

**UPDATED (Third) EPILOGUE TO NEW EDITION OF  
*UNHOLY WARS*** (This replaces earlier versions supplied to foreign  
publishers)

**(January 3, 2002)**

The lessons of the second Afghanistan war of our time, triggered by the worst terrorist attack in remembered history, have proved numerous and bitter for all concerned. These lessons—military, political, historical and above all human—or most of them, were similar to those of the 1979-89 war and *après guerre*: the dangers of using fractious mercenaries as proxies; the hostility, indifference or uncertain support of many of the less-favored classes among the world's over one billion Muslims; the failures of Western intelligence to understand the Islamist terrorist movements, or accurately to predict their actions.

Balanced against this was the obvious relief, joy and euphoria of Afghan people, especially women and their children, at being freed from the cruel and unnatural social constraints and repressive laws applied by the Taliban, as the allies successively liberated larger and larger regions from the Taliban yoke in the early winter of 2001-2002. People literally danced for joy; returned to their own music for entertainment; turned on their television and radio sets; dusted off works of art which had portrayed living beings. Men shaved their beards and got haircuts; many women discarded their all-covering *burqahs* and returned to teaching nursing and other jobs forbidden to them by the Taliban since the early 1990s.

At the start of the fall and winter military campaign against Afghanistan's Taliban rulers, in October 2001, President George W. Bush and his senior advisers hoped, and told the American and world public, that it could destroy Usama bin Laden, his Al-Qaida terrorist central and the Taliban regime that protected them largely through a series of air strikes applied with state-of-the-art high technology, and with an almost total lack of American casualties. This strategy had been applied in the Gulf war against Iraq in 1991 and the Kosovo war against Serbia in 1999. It was revived, with the addition of commando raids and support of anti-Taliban opposition groups in Afghanistan. In Washington and apparently in London, though with lesser enthusiasm in other capitals participating in the coalition, such as Islamabad, Riyadh,

Paris, Berlin or Rome, it was expected that thousands of fighters would defect from Taliban ranks.

This was not the case at the start of the war in October, but it did happen later. In November, thousands of new tribal volunteers from Pakistan tried to flock across the border to swell Taliban ranks. But after the fall of Mazar –I-Sharif and Kabul itself, as well as Herat and Jallalabad, to the proxy forces of the Afghan Northern Alliance renamed the National Union, the allied noose tightened around other Taliban strongholds such as Kandahar, and Kunduz, the last Taliban bastion in the north, as the Taliban retreated and these strongholds too fell, leaving US Special Forces and Marines, with their Afghan allies, to probe Al Qaida's presumed hideouts in the mountainous Tora Bora caves and caverns, near the Pakistani frontier..

Everywhere, a thunderous bombing campaign by many US and a few British warplanes softened the enemy resistance. And slowly, the steel of the allies tightened around the presumed hideouts of Usama bin Laden and his Al-Qaida movement, as thousands of Taliban fighters deserted, changed sides, or simply shaved their beards, hid their weapons, and merged with the local populations. Those who remained in towns like Kunduz and tried to fight to the end were the foreign mercenaries of the Taliban and bin Laden: Pakistanis, Arabs, Indonesians, Uighurs and other Muslims who had flocked to the banner of jihad from all parts of the world.

What was lacking, following the first military allied military successes of November, was the absence of a widely-based coalition government, composed of minority Tajikm Uzbek or Hazara components, as well as the majority Pushtun element which had formed the tribal backbone of the Taliban. Efforts under the aegis of the United Nations, led by the highly able Algerian diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi, sought to fashion such a government, with many political cooks stirring the Afghan broth, from the 87-year-old, exiled former king, Zaher Shah and his entourage, to the Pushtun and other warlords who became regional governors and village headmen, as the Taliban retreated. By December an interim government had been agreed upon at a conference in Bonn, Germany, attended by representatives of all the main Afghan ethnic and tribal factions. It began to function in Kabul, protected in part by a peacekeeping force sponsored by the UN and led by a contingent of several hundred British troops.

The tunnels, caves and the homes of ordinary Afghan citizens, often hardly to be distinguished from the fighters, often proved to be as tough to single out, penetrate or destroy as the Russian invaders had found them to be in the 1979-89 war. Warned by allied and some of its own intelligence experts, the US Defense Department planners agreed to accept aid, including troop contingents it had initially shunned from such NATO allies as France, Germany and Italy. Even Japan stretched its constitutional constraints against involving its Self-Defense Forces, committed since its defeat in World War II in 1945 not to undertake military actions abroad, sent a small force of warships and planeloads of humanitarian aid.

Arab and Muslim public opinion had opposed the bombing campaign from the start, especially when it became apparent that no bombing pause was intended during the month-long Ramadan Muslim holy month of fasting, which ended just before Christmas 2001. However, the street demonstrations and other public opposition eased as the allied hi-tech military campaign succeeded. European public opinion, though gratified by the November successes against the Taliban and al-Qaida, had been at first appalled at the vast movement of millions of often starving and freezing refugees displaced by the war, and the daily pummeling of an impoverished, country, already devastated by over 20 years of war and four years of punishing drought. The US administration, relieved at the outpouring of international humanitarian aid, also accepted the European offers of military aid, partly to show that the global anti-terrorist coalition demanded by President Bush was not just a myth.

. It was disclosed that not only US Special military Forces were operating on the ground in Afghanistan, but also that the CIA's own paramilitary units had entered the fray, carrying out reconnaissance, behind-the-lines spying and other covert operations. The CIA suffered its first battle casualty in the new war, when a CIA officer was killed in a revolt of Al Qaida war prisoners captured during the fighting at Mazar-I-Sharif.

However, the CIA's pre-war prescience about what was to come on the terrorist front had left much to be desired. For some reason unknown at this writing, for example, little or no heed was paid in Washington to an ominous warning passed on by King Abdallah's royal Jordanian intelligence service. Sometime during the late summer, United States officials, and separately, German intelligence contacts in Amman were advised that the assiduous Jordanian service had heard that there would shortly be a "major attack "on American soil, involving airplanes, though hijacking

was not mentioned. The Jordanian service, which as we saw in this book, had been relentlessly tracking other Islamist terrorist and the specifically Al-Qaida conspiracies for years, had even learned the Arabic code name used by the conspirators for the operations: *Al Urous al-Kabir*, or “The Grand Wedding.” Which US service received this alert, and how it was passed up the chain of command in Washington (if it was), is unknown to the author at this writing. Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder’s German government in Berlin did not take it seriously.

Not that red flags of danger had not been displayed inside the United States: In March 2001, a US government commission, chaired by two former Senators, Gary Hart, a Colorado Democrat and Warren Rudman, the New Hampshire Republican, published a 146-page book titled *Road Map for National Security: Imperative for Change*. It called for creation of the cabinet-level post of Homeland Security-- which was done by President Bush after September 11-- and warned:

“ The combination of unconventional weapons proliferation with the persistence of international terrorism will end the relative invulnerability of the United States homeland to catastrophic attack.” The report also correctly prophesied ; “A direct attack against American citizens on American soil is likely over the next quarter century. The risk is not only death and destruction but also a demoralization that could undermine US global leadership. In the face of this threat, our nation has no coherent or integrated governmental structure.”

Outside the United States, a bewildering array of at least 12 different and often competing intelligence agencies reported on every conceivable aspect of military, political, economic, social and even cultural trends. The ubiquitous National Security Agency (NSA) in Fort Meade, Maryland, cooperating with similar but much smaller corresponding agencies of Britain Canada, Australia and New Zealand, trolled through the world’s electronic communications. But the conspirators preparing the September 2001 attacks had apparently managed to evade detection even by this multi-billion-dollar network of electronic snoopers.

In November 2001, a US presidential commission recommended that the NSA, the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) which runs satellite intelligence systems and the National Imagery and Mapping Agency, which handles visual mapping systems from the air and outer space, be put under the directorship of the CIA. When implemented, after the expected battles over turf and jurisdiction between agencies, this would become the “largest overhaul of the US intelligence community in decades

and is intended to help consolidate programs and reduce rivalries” within the gigantic US intelligence community, as *Washington Post* intelligence expert Walter Pincus reported on November 8, 2001.

Hindsight, of course, is always easier than foresight, and this is as true for the present writer as for everyone else. However, since much of this book has been an attempt to catalogue historical errors of US policy, I am closing it with some reflections of a very distinguished, retired US intelligence officer and businessman who has spent his career, as have I as a journalist, largely in the Middle East. I happen to share these ideas, so I set them forth here. I realize that I will be called “unpatriotic”, or worse, by some fellow Americans for doing so, but here goes:

The US bombing campaign initiated on October 7, 2001, with some British participation, was an understandable and, in military terms, successful act of angry but purposeful frustration with what had happened in New York and Washington a month earlier. The military successes against the Taliban left the political problem. Could all the kings horses, and all the king’s men, piece together the shattered political entity which had once been a kind of country?

The Bush administration should have capitalized on the initial and unprecedented wave of international outrage and sympathy for the American victims. First, it should have called on all governments even remotely concerned for a huge law-enforcement effort, to track down and capture the criminals. The United Nations, whose secretary-general, Kofi Anan, was branded a “criminal” in one of Usama bin Laden’s televised outbursts, should have been asked to head this world-wide effort, which was rightly perceived by President Bush, Mr. Anan and many others, as an “existential threat to civilized international society,” in the words of the veteran observer whose thoughts I share. The basic agreement of Russia, which offered use of bases near Afghanistan in the former Soviet Muslim republics bordering Afghanistan, and 1979-89 holy war ally China, which offered at least moral support, provided a huge opportunity for such a UN-sponsored world campaign. Both Russia, in rebellious Muslim Checheniya, and China, in the fractious Muslim Uighur tribes of China’s Far West, in Xinjiang, had their own fierce agenda in opposing bin Laden and the Taliban, whom they both accused of aiding their adversaries.

There was still time, in the winter of 2001-2002, to get the UN Security Council, dominated by the triumvirate US-Russia-China, and with the usual support of the other NATO allies, to develop an international protocol or code defining and

regulating violent and criminal political action, perhaps avoiding the use of the word “terrorism” which always raises the familiar “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter” cliché.

With the authority of the United Nations behind it, the US, in the absence of the bombing campaign in Afghanistan, could woo and perhaps enlist some real support of smaller nations like Iran , Syria and Libya, whom we have so often accused of “harboring” terrorists. Assuming that bin Laden did not find asylum in some fringe or outlaw state, such as Somalia, there seems to me a reasonable chance that he might be so brought to justice and deferred before an international tribunal, rather than the American criminal courts which have tried other terrorists involved in the 1990s assaults on America at home and abroad. By the end of 2001, the United States was preparing to detain Afghan war prisoners at the big American base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. There was serious talk of organizing US military courts to try suspected terrorists and their leaders.

An imaginative and sweeping gesture would be a new American initiative to launch a worldwide new development effort, a kind of “Marshall Plan” on a world scale, avoiding the now pejorative noun, “globalization.” It would aim at leveling some of the terrible economic, environmental and health problems which have created such growing poverty and misery, which, after all, are root causes of terrorism. Along with this should be real pressure on some friends and allies of the United States, not the least of them Saudi Arabia, to solve their human rights problems, which exist around the world, and found only their most extreme form in the abuses of the Afghan Taliban.

Last, but perhaps most important for those of us who have dealt most of our lives with the Middle East—and truly, I believe, for the rest of the world—would be a concerted effort by US administrations, present and future, finally to solve the Palestine-Israel problem in a manner that is just and equitable for both sides. Like Stalin’s Soviet Union, the United States was present and approving at Israel’s creation in 1948. The Arab world (and not only the Palestinians themselves) collectively regarded this as a violation of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s 1944 promise to King Abdelazziz ibn Saud not to change the status of British-mandated Palestine without consulting the Arabs first. No matter: Israel, as the needed and eternal haven for the survivors and heirs of the Nazis, is of course, here to stay. But as the only existing and important national state which has insisted on maintaining for two

generations now the military occupation of another people's territory, it is out of line with most of the world community, and finds unwavering support only from the United States.

In October 2001, Yassir Arafat and his advisors indignantly rejected the demagogic claim by Usama bin Laden that he, too, was fighting with them for a liberated Palestine. Bin Laden realized that the Palestinian cause is by far the most popular cause among the world's billion or more Muslims and Arabs, and so tried to raise his own banner and image alongside that of the Palestinians, as a champion of Jerusalem's "liberation." Arafat and his Palestinian Authority angrily rejected this, denouncing Al-Qaida's violence and refusing its support

The ageing leadership of the Palestinians around Yassir Arafat, or the Israelis around Ariel Sharon or another Israeli prime minister, may not be up to the task of reaching what this author advocated in his book, *Green March, Black September*, back in 1972: a compromise on a settlement and creation, in fact, of an Arab Palestinian state. Such a solution has already existed, in the dreams and aspirations of Palestinian people, Muslim and Christian, and in that of many thoughtful Jews for years. It is up to the United States to lead. It must forcefully mediate, and if necessary, impose, such a solution, which alone can assure the future security of Israel's people, the Palestinian Arabs, and of people in the entire region.

Yes, I agree with the reader who will tell me that this is a tremendously over-ambitious agenda. But I believe that it's not "mission impossible." And I think that if it is seriously attempted, the second Afghanistan war in a generation, costing like others before it thousands of lives and billions of dollars, may succeed in restoring a measure of the hope and stability that earlier wars, both holy and unholy, failed to bring to the Afghan people.

(End of Epilogue and of the book)