

COMMEMORATING THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF 9/11 ATTACKS

A day of remembrance, a day of reckoning

BLACK, WHITE AND GREY



ALI RIAZ

This is not how the day marking the 20th anniversary of the al-Qaeda attacks on the United States was expected to be commemorated, but unfortunately, the day has turned out to be not only a day of remembrance, but also of reckoning.

Like any other year, commemorative events remembering those who lost their lives in the horrific attacks will be held today, but the discussion in the wake of the day has been dominated by the recent events in Afghanistan. The most innocuous question has been: How have we come to this point? Detractors of the US and conscientious observers of US policies agree that the country has lost another war. For observers, the questions are how and why. It is not only the Afghanistan war they are referring to, but to a larger picture: Has the US lost the war it fought against terrorism for the past two decades? Did the war that President George W Bush began nine days after that attack in 2001 conclude with the fall of Kabul to the Taliban on August 15, 2021? For the past decade, there has been intense discussion on the failure of the war, and the chaotic withdrawal from Kabul has become the most obvious symbol of that failure.

George W Bush, referring to the attackers, said on September 12, 2001: "The United States will use all resources to conquer this enemy. We will rally the world. We will be patient. We will focus, and we will be steadfast in our determination. This battle will take time and resolve. But make no mistake about it, we will win." Indeed, in the past two decades, four US presidents—George W Bush, Barack Obama, Donald Trump and Joe Biden—remained steadfast in their defence of this "war", and there was no dearth of resources. The US has already spent at least USD 2 trillion, and another USD 4 trillion

will be needed in the future to deal with the consequences of the war. At one point, most countries in the world extended their sympathy and support to the US. But it cannot be claimed that it has won the War on Terror.

It is important to recall that the nature and scope of this war was neither clearly stated, nor did one know how someone was being identified as an "enemy." In such an instance, "win" remains as elusive as the accomplishment of mission. The question raised in the September-October issue of *Foreign Affairs* is important: What would it mean to win?

Terrorism is a strategy, which can be adopted by anyone at any point; yet, a war was declared against it by the US and its allies, leaving it to our imagination as to what is meant by the "War on Terror." To say that it was ambiguous is an understatement; it turned out to be an action to serve the geopolitical and economic interests of a few countries. That's why defence contractors profited from the US presence in Afghanistan more than the Afghans. There has been no clear answer in the past two decades as to what the strategy of the asymmetrical warfare should be. In Afghanistan, the war against terror was transformed from counterterrorism to counterinsurgency, and then to the ambitious nation-building project. It is a classic example of a mission drift.

Analysing the War on Terror exclusively through the experience of the Afghanistan war will be incomplete, if not erroneous. It is under the pretext of the War on Terror that Iraq was invaded, violating international laws and norms. Besides, there have been indirect military interventions—drone strikes, for example—in various countries against "terrorists," which have cost the lives of innocent people making these attacks counterproductive.

The US and the UK were not the only partners of the so-called Global War on Terror (GWOT). Many countries were quick to join the bandwagon as their rulers saw it fit their own interests. In its name, rulers of various

countries, particularly the authoritarians, have grabbed more power, increased surveillance over common citizens, and enacted laws limiting the fundamental rights.

On September 20, 2001, George Bush declared the war and drew a line in the sand: "Every nation in every region now has a decision to make—either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." The seed of a long-lasting division was sowed with these words. This division didn't stay within the purview of US foreign policy; instead, it permeated

rulers, many with dubious track records, have used and continue to use this idea. No matter how much they and their supporters oppose US foreign policy, no matter how loudly they speak out against the alleged War on Terror, their penchant for such policy is easily discernible. Their everyday rhetoric and behaviour reveal their preference for a contrived division, a tendency to construct enemies, and an eagerness to silence dissent. In this way, the concept of War on Terror has gained a life of its own, and assumed different

transnational terrorist organisations, as these measures have helped them recruit new foot soldiers. The rise of Islamic State, in Iraq in 2014, is a case in point. This is not to suggest that such terrorist organisations were absent prior to 2001. The September 11 attacks and the previously growing strength of al-Qaeda, building bases in Afghanistan, providing training to recruits from different countries and launching attacks on US interests in various countries since 1993, prove that terrorist activities were a reality on the ground. However, whether their strengths were overrated, the measures taken against them were proportional to the threat they posed, and the adopted strategy was correct or not is an open question and deserves criticism.

Some argue that the GWOT has decimated al-Qaeda as a centralised organisation capable of mounting large-scale attacks on US interests. Various violent organisations inspired by al-Qaeda ideology have emerged in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia, but they do not pose any imminent threat to the security of the US. This is portrayed as a success. Another argument is that the US has not been a victim of any major terrorist attack since 9/11. But are these successes worth the money spent and the 7,000 American lives lost in Afghanistan and Iraq?

Twenty years after 9/11, a new reality has emerged in the wake of the humiliating defeat of the US in Afghanistan. After the attacks in 2001, we became accustomed to describing the present era as "post-9/11." Perhaps in 2021, we are entering a new era which can be described as "post-post-9/11." The future role of the US in global politics and the geo-strategic global game will be partly shaped by what it learns from the events, strategies, and failures of the last two decades. Without the reckoning, it will be difficult for the US to move forward. September 11, 2021 should be the point of departure of the reckoning.

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FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

society. Islamophobia, which had existed for long within the US society, reached a new height. The loyalty and patriotism of Muslims were questioned. In the long run, this attitude has contributed to the pernicious divide in US politics, the rise of white supremacist extremism, and anti-Muslim hatred.

The notion of such division has proliferated beyond the boundaries of the US. Other

forms in different countries to justify the violation of democracy and human rights. Whether terrorists exist in society has made little difference, and where violent extremists have been present, it has been used as an excuse to give rise to a culture of fear through legal and extralegal measures.

The measures taken to combat terrorism have become a blessing to domestic and

Winners and losers of the West's 'forever wars'

THE OVERTON WINDOW



ERESH OMAR JAMAL

TODAY marks 20 years of the 9/11 attacks on the US masterminded by Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda and a bunch of "ragheads" (as angry racist US

soldiers called them) sitting in some cave in Afghanistan, as per the West's dubious official narrative of what transpired on this day. Even though there are still a thousand unanswered questions about what really happened, the events of 9/11 and what followed are undoubtedly the most important world-shaping occurrences of the 21st century.

It significantly changed the West's foreign policy (particularly the US) and marked the start of the War on Terror—an odd turn really, since al-Qaeda was of its own making. Hillary Clinton, for example, when she was the US secretary of state, once asked during her testimony to Congress why the US was in Afghanistan fighting the same people that they once funded to fight the Soviet Union—namely the Mujahideen.

The first country the West invaded in its War on Terror was Afghanistan. Two long decades later, it has finally ended its occupation of that country, with mixed results, even according to its most ardent supporters and unapologetic war-hawks—including politicians on both sides of the Atlantic, experts and media personalities across the partisan line.

According to the latest report by Brown University's "Costs of War" Project, the US-led war on terror has killed nearly one million people globally and cost more than USD 8 trillion. Even though the death toll in the report pales in comparison to another estimate from 2015 done by the Nobel Prize-winning Physicians for Social Responsibility—which said more than one million people were killed both indirectly and directly in wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan alone, never mind other places like Libya, Syria, etc—it is still significant.

Meanwhile, the economic costs tallied by the "Costs of War" report include USD 2.3 trillion spent by the US government on military operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan, USD 2.1 trillion in Iraq and Syria, and USD 355 billion in Somalia and other regions of Africa, with an additional USD 1.1 trillion spent on domestic security measures in the US since 2001, bringing direct expenditures from the war on terror at home and abroad to an astronomical USD 5.8 trillion. Moreover, according to an earlier report by the same group, the wars the US government has fought since 9/11 have forced at least 37 million people—perhaps as many as 59 million—to flee their homes. In Afghanistan and Iraq alone, the total number of displaced people reached 14.5 million. Alongside

that, the report included 3.7 million Pakistanis, 1.7 million Filipinos, 4.2 million Somalis, 4.4 million Yemenis, 1.2 million Libyans and 7.1 million Syrians who were displaced.

So, what did the US, the people living in these regions, and the world get in return?

Well, the US spent trillions of dollars of its own taxpayers' income, became a surveillance state—as exposed by NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden—and surrendered the constitutional rights of its own citizens. Also, in the so-called pursuit of "exporting democracy," it sacrificed its own democratic ideals, such as granting US presidents the power to go to war without congressional approval. US soldiers, along with soldiers of other NATO countries, committed all sorts of atrocities worthy of being called war crimes, including torture—as exposed by CIA whistleblower John Kiriakou. Its troops killed hundreds of thousands of people in the countries they occupied, such as Afghanistan and Iraq—as exposed by documents published by WikiLeaks in their "Afghan War Diary" and "Iraq War

the world, mainly as a reactionary expression of anger against the violent conduct of the West. The Islamic State, which was largely created by the US invasion of Iraq, at one point controlled vast swaths of territory in Iraq, Syria and Libya, only to be pushed back by the West's seemingly sworn enemies such as the Assad government in Syria, Iran and Russia. Evidence has even come out showing that the West actually funded some of these radical elements for geopolitical gains against its rivals.

The destabilisation of countries—particularly in the Middle East—has led to mass migrations of people, and the European migrant crisis that we witnessed a few years ago was a direct result of the West's interventionist policy. These migrations, in turn, have resulted in increased tensions between different cultures, people, and religions, and have possibly supplied even more fuel for future fires.

So, from that perspective, has the War on Terror and Western interventionism been a failure? Well, it depends on your definition of success and failure.

Following the recent US withdrawal



The US-led War on Terror has killed nearly one million people globally and cost more than USD 8 trillion.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

Logs"—and then lied about it. According to a 2011 poll, six in 10 Americans believed that the US had weakened its economy by overspending in its responses to the 9/11 attacks. And two out of every three Americans perceived that since 9/11, US power and influence in the world declined.

The people in these regions, needless to say, suffered tremendously. Thousands of people died and millions were injured. Those who made it out alive couldn't possibly do so without suffering some sort of major trauma.

In Afghanistan, the Taliban has now once again returned to power and are better armed, thanks to US-made weapons. In Iraq, one poll from 2016 found that more than 90 percent of young people considered the US an enemy of their country. Peoples' sentiment was found to be similar in other countries, and they believed that the West had destabilised Syria, Somalia and Libya.

Islamic extremism has only increased and spread out all across

from Afghanistan, a 2011 video clip of WikiLeaks' founder Julian Assange went viral. In it, the now incarcerated journalist—who, by the way, is yet to be convicted of any crime, but has published evidence that could possibly implicate Western leaders of being responsible for sanctioning war crimes—said that the US goal in Afghanistan is not to completely subjugate the country. "The goal is to use Afghanistan to wash money out of the tax bases of the US and Europe through Afghanistan and back into the hands of a transnational security elite. The goal is an endless war, not a successful war."

From that perspective, the War on Terror has been a success. According to The Intercept, over the past 20 years, returns on stocks of the five biggest US defence contractors—Boeing, Raytheon, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, and General Dynamics—outperformed the overall stock market by 58 percent. "A USD 10,000 investment in stock evenly split across those five companies on the day in 2001 that then President George

W Bush signed the authorisation preceding the US invasion would be worth USD 97,295 this week." The Intercept reported on August 21. These numbers, according to journalist Jon Schwarz, "suggest that it is incorrect to conclude that the Taliban's immediate takeover of Afghanistan upon the US's departure means that the Afghanistan

War was a failure." "On the contrary, from the perspective of some of the most powerful people in the US, it may have been an extraordinary success. Notably, the boards of directors of all five defence contractors include retired top-level military officers," he says.

For everyone else, however, the War on Terror has been a mostly painful and costly disaster, proving the words of Major General Smedley Butler—one of the most decorated soldiers in all US history—true: "War is a racket."

Eresh Omar Jamal is a member of the editorial team at *The Daily Star*. His Twitter handle is: @EreshOmarJamal

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Request for Expression of Interest (EOI)

Ministry/Division	: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare/Medical Education and Family Welfare Division			
Agency	: National Institute of Population Research and Training (NIPORT)			
Procuring Entity Name	: Training Research and Development (TRD) Operational Plan of 4th HPNSP, National Institute of Population Research and Training (NIPORT), Medical Education and Family Welfare Division, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW)			
Procuring Entity Code	: 16205224108800			
Procuring Entity District	: Dhaka			
Expression of Interest for Selection of	: Research/Consulting Firm (National)			
Title of Service	: NPS 24: Procurement of Services for Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS) 2021-22			
EOI Ref. No.	: NIPORT/Research-1006/BDHS (Part-1)/BDHS 2021-22/2020-423			
Date	: 08/09/2021			
KEY INFORMATION				
Procurement Sub-Method	: Quality and Cost Based Selection (QCBS)			
FUNDING INFORMATION				
Budget and Source of Funds	: Development Budget RPA (GOB)			
PARTICULAR INFORMATION				
Project/Programme Name	: Training, Research and Development (TRD) Operational Plan of 4th HPNSP			
Last Date/EOI Closing Date and Time	: 26/09/2021, 2:00 PM			
INFORMATION FOR APPLICANT				
Brief Description of Assignment	<p>a) Broad objective of the above mentioned package: NPS 24: Collect and produce clean data set for the 2021-22 Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS) from a national representative sample of Bangladesh.</p> <p>b) NIPORT now invites eligible research/consulting firms to submit their Expression of Interest (EOI) for the above service package. Interested consultants (firms) are invited to provide information indicating that they are qualified to provide the services (brochures, description of similar assignments, experience in similar operating conditions, availability of appropriate professional qualification and experience among staff.).</p> <p>Special Instructions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Incomplete/partial EOIs will be rejected. - Interested firm (s) must provide focused information demonstrating that they are qualified to perform the services. - EOI proposal should not exceed 150 pages. - Authority may visit concern offices (if necessary). - Firm (s) must submit valid registration certificate, TIN certificate, and VAT Certificate. - The authority reserves the right to accept or reject any or all the EOIs or annul the EOI process at any stage without assigning any reason(s) whatsoever and without incurring any liability to the affected applicant(s). - Subject to the approval and availability of fund under TRD-Operational Plan of 4th HPNSP, the assigned package will be implemented. <p>c) A consultant (research firm) will be selected in accordance with the Public Procurement Act 2006 and Public Procurement Regulations 2008 (with latest amendments) issued by the GOB.</p> <p>d) Interested consulting firm(s) is required to submit their EOI along with relevant supporting documents (2 copies) in a sealed envelope to the address indicated below by 26 September 2021, 2:00 pm.</p> <p>e) Detailed description of services will be given in the TOR to the short-listed consultants (research firms).</p>			
Experience, Resources and Delivery Capacity Required	<p>The firm shall have at least 15 years of experience in conducting health, demographic and population related surveys.</p> <p>The EOIs would be evaluated on the basis of the following aspects:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Age of business of consultant (firm): Duration involved in doing health, demographic and population related research/survey activities b) Availability of key professional staff: list of key personnel & professionals, their qualifications and experience, list of management staff, their qualifications and experience c) Total turnover of the consultant (firm) in the last three years minimum Tk. 1000.00 lakhs (with supporting bank statement) d) Experience of the consultant (firm) in similar field: conducting large scale (minimum 20,000 sample) national surveys in health, demographic and population in Bangladesh (with supporting documents) e) Experience of the consultant (firm) in other works/assignments: Experience in conducting other activities in similar process f) Support service of the consultant (firm): HR, Office Space, Training Facilities, Bank Solvency (with mentioning amount), Equipment's etc. <p>Consultants (research firm) may associate to enhance their qualifications but should clearly mention whether the association is in the form of a "Joint-Venture" or of "Sub-Consultancy". In the case of a joint venture, all members of such "association" should have real and well-defined inputs to the assignment and it is preferable to limit the total number of firms including the associates to a maximum of two.</p>			
Other Details (if applicable)	: Submission of EOI for each of the package must be done in closed envelop bearing the name and address of the applicant, Title and No. of EOI and date and addressed to the issuing authority separately.			
Association with foreign firms is	: Encouraged			
EOI Detail information				
Ref No	Phasing of Services	Location	Start Date	Completion Date
NPS 24	Single	Dhaka	November 2021	December 2022
PROCURING ENTITY DETAILS				
Name of Official Inviting EOI	: Mohammed Ahsanul Alam			
Designation of Official Inviting EOI	: Director, Research (In Charge) and Evaluation Specialist.			
Address of Official Inviting EOI	: National Institute of Population Research and Training (NIPORT), Medical Education and Family Welfare Division, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 13/1 Sheikh Shaheb Bazar, Azimpur, Dhaka-1205			
Contact details of Official Inviting EOI	: Phone: 02-58611206, Email: directorresearch.niport@gmail.com , alam.niport@gmail.com			
The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject any or all EOI proposals and to the procurement process at any stage without showing any reason.				

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