

Winning Afghan 'hearts and minds'? Time to leave Afghanistan

blogs.lse.ac.uk/waronterror/2010/08/12/winning-afghan-%e2%80%98hearts-and-minds%e2%80%99-try-leaving-afghanistan/

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As part of the process to win local 'hearts and minds,' Afghans gather at a shura to discuss their concerns © PJHQ

'We try to help them ... but it just seems pointless' one British soldier says, referring to the battle for 'hearts and minds' in Afghanistan. The biggest problem, says another, is "convincing the locals to help themselves."

Next year marks 10 years that US-led forces have been in Afghanistan. The US alone has spent an astonishing \$300 billion on the war. Thousands of coalition troops have been killed and many more injured, yet, far from winning local 'hearts and minds,' Afghans do not exhibit the signs of a free and liberated people. Rather the opposite, Afghans appear more besieged, distrusting and often fearful of both US-led coalition troops and Taliban fighters. The reason for this? Afghanistan is not a war for the Afghan people.

Afghanistan for decades has been the battle ground for empires and this is no less true of the current conflict. The ideological 'global war on terror' theoretically could have been fought in a number of other countries, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Yemen, Somalia or Indonesia, all with equivalent ties to Islamic extremists. Many, if not most insurgents and fighters in Afghanistan are not local Afghans, including Bin Laden, assuming he is still alive and have come from other countries. For historical and geopolitical reasons, Afghanistan has been consumed by war for decades, unable to establish a strong national identity and political system. This has meant that foreign interests have been able to exploit its territory as a battlefield for their ideological conquests. In the current context, Afghanistan unwillingly has come to host an international guerrilla war, being fought in the name of a 'war on terror.' Local Afghans are merely bystanders as they watch their country be torn apart by foreign powers.

It is not surprising then that the civilian population in Afghanistan is responding how it is. The recently released Wikileaks 'Afghan war logs' have provided a grim perspective on the war – from that of soldiers on the ground. We know that secret American death squads (TF 373) and robotic Predator drones are roaming the Afghan countryside, killing innocent people, children in some instances, in an attempt to get at insurgents. As consolation for

these deaths, coalition forces pay-off locals with cash. Not surprisingly, this hasn't won any 'hearts and minds.' Insurgents have been causing equal destruction. In response to the US-led coalition's presence in the country, there has been a [dramatic increased the use off IEDs](#) by insurgents, that has claimed thousands of civilian lives. As both sides battle one another they claim more and more lives.

In an ironic twist, suspected by many commentators, it has come to light that Pakistan has been playing off both the US and insurgent fighters, resulting in the embarrassing situation of the US waging a proxy war against itself. Is this what has cost so much money and so many lives?

Winning Afghan 'hearts and minds' will never happen. Conventional guerrilla warfare requires the need to win local 'hearts and minds' because they are supporting the guerrilla fighters, providing their food, water, housing and other supplies. Afghanistan is different. The insurgents are foreign and unwelcome, only winning local support through intimidation and bribery. Equally, coalition troops have suffered a similar reputation. To defeat the enemy in Afghanistan, the troops need to come home. In doing so insurgents will leave and Afghans can be left to rebuild their country after having the country exploited for decades by foreign powers.

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The now declassified US military documents referred to in this blog posting can be found on Wardiary.wikileaks.org/index.html