces' collapse.⁹¹Biden repeatedly claimed that the Afghan army was 300,000 strong, even though official numbers that were common knowledge at the time put the Afghan military at 254,000.⁹²He woefully overestimated the ANA's ability to fight the Taliban without American assistance. In addition, Biden gave no space for US soldiers in Afghanistan to be forewarned, producing shambolic situations where US troops, having just received their orders hours ago, had to abruptly alert their Afghan comrades

⁸⁷ Ibid., 26.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 33.

⁸⁹ Amiri, "The Trillion Dollar War," 176.

⁹⁰ Dunleavy and Hasson, "Kabul," 33.

⁹¹ SIGAR, "Why the Afghan Security Forces Collapsed," 6.

⁹² Dunleavy and Hasson, "Kabul," 39.

and depart.⁹³ The sudden knowledge that they would be fighting on their own⁹⁴ without US assistance shredded Afghan morale. With the departing US troops went the contractors who played a pivotal role in maintaining Afghan military hardware, particularly helicopters.⁹⁵ The 18,214 contractors in January 2021 dropped to 7,795 in July 2021. Without contractors, the AAF was progressively unable to support ANA troops against an emboldened Taliban. While certain units fought bravely⁹⁶, others crumbled. The initiative had swung firmly unto the Taliban and the government collapsed in 11 days.

Biden's team displayed an alarming lack of priorities in both distributing aid to the struggling Afghan government and somewhat organizing the withdrawal. On June 4th, Biden pledged \$266 million in humanitarian aid.⁹⁷ Antony Blinken additionally announced that it would be delivering 3.3 million COVID-19 vaccine doses on July 8th.⁹⁸ The Afghan government didn't need humanitarian aid, it needed weapons to defend itself from an invigorated Taliban that threatened to devour the country. Biden failed to preposition troops to secure HAMid Karzai Airport in Kabul where the evacuations would take place, causing needless mayhem as US troops who had been hastily rushed to secure the airport were overwhelmed by the mob of thousands of Afghans seeking to escape.⁹⁹ The Biden administration's stringent enforcement of its COVID-19 vaccination mandate and other accompanying rules were extremely detrimental to the effectiveness of US troops in Kabul.¹⁰⁰ Units deployed to Kabul understaffed since unvaccinated personnel weren't allowed to be deployed. This also meant that any Afghans hoping to be evacuated had to be vaccinated if they wanted to be accepted. The DoS, which

⁹³ Ibid., 43.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 51. US sorties in 2020 dropped by more than 3,000 down to 5,533.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 45.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 60. Afghan records from July 1 to August, 4,000 Afghan soldiers were killed fighting.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 65.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 67.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 119.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 113.

managed the evacuation, required all personnel to wear masks while on duty-in sweltering summer heat-and quarantine for two weeks if exposed. While well-intentioned, these asinine rules had the effect of hampering the evacuation by needlessly depriving the US effort of key personnel. On top of this, Biden would subsequently order the troops to admit any Afghans who claimed to be ‘family’ to Afghans who had been employed by the US or who claimed to be ‘at risk’.¹⁰¹ Biden wanted to speed up the numbers of Afghans being evacuated, heedless of proper vetting, to inflate his administration’s success rate. A toddler could have guessed what happened next. When soldiers implemented the order, they were both almost immediately mobbed and allowed hundreds of Afghans who were unqualified to be evacuated to slip through.¹⁰² All of this occurred so that Biden and his cronies could claim success to the press, hoping to drown out the rising accusations of incompetence.

Biden’s failure did not end at the US withdrawal. It continues to this day. While an exact picture is difficult to obtain, owing both to the turbulence of the withdrawal and the lack of accounting. Even before the withdrawal, the US lacked a comprehensive accounting of equipment that it had delivered to the Afghan military.¹⁰³ US records were kept on fragmented and incompatible systems belonging to the various government agencies. One estimate by SIGAR puts the value at \$7.12 billion.¹⁰⁴ The Taliban have captured the vast majority of US-supplied equipment and are actively utilizing it to enforce their rule. In addition, the US under Biden may be funding the Taliban. On top of the \$1.1 billion and \$57 million in aid that the Afghan government received shortly before it collapsed, Biden authorized the release of \$3.5 billion in frozen Afghan central bank funds for humanitarian groups operating in the country in

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 117.

¹⁰² Ibid., 126.

¹⁰³ SIGAR, “Why the Afghan Security Forces Collapsed,” 68.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 65.

2022.¹⁰⁵ While providing humanitarian aid to needy Afghans is undeniably noble, there exists high risk in a large portion-if not the outright majority-of the funds being skimmed off by the Taliban. The Taliban have reportedly figured out ways to divert humanitarian aid efforts to benefit them by, among other things, confiscating food, pressuring charities to fund Taliban-supported construction projects such as madrassas, hire Taliban members onto the charity's staff, and provide aid to individuals on lists submitted by the Taliban to charities who are Taliban officials.¹⁰⁶ To this day, the US, under Biden, has both gifted the Taliban with money to fund their oppressive rule and with equipment to crush unrest.

Biden's decision to withdraw the US from Afghanistan was an unmitigated disaster and willful betrayal of the thousands of Afghans who, trusting and believing in the US's purpose in their country, had risked their lives innumerable times to save countless American lives. It was a betrayal of everything that the 2,402 American soldiers who had laid down their lives in service to the nation had fought for.

Section II: The Marshall Plan

The end of World War Two saw Europe liberated from the despicable fascist regimes of Nazi Germany and Italy. This victory came at an incredible cost however to the continent. Not only had 39 million people been killed by the war, but the countries that the conflict had been fought upon were utterly decimated by it. The desiccated governments of Europe could not meet the needs of their citizens, with omnipresent hunger gnawing into the soul of Europe.¹⁰⁷ Germany from 1945 to 1948 was bankrupt, utterly reliant upon US aid to sustain the government and feed

¹⁰⁵ Dunleavy and Hasson, "Kabul," 238..

¹⁰⁶ Ruchi, Kumar. "Charities say Taliban intimidation diverts aid to Taliban members and causes." NPR. June 23, 2023.

<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2023/06/23/1180464339/charities-say-taliban-intimidation-diverts-aid-to-taliban-members-and-causes>.

¹⁰⁷ Amiri, "The Trillion Dollar War," 20. In the months after Germany's surrender in 1945, daily rations for Germans fell from 1,400 calories to 1,244.

German citizens.¹⁰⁸ 1945 industrial production in France and the Netherlands was 34 to 46% of prewar levels, while Germany and Italy were only at 20%.¹⁰⁹ The source from which the immense suffering spewed lay in the complete breakdown in the economic system of Europe.¹¹⁰ Farmers would not grow food for city residents if manufactured goods could not be produced in return. The physical destruction of industry, particularly in transportation¹¹¹, paled in comparison to the economic dislocation that traumatized Europe. The nationalization of private industries and disappearance of private firms decimated the national economies of European countries by draining capital from countries' economies. To resuscitate Western Europe, the US developed and implemented what is known today as the Marshall Plan from 1948 to 1952. The Marshall Plan's effectiveness derived from four characteristics; **Ownership, alignment, harmonization, results, and mutual accountability.**

The Marshall Plan was designed to allow recipient countries to take ownership over how to rebuild their economies. Their strategies, once developed, were vetted by the US and then funded through the Marshall Plan. This approach was effective as the recipient countries better comprehended local conditions and could design their programs accordingly.¹¹² One way that illustrated this characteristic was the Dollar Aid Program.¹¹³ Initially designed to meet emergency humanitarian needs-food, animal feed, fertilizer, and fuel-the program distributed a total of \$2.25 billion in grants to recipient countries to purchase these goods. As the European economies' needs progressed however, the program shifted to providing raw materials and production

¹⁰⁸ Benn Steil, "The Marshall Plan: Dawn of the Cold War," (Ebook Central Purchased: Oxford University Press, 2018). 105.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 342.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 99.

¹¹¹ Amiri, "The Trillion Dollar War," 21.

¹¹² Amiri, "The Trillion Dollar War," 192.

¹¹³ Ibid., 39.

machinery. This gave the Europeans the means to jumpstart their own economies in a way that best worked for them.

The next key component was bringing the goals of the US, the donor country, into alignment with those developed by the recipient country and utilizing local systems to further those objectives. The US didn't pick and choose what aspects of reconstruction it thought important and then bypass the European governments to achieve them.¹¹⁴ The technical assistance programs run under the Marshall Plan illustrated this point.¹¹⁵ Over \$30 million was spent during the four years to fund more than 6,000 European delegates traveling to the US to receive advice on how to increase production and develop management skills and labor behaviors that would allow the recipient countries' economies to optimally function in the long term. The program also paid for roughly 2,100 American experts to travel to Europe. The economics of the recipient countries were developed in accordance with their aims while the US provided the expertise necessary to make them work more efficiently.

The program development by the US was harmonized with that of recipient countries. Efforts by both recipient and donor countries were coordinated to reduce waste and maximize impact. This is evident in the Counterpart Funds Program.¹¹⁶ Arguably the most innovative feature of the Marshall Plan,¹¹⁷ the recipient countries were obligated to match US grant contributions dollar-for-dollar. The resulting money pool was then to be used for infrastructure development projects. The recipient countries were able to stimulate their own economies as they were both spending their own money and facilitating economic growth through infrastructure, curbing continued dependence upon America. On the US side, harmonization was achieved both

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 193.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 41.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 41.

¹¹⁷ Steil, "The Marshall Plan," 347.

by the US being the sole owner of the Marshall Plan¹¹⁸ and through the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA).¹¹⁹ Created in 1948 by Congress, the ECA was tasked with overseeing the implementation of the Marshall Plan.¹²⁰ This reduced duplication of efforts as there were no disparate US agencies who each had their own programs, instead centralizing the responsibility of executing the Plan into one government agency that all would have to go through.

From the very beginning, the Marshall Plan emphasized achieving results and enforcing mutual accountability to donor and recipient countries. Coherent and measurable goals were set to hold all parties accountable.¹²¹ The US and recipient countries each signed bilateral agreements that outlined the commitments on both countries' parts.¹²² Moreover, the ECA established offices in each recipient country to monitor the effectiveness of recovery programs. All countries agreed to meet specific goals and consented to reciprocating accountability in their efforts to meet those goals.

Stressing accountability and clear objectives contributed to the Marshall Plan's effectiveness, but other aspects of the initiative reduced waste. In particular, waste was reduced by the US setting a definitive timeline-April 1948 to September 1951, four years-and a fixed financial contribution-\$13 billion or \$138.8 billion in 2018 USD-to be distributed to the sixteen recipient countries¹²³ under the Marshall Plan.¹²⁴ By avoiding an open-ended commitment that lacked conditions attached to the grants and was distributed by multiple agencies, graft and fraud were kept at a minimum since the money flow was finite, the flow could be easily monitored through the ECA, and the funds could be pulled back if the attached conditions were violated.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 100.

¹¹⁹ Amiri, "The Trillion Dollar War," 38.

¹²⁰ Steil, "The Marshall Plan," 225.

¹²¹ Amiri, "The Trillion Dollar War," 194.

¹²² Ibid., 38.

¹²³ Steil, "The Marshall Plan," 342.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 36.

The Marshall Plan had immediate and lasting effects on reviving post-war Europe. Between 1947 and mid-1952 when the Marshall Plan ended, industrial output in recipient countries increased on average by 60%.¹²⁵ New life was breathed into a ravaged western Europe that persists to this day. The enduring success of the Marshall Plan rested upon multiple interlocking components; ownership of recipient countries over economic recovery strategies, alignment of donor and recipient countries' priorities, harmonization of program development efforts to achieve maximum success, a priority on achieving clear and realistic results, accountability on the parts of donor and recipient countries, centralizing reconstruction efforts through a single agency, attaching and enforcing conditions on aid, and setting a definitive timeline with a large one-time aid commitment that facilitated continuity in effort and discouraged embezzlement and waste.

Section III: Ukraine

The US's experiences in Afghanistan and post-World War Two Europe hold immense applicability to its current aid effort in Ukraine. As of December 2023, the US has sent \$76.8 billion dollars to Ukraine.¹²⁶ This can be broken down into \$3.9 billion-5%-for humanitarian purposes, \$26.4 billion-34%-for financial aid, where the US effectively pays the

¹²⁵ Ibid., 341.

¹²⁶ Masters, Jonathan and Merrow, Will. "How Much Aid Has the U.S. Sent Ukraine? Here Are Six Charts." Council on Foreign Relations. September 21, 2023.
<https://www.cfr.org/article/how-much-aid-has-us-sent-ukraine-here-are-six-charts>

salaries of 150,000 Ukrainian civil servants, more than 500,000 teachers, professors, schoolworkers, and government expenses that include healthcare and housing subsidies,¹²⁷ and \$46.6 billion-61%-in military aid. This includes \$18.3 billion-24%-in security assistance for training Ukrainian military personnel and providing logistics through the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, \$23.5 billion-31%-in sending US weapons and equipment to Ukraine, and \$4.7 billion-6%-in grants and loans for weapons and equipment provided through the Foreign Military Financing Program. While such large quantities of aid are justified given the desperate situation Ukraine finds itself in, there are credible fears that the US is replicating a key mistake that it committed in Afghanistan; Throwing money at a problem without adequate oversight, transparency, and a cohesive strategy for what it hopes to achieve in Ukraine

The dangers of shoveling such large quantities without much forethought are especially pronounced given that Ukraine has historically struggled with the same cancer that Afghanistan faced; corruption. Transparency International has consistently ranked Ukraine the second-most corrupt country in Europe, exacerbating concerns that the large and sudden influx of foreign aid, given with too few strings attached, will fuel corruption.¹²⁸ Even during the war, several high-profile corruption cases have surfaced. On August 11th of 2023, Zelenskyy fired all 33 heads of Ukraine's regional military recruitment centers.¹²⁹ They were fired after being exposed for selling certificates declaring a person unfit for military service for \$10,000 apiece. This followed another scandal where a Ukrainian weapons dealer was found to have inflated the prices of military equipment sold to Ukraine by using his personal network to buy and resell

¹²⁷ Mauldin, William, and Walker, Marcus. "U.S. Funding Cutoff Threatens Ukraine's Economic Stability." *Wall Street Journal*. October 3, 2023.

<https://www.wsj.com/world/europe/u-s-funding-cutoff-threatens-ukraines-economic-stability-82716679>

¹²⁸ <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/ukraine>

¹²⁹ Stern, David. "Zelensky Fires Military Recruitment Center Chiefs After Corruption Probe." *The Washington Post*, August 11, 2023.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/08/11/ukraine-military-recruitment-zelensky-corruption/>

equipment, with the funds used by the government to buy this equipment coming from European aid.¹³⁰ This case also points to the fact that the sudden outbreak of the war froze current Ukrainian anti corruption efforts and caused the Ukrainian government to loosen rules aimed at fighting corruption in the interest of rapidly equipping its army. This case also came on the heels of another scandal where the chair of Ukraine's supreme court was dismissed on May 16, 2023 for accepting a \$2.7 million bribe.¹³¹ Before that, all six deputy ministers and five regional administrators, reporting directly to Zelensky, were fired for accepting millions in bribes.¹³² The problem of corruption in Ukraine is further illustrated by USAID's reporting that costs for large-scale construction projects are routinely inflated by 30%, including 10% in kickbacks to government officials and friends.¹³³ While these cases have indeed been prosecuted or been addressed by the Ukrainian government, it points to the scale and potential for corruption that can occur. Just as in Afghanistan, military-political expedients may lead to anti corruption efforts being deprioritized in the name of supporting the war effort, not to mention the fact that corruption is caustic to any hope of continuing Ukraine's war effort.

¹³⁰ Scheck, Justin and Thomas Gibbons-Neff. *Zelensky Called Him a Criminal. Now Ukraine Calls Him for Guns and Ammo*. New York: New York Times Company, 2023.
<https://holycross.idm.oclc.org/login?auth=cas&url=https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/zelensky-called-him-criminal-now-ukraine-calls/docview/2849250762/se-2>.

¹³¹ Daniel, Victor. *The Chief of Ukraine's Supreme Court has been Detained and Accused of Taking a \$2.7 Million Bribe*. New York: New York Times Company, 2023.
<https://holycross.idm.oclc.org/login?auth=cas&url=https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/chief-ukraine-s-supreme-court-has-been-detained/docview/2814069066/se-2>.

¹³² Hayda, Julian. "President Zelenskyy Shakes Up Ukraine's Cabinet Amid Corruption Allegations." *NPR*, January 24, 2023.
<https://www.npr.org/2023/01/24/1150943435/president-zelenskyy-shakes-up-ukraines-cabinet-amid-corruption-allegations>

¹³³ USAID. *Dekleptification Guide: Seizing Windows of Opportunity to Dismantle Kleptocracy*. September, 2022.
<https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-02/USAID-Dekleptification-Guide.pdf>, 55.

The flaws existing in Ukraine are being compounded by mistakes being made in the US. Foremost among these is a lack of proper messaging, oversight, and strategy by the Biden administration. Biden's failure in messaging is a key reason why resistance to further US aid to Ukraine has gained such traction.¹³⁴ American citizens, already facing immediate concerns such as high prices for goods such as groceries and fuel, are frustrated to see that the US is spending billions of dollars and they don't know where it's going. To them, the US is throwing billions into a black hole. By not explaining what the aid is going towards and the goals that the US is pursuing, Biden makes it appear that the US will be perpetually mired in a conflict without any clear goal in mind. This is comparable to Afghanistan, where the four presidents never articulated a clear desired endstate for Afghanistan and how they hoped to achieve it. This also contrasts starkly with the Marshall Plan, where Truman definitely explained why the program was necessary, where the US aid was going, and what its goals were. If Biden doesn't eminently act to ameliorate this mistake, it will continue to damage prospects to deliver future aid.

The messaging debacle is compounded by an oversight flaw that is ominously similar to that in Afghanistan. Thus far, each US agency has relied upon its own Inspector General (IG) to track the aid that it has provided. With fourteen to seventeen US agencies operating in Ukraine alongside the more than thirty countries and international organizations, this is clearly inadequate and efforts to track and coordinate aid can end up being, "like herding cats," as John Sopko put it.¹³⁵ While the DoD IG can track its own aid efforts, it can't look at USAID's programs and vice versa. This can be compared to the aid situation in Afghanistan. Multiple donor countries, each with their own programs and none of them coordinating their efforts, often wound up duplicating

¹³⁴ Charlotte Cremin, interview by author, Washington DC, November 20, 2023.

¹³⁵ Echols, Connor, "Afghanistan watchdog: 'You're gonna see pilferage' of Ukraine aid." Responsible Statecraft, April 21, 2023.
<https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2023/04/21/afghanistan-watchdog-youre-gonna-see-pilferage-of-ukraine-aid/>

each other's work and wasting money as a result, not to mention making it far easier for corrupt actors to enrich themselves. The Marshall Plan significantly diverged from the current situation in Ukraine, with one agency, the ECA, overseeing all aid programs, with much greater results than those given in Afghanistan as a result.

Messaging flaws and oversight defects point to an apparent lack of overarching American strategy in Ukraine. Biden and his cohorts have thus far failed to articulate what they hope to achieve in Ukraine, with conflicting messages from Biden that range from simply helping Ukraine defend itself to Biden stating that Putin can't be allowed to remain in power. This deficiency of strategy opens the door to mission creep and significantly increases the chance of the war escalating to involve the US. Putin has already made it clear that any attempt by Ukraine to retake Crimea-something that is widely seen as divorced from reality by military experts for the time being-are red lines which would cause Russia to use nuclear weapons on Ukraine, which could draw the US into the war. Biden already refused a demand from Zelensky for NATO to establish a no-fly zone over Ukraine, which was a fairly blatant Ukrainian attempt to chain-gang the US into the war. Nonetheless, escalatory US rhetoric could incite Ukraine to recklessly employ US weapons that could bring about a serious US-Russia confrontation. An ambiguous strategy echoes US experiences in Afghanistan where the US never decided what its goals in Afghanistan were, while the Marshall Plan demonstrates what the US, guided by a concise strategy, is capable of doing. Biden's failure to develop a cogent strategy is an astounding error that is sinking his own boat while placing the US in a precarious geopolitical situation.

I do think that there is a way out of the ditch that the US has dug for itself. To do so, Congress must step up and fulfill its congressionally mandated oversight role by asking hard questions and demanding clear answers. For a start, it could demand a dedicated Inspector

General possessing the same powers and structure as SIGAR. Such proposals have already been made by John Sopko and Sen. Josh Hawley.¹³⁶ This would allow the US to adequately coordinate and audit aid programs to minimize duplication and waste. Next, mirroring the Marshall Plan's Counterpart Funds Program, Congress could impose requirements that European allies match US aid contributions to ensure that Europe shoulders the burden as well. Congress also shouldn't allow Biden to use legal loopholes to dodge any spending restrictions in the form of emergency war spending or overseas contingency operations funds that were routinely abused by presidents to skirt Congressional oversight in funding post-9/11 conflicts. With the \$33 trillion national debt looming large in American's minds, it's imperative to assure American citizens that the national debt is being taken seriously and that Congress's oversight efforts have teeth. Aid supplements to Ukraine should receive standalone votes and not be allowed to be slipped into bills. It is also imperative that Congress demand for any new authorizations and distribution of aid to Ukraine be tied to the administration providing monthly unclassified reporting on topline information on US personnel in Ukraine. In Afghanistan, the number and activities of US personnel were routinely classified. Doing this would allow Congress to better gauge the risks that subsequent US actions face and if they're justified. US rhetoric must be tamped down, signaling that its aims are limited and defensive. Not doing so could risk encouraging reckless Ukrainian actions. Congress should refrain from providing weapons that carry high risks of escalation, such as terminal high altitude area defense batteries. Congress should stipulate that Biden make clear to Ukraine that US aid isn't to be used in efforts to retake Crimea and that aid would be frozen if Ukraine violates these restrictions. Ukraine has the right to fight the war for as long as it wants and to determine its own objectives, but the US likewise has the right to determine how its aid

136

<https://www.hawley.senate.gov/hawley-introduces-new-bill-create-special-inspector-general-ukraine-assistance>

will be used and what Ukrainian activities it's willing to support. Biden must be reminded that, as President, his first responsibility is to the American people. His administration must be clear on its goals to Congress and American citizens. To make sure he follows through on this, Congress should require Biden to produce a detailed Ukraine strategy that clearly articulates the desired endstate, the cost that will be incurred, and how it will facilitate eventual peace negotiations. Rep. Warren Davidson proposed an amendment calling for just that.¹³⁷The US has sent \$76.8 billion to Ukraine without articulating what that \$76.8 billion is supposed to achieve. Failing to resolve this dilemma risks inviting the same waste and fraud that helped undermine the US effort in Afghanistan and invites the scenario where the US is drawn into war against Russia, a scenario with nuclear consequences for all.

Section IV: Conclusion

With the conclusion of the US intervention in Afghanistan, some might argue that the US should dust itself off, move on, and focus on current issues. They may assert that the US failure in Afghanistan indicates that there is nothing that can be learned from America's experience in Afghanistan, that it stands on its own as a tragic mistake in American foreign policy that is best forgotten. Nothing could be further from the truth. America's intervention in Afghanistan stands as the most recent addition to the rich tableau of US aid and intervention abroad, encompassing, but not limited to, the Marshall Plan. These three cases stand as prominent illustrations of both American successes and blunders abroad. Extensive research conducted by the author points to the US failure in Afghanistan stemming from a lack of ownership by the Afghan government over how and where foreign aid was spent, combined with an ill-defined mission on the part of the US, proved cancerous to the US effort abroad. From these two original errors, all other defects grew; lack of accountability and transparency, comprehensive long-term planning,

¹³⁷ https://amendments-rules.house.gov/amendments/DAVIOH_048_xml230630095131328.pdf

perpetually rotating personnel, and an enduring deficiency in understanding the socio-political environment of Afghanistan. Much can be learned from the Marshall Plan, where a coherent plan was drawn up that emphasized accountability on both parties' parts, recipient countries developed strategies to achieve economic development that were adapted to the realities of their individual nations, and donor countries adequately funded those plans. However, flawed the US intervention in Afghanistan was, it had noble intentions. It is important to keep in mind one of the first truths of history; nothing is inevitable. The humiliating fall of the Afghan government in 2021 and the subsequent disastrous US withdrawal were not pre-ordained. Conscious decisions and actions by individuals produced the outcome witnessed in 2021.

Works Cited:

- Amiri, Abid. *The Trillion Dollar War: The U.S. Effort to Rebuild Afghanistan, 1999-2021*. Quantico: Marine Corps University Press, 2021.
- Barfield, Thomas. *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.
- Loyn, David. *The Long War: The Inside Story of America and Afghanistan Since 9/11*. New York: St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2021.
- Whitlock, Craig. *The Afghanistan Papers: A Secret History of the War*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021.
- Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *What We Need to Learn: Lessons from Twenty Years of Afghanistan Reconstruction*, Akins Harrison, Clift Will, Kane Jordan, Kane Paul, Rubin Matthew, Weggeland Daniel, Young David, Condee-Padunov Nikolai, Content Tracy, David Jason, Lim Vong, Windrem Joseph. SIGAR-21-46-LL, Arlington: SIGAR, 2022. GPO, <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/lessonslearned/SIGAR-21-46-LL.pdf> (accessed Oct 8, 2023).
- Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Why The Afghan Security Forces Collapsed*, Cunningham James, Young David, Andriychuk Anna, Earnest Michael, Gillis April, Jawas Ahmad, McKean Kaye, Misencik James, Rababy Sarah, Rubin Matthew, Alyssa Teddy. SIGAR 23-16-IP, Arlington: SIGAR, 2022. GPO, <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/evaluations/SIGAR-23-16-IP.pdf> (accessed Oct 8 2023).

- Steil, Benn. *The Marshall Plan : Dawn of the Cold War* Benn Steil. First edition. Ebook Central Purchased. Oxford University Press, 2018.
<https://search-ebscohost-com.holycross.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=c992&site=eds-live&scope=site> (accessed Oct 8 2023).
- Malkasian, Carter. *The American War in Afghanistan; A History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021.
- "How Obama Came to Plan for 'Surge' in Afghanistan." New York Times Company.
- Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, "G222 AIRCRAFT PROGRAM IN AFGHANISTAN: ABOUT \$549 MILLION SPENT ON FAULTY AIRCRAFT AND NO ONE HELD ACCOUNTABLE," Sopko, John. SIGAR-21-21SP, Arlington: SIGAR, February 2021. GPO, <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/special%20projects/SIGAR-21-21-SP.pdf?emci=61503ca4-0f81-eb11-85aa-00155d43c992&emdi=57316f21-9881-eb11-85aa-00155d43c992&ceid=194289> (accessed October 20, 2023).
- Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, "Afghan Air Forces: The U.S. has Reduced its Advising for Vetting AAF & SMW Recruits & the Afghan Ministry of Defense does not have the Resources needed to Vet all Recruits or Personnel", Sopko, John. SIGAR-21-03-OR, Arlington: SIGAR, April 2022. GPO, <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/audits/SIGAR-21-03-AR.pdf> (accessed October 29, 2023).

- Cunningham, James, Windrem, Joseph. “What Happened to the Afghan Air Force?” *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*. January 7, 2022.
<https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2891279/what-happened-to-the-afghan-air-force/> (accessed October 29, 2023).
- Zerden, Alex. “Establishing a Humanitarian Financial Corridor for Afghanistan.” *Lawfare*. November 15, 2021.
<https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/establishing-humanitarian-financial-corridor-afghanistan> (accessed October 29, 2023).
- Dunleavy, Jerry and Hasson, James. *Kabul: The Untold Story of Biden’s Fiasco and the American Warriors Who Fought to the End*. New York: Hachette Book Group, 2023.
- Kumar, Ruchi. “Charities say Taliban intimidation diverts aid to Taliban members and causes.” *NPR*. June 23, 2023.
<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2023/06/23/1180464339/charities-say-taliban-intimidation-diverts-aid-to-taliban-members-and-causes> (Accessed October 30, 2023).
- Bowman, Tom. “Corruption in Afghanistan offers lessons for billions going to Ukraine.” *NPR*. August 17, 2023.
<https://www.npr.org/2023/08/17/1194151502/corruption-in-afghanistan-offers-lessons-for-billions-going-to-ukraine>
- Stern, David. “Zelensky Fires Military Recruitment Center Chiefs After Corruption Probe.” *The Washington Post*, August 11, 2023.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/08/11/ukraine-military-recruitment-zelensky-corruption/>

- Scheck, Justin and Thomas Gibbons-Neff. *Zelensky Called Him a Criminal. Now Ukraine Calls Him for Guns and Ammo*. New York: New York Times Company, 2023.

<https://holycross.idm.oclc.org/login?auth=cas&url=https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/zelensky-called-him-criminal-now-ukraine-calls/docview/2849250762/se-2>.

- Daniel, Victor. *The Chief of Ukraine's Supreme Court has been Detained and Accused of Taking a \$2.7 Million Bribe*. New York: New York Times Company, 2023.

<https://holycross.idm.oclc.org/login?auth=cas&url=https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/chief-ukraine-s-supreme-court-has-been-detained/docview/2814069066/se-2>.

- Hayda, Julian. "President Zelenskyy Shakes Up Ukraine's Cabinet Amid Corruption Allegations." *NPR*, January 24, 2023.

<https://www.npr.org/2023/01/24/1150943435/president-zelenskyy-shakes-up-ukraines-cabinet-amid-corruption-allegations> (Accessed Dec 1, 2023).

- USAID. *Dekleptification Guide: Seizing Windows of Opportunity to Dismantle Kleptocracy*. September, 2022.

<https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-02/USAID-Dekleptification-Guide.pdf>

- Masters, Jonathan and Merrow, Will. "How Much Aid Has the U.S. Sent Ukraine? Here Are Six Charts." Council on Foreign Relations. September 21,

2023.

<https://www.cfr.org/article/how-much-aid-has-us-sent-ukraine-here-are-six-charts>