

# Western experience in Afghanistan was disappointing, Italian expert says

From page 1 ► democracy' through military intervention and state-building strategies. This was probably the main reason for the failure," Gianluca notes.

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Following is the text of the interview:

**How do you describe Afghanistan's situation after the U.S. withdrawal?**

For sure, it is a complex one. I am not sure that the Taliban's grip on power is as firm as it appears. Islamic State – Khorasan Province (ISKP) is a credible threat, the status of the Panjshir valley remains unclear, and an anti-Taliban resistance front (NRF – National Resistance Front) seems to coalesce, enjoying some degree of international favor.

On the contrary, the Kabul government faces a problem of international recognition. Currently, no country has officially recognized the Taliban government, although many of them are dealing with it in one way or the other. Moreover, Afghanistan is badly in need of international assistance, and the best way to access it is through better foreign relations; something that the Taliban still have to establish and that will probably prove quite troublesome.

**How do you evaluate U.S. performance in Afghanistan after two decades of war? What were the reasons for the U.S. failure in Afghanistan?**

Overall, the Western experience in Afghanistan was disappointing. The international community faced massive



human and financial costs to reach only minimal results, possibly no result at all. Many of the social and economic benefits gained in the past years will probably get lost in the future. Moreover, the Afghan experience will probably deliver another fatal blow to the idea that it is somehow possible to export 'Western-style democracy' through military intervention and state-building strategies. This was probably the main reason for the failure. A mission started with limited aims (hitting al-Qaeda and the Taliban regime supporting it and avoiding new attacks against the United States) creeping into a state-building effort without clear targets and an open deadline that proved unsustainable.

**What is the EU's stance towards developments in Afghanistan? Apparently, there is no serious posture.**

The European countries actively supported Afghanistan's socio-economic development with both men

and funds within and outside the NATO framework. The European Union, too, elaborated its own programs on a 2014-20 timespan investing more than four billion euros since 2002. However, the EU political drive has always been weak. Political coordination is traditionally tricky because different member countries have different priorities, and the outcome usually is a compromise. The U.S. withdrawal was largely resented, but no EU country could offer a credible alternative at both political and military levels. The G7 summit convened in late August to deal with the political and humanitarian implication of the Western withdrawal highlighted this state of things but was unable to provide alternative solutions.

**How could neighboring countries contribute to rebuilding Afghanistan?**

Afghanistan's neighbors have a strong interest in a stable and peaceful country. Although they lack the same financial means, they can project

their political influence more effectively than their Western counterparts. At the same time, Afghanistan is also the chessboard where its neighbors traditionally compete to extend their influence. Their rivalry reverberated in the country's long civil war and partly made possible the success of the Taliban movement in the second half of the 1990s. The most reasonable attitude for many of these countries would be to sit still and let the domestic situation stabilize but predicting a posture like this would be unrealistic. However, it is worth noting that two important external actors like Russia and China seem to have adopted such a cautious attitude, at least for the moment.

**What are the implications of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan for Washington's allies?**

I do not think that the U.S. withdrawal will impact the relations with its regional allies. In Afghanistan, I think the Arab countries have already 'decoupled' their policies from the U.S. for a long time. In terms of military commitment, too, I do not think what happened in Kabul conveys any particular message. In Washington's eyes, Afghanistan's status has never been comparable to the Arab states of the (Persian) Gulf. At the same time, Afghanistan has never had the same leverage the Arab states have on the U.S. posture. Moreover, the United States remains a critical regional player at political and military levels and shares many interests with its local allies. Supposing that the withdrawal from Afghanistan could change this long-established state of things is not credible, either if we focus on the U.S. perspective or its Arab counterparts.

## The 'war on terror' and the disciplining of American Muslims

By Abdullah Al-Arian

Earlier this month, The New York Times Magazine published a feature article profiling a former FBI agent who was imprisoned by the U.S. for exposing the rampant abuses in the government's domestic war on terror. In the piece, Terry Albury recounted the FBI's systematic harassment and intimidation of American Muslims, its spying on the community, and its prosecution of many of its members under the guise of combatting terrorism.

Upon joining the FBI shortly after the attacks of September 11, 2001, Albury recalled, "It was made very clear from day one that the enemy was not just a tiny group of disaffected Muslims. Islam itself was the enemy." Its uniquely candid and self-reflective tone notwithstanding, there was little in this account that would come as a surprise to most American Muslims.

Twenty years on from the launch of a war that would place an entire minority population under a cloud of suspicion, it is worth examining how the lives of American Muslims have been irrevocably transformed. As securitized subjects, they have existed on one of the many front lines in the global war on terror, forced to reassess their identity and core values in the name of belonging.

**Securitizing Islam**

Although anti-Muslim discrimination in the U.S. has roots that long predate 9/11, the global war on terror ushered in an unprecedented era of mass securitization of American Muslims that manifested in untold ways. U.S. law enforcement agencies quickly set about to uncover " sleeper cells " hiding within the community's mosques and Islamic centers. By reducing the actions of the 9/11 perpetrators down to their religious beliefs, all Muslims were effectively pathologized as potential terrorists.

The domestic war on terror would operate as a dual-pronged assault on both Islam and Muslims. Led by alarmist media and self-serving policymakers, the faith itself was repackaged as a dangerous ideology. Not unlike the depictions of communism at the height of the Cold War, Islam was portrayed as lurking behind every corner and posing a growing threat to the American way of life, if left unchecked.

Islamic traditions, beliefs and practices were sloppily anatomized by an emergent class of self-proclaimed "terrorism experts", talking heads with questionable qualifications who coined flashy buzzwords like "Islam-ofascism" and warned that Sharia was little more than a pathway to Orwellian totalitarianism.

At the same time, Muslims became an increasingly racialized category subjected to forms of discrimination that paralleled the treatment of targeted minorities throughout U.S. history. More than 80,000 Muslim immigrants were called in for questioning by federal agents and required to enroll in a national registry. Tens of thousands more were searched and interrogated at airports and prevented from travel through the use of no-fly lists. Simply wearing a headscarf or growing a beard made one suspect in the eyes of an ever-vigilant police force and a hypersensitive public.

Despite the fact that the sleeper cells never materialized, the domestic war on terror proceeded unchecked, due in part to the Patriot Act, a law passed overwhelmingly by Congress in October 2001 that greatly expanded the government's investigative powers at the expense of civil liberties. Against the national backdrop of fear and suspicion, American Muslims were systematically targeted in several waves. In the initial phase authorities singled out prominent community leaders and institutions.

Shortly after 9/11, the government cast a wide net by spying on community leaders. As files leaked to the Intercept later revealed, in one instance the government targeted a lawyer, a political lobbyist, an academic, and the heads of two of the most prominent American Muslim civic organizations. Those targeted for surveillance faced the threat of criminal prosecution for exercising their constitutionally protected rights to free speech and association.

In 2004, the Department of Justice brought terrorism charges against the largest Muslim charity in the U.S., the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development (HLF), and arrested five members of its staff. Following a retrial in 2008 after prosecutors initially failed to convict the men, all of whom were Palestinian-American, the HLF officers and employees were sentenced to up to 65 years in prison, despite the government never providing any evidence that the charitable donations had any connection to violence.

The fallout from the HLF case continued well beyond the trial. In an unorthodox move, prosecutors released the names of 246 unindicted co-conspirators in the case, a list that would normally be kept anonymous due to the fact that uncharged entities have no means of defending themselves against serious accusations like supporting terrorism. The list included several of the most prominent American Muslim organizations, from the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) to the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR). The intent behind the leak was clear: to cast a cloud of suspicion over all American Muslim institutions, thereby paralyzing their ability to serve their communities and play any meaningful role in civic life.

Similarly, in 2005 the government targeted Ali al-Tamimi, a Virginia-based imam. He was charged with conspiring against the United States and was sentenced to life in prison for allegedly providing a fatwa to community members about "jihad" days after 9/11. These high-profile terrorism trials contributed greatly to the chilling effect among American Muslims, as imams and community leaders across the country

feared their words could be used to put them in prison.

At a time when the U.S. had launched large-scale military invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq while waging deadly covert operations in dozens of other Muslim-majority countries, the government was seemingly determined to neutralize political opposition and silence dissenting views at home.

**Fake plots, real consequences**

More than a decade after 9/11, the FBI had more than doubled the number of agents devoted to investigating terrorism, tripled its overall budget, with \$3.3bn dedicated to combatting terrorism alone, and a permissive legal environment within which to operate. It was also turning up no actual terrorist cells.

In the next phase of the domestic war on terror, the FBI decided to take matters into its own hands and expanded a practice it had launched soon after 9/11. It stepped up sending paid informants into communities to entrap unsuspecting Muslim youth into terrorist conspiracies that FBI agents would then foil.

A 2015 study revealed that since 9/11, more than half of all terrorism prosecutions involved the use of paid informants who were usually responsible for concocting the plot in collusion with their FBI handlers.

Sensationalistic media coverage of the most high-profile cases rarely if ever made mention of the fact that these conspiracies were the work of FBI informants. Instead, stories of foiled terror plots like those of the Newburgh Four or the Fort Dix Five provided fodder for the continued stigmatization of American Muslims.

The vacuum left by the assault on the community's leadership, coupled with a steady rise in Islamophobic sentiments across the wider American society, created a pervasive sense of isolation, particularly among younger American Muslims who had come of age in the post-9/11 reality.

With at least 15,000 informants at its disposal, the FBI's rampant infiltration of mosques and Islamic centers stripped Muslims of any sense of security or sanctity in their community spaces. As the entrapment cases unfolded with alarming regularity, it became painfully clear that the war on terror's latest victims were often the community's most vulnerable members, suffering from poverty, mental health issues, and other difficulties that made them easy prey for undercover agents.

Even those young American Muslims who avoided being ensnared by informants were nevertheless subjected to mass surveillance programs, such as the one pursued by the New York Police Department (NYPD) and the CIA. Exposed by the Associated Press in 2011, the secret program "mapped, monitored and analyzed American Muslim daily life," going as far as to infiltrate Muslim student groups at various universities in the New York metropolitan area.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

## Republicans urge Biden to designate Taliban as terrorist group

Several GOP senators have urged U.S. President Joe Biden to designate the Taliban as a terrorist group, calling it "a significant threat to the United States."

"Since reestablishing control of Afghanistan, the Taliban resumed the same murderous and oppressive habits that characterized their leadership tenure prior to the arrival of U.S. forces in 2001," the senators, led by Joni Ernst, wrote in a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday.

The senators mentioned the Taliban's approach towards the civilians, including women, as one of the reasons behind their demand.

They also slammed the appointment of Sirajuddin Haqqani, wanted by the FBI, as Afghanistan's acting interior minister.

"Given their history of supporting terror attacks on the United States, their brutal style of governance, their continued display of atrocities against Americans and our allies, and now, their enhanced military capability, the current version of the Taliban government presents a significant threat to the United States. Further, the Taliban display the will and the means to attack Americans and American interests," the senators added.

The letter comes after two prominent Republican senators, Lindsey Graham and Michael Waltz, introduced a resolution on Tuesday, asking the Biden administration to recognize the Taliban as a terrorist organization and call the group's takeover of Kabul a "coup d'etat."

"This resolution is one of the most important things Congress can do regarding the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban," Graham said in a statement.

"Designating the Taliban as a Foreign Terrorist Organization will make it harder for countries to provide them aid and recognition. We would be sending a strong signal that America does not do business with terrorist groups and their sympathizers. The Taliban are radical jihadists in every sense of the word and use terror as their tactic," he noted.

Over the past weeks, the Biden administration has been under fire over its chaotic withdrawal of the U.S. forces from Afghanistan, which led to the Taliban's takeover of Kabul.

Biden's exit, which effectively ended the United States' two-decade war in Afghanistan, has led to infighting in the U.S., where politicians pin blame on each other for the return of the Taliban to power.

The United States and a number of its allies invaded Afghanistan and toppled a Taliban regime there in late 2001 under the pretext of the so-called "war on terror." The invasion and the ensuing war, however, gravely worsened the security situation in the country.

## Japan provided Iran with 2.9 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines: Japanese expert

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**Could you update us about the history of Iran-Japan ties?**

Japan established its diplomatic relations with Iran in 1929, which is 92 years ago. Japan started to import oil from Iran in the 1950s and since then, Japan's relations with Iran have centered on oil.

However, our relations actually date back to centuries ago, when many elements of Persian culture were brought to Japan through the Silk Road. Japanese people have traditionally shown great respect towards Persian culture.

**What are the main areas of trade between Iran and Japan? And how have the American sanctions affected it?**

The main field was oil as I mentioned in the answer to the first question. We imported oil from Iran and exported cars and machinery in return, but our oil import from Iran has far exceeded the amount of our export to Iran.

U.S. sanctions affected the oil trade greatly because



the U.S. used it as a weapon to fight against Iran. It was as if the U.S. took Iranian oil as a hostage and demanded foreign banks to pay a ransom if they wanted to get it back. The U.S. sanctions worked and Japan did not import Iranian oil in 2020.

**What is your prediction of Tehran-Tokyo relations now that Ibrahim Raisi has taken power in Iran?**

We are hoping that the Vienna negotiations will start again soon so that the sanctions will be lifted and we can start trading again.

**What are Japan's collaborations with Iran in terms of fighting COVID-19?**

Japan provided Iran with 2.9 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines manufactured in Japan.

**How is Iran viewed in Japan? As a Japanese researcher who lived in Iran, how do you describe the Iranian culture?**

As I mentioned already, Japanese people have shown great respect towards the Iranian culture. For me, the Iranian culture is very rich in the sense that it consists of diverse elements, each of which has its own history.

The Iranian culture is full of wonder and beauty that encompasses all the realities and contradictions that we could think of. My work as a researcher is like a journey to reach a sound understanding of the Iranian culture, whose various aspects have fascinated me in each step that I have taken.

## Hezbollah to the rescue again

Not for the first time, Lebanon faces a crisis. Hezbollah has helped guide the country out of the predicament.

The movement is known for resisting, defending, liberating and preserving Lebanon's territorial integrity from Israeli occupation and aggression.

In 2000, Israel withdrew its forces from Lebanon after a hard-fought resistance by Hezbollah.

During Israel's war on Lebanon in 2006, Hezbollah took the regime by surprise and emerged victoriously.

That victory created an equation whereby Israel never attacked Lebanon again and the people of the country benefited from living in safety and security until today.

This extremely significant victory also overshadowed Hezbollah's other activities from the international arena. These include its welfare programs, the educational facilities it runs for orphans, for example, different types of assistance and helps for the needy, the elderly and many other aspects in this regard.

Over the past year or two, the country has faced multiple domestic crises. One of the biggest challenges Lebanon faces today is the unprecedented energy crisis that is literally suffocating a nation struggling to keep the light on.

This crisis is not just ongoing but getting worse and worse. It is already on the verge of reaching a point where hospitals, shops, bakeries, etc., cannot function because of a lack of fuel. Lebanon was heading towards the unknown.

Here, Hezbollah once again, devised a plan to alleviate the crisis, while preventing any foreign interference or trouble for Lebanon.

After careful consideration, the Secretary-General of Hezbollah, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah and other high-ranking officials in the movement decided to purchase oil from the Islamic Republic of Iran and bring the oil tankers to Lebanon itself.

The Hezbollah chief says after being told of possible sanctions or other measures by the United States, that could hurt the government if the tankers docked in Lebanon; it decided to dock the first vessel in neighboring Syria

and take the cargo by land across Lebanese-Syrian border crossing.

Nasrallah has extended his gratitude to the Syrian government for helping coordinate the logistics of importing this vital commodity. He also thanked the Syrian government for understanding the situation of Lebanon and the dangers of Lebanon and Syria's enemies in trying to harm Damascus by the assistance it provided.

On Sunday, the vessel docked at a Syrian port, and the process of unloading the oil and dispatching it to Lebanon is expected to be completed by around Thursday. Hezbollah says this is the first of many ships to bring oil from Iran to Lebanon.

Nasrallah noted whoever issued negative statements about this operation should learn a lesson.

According to Nasrallah, the negative statements were the following and he noted how they ended up in dustbin of history.

One: The announcement [importing oil from Iran] was just a PR stunt. However, the oil has arrived.

Two: Those who said the operation will fail because Iran itself has problems exporting gasoline and diesel.

Three: Those who stated Israel will prevent the tanker from reaching Lebanon or Syria, especially because Hezbollah announced the move publicly on the Day of Ashura. It wasn't a secret operation.

Nasrallah says it's unfortunate that some had hoped Israel would prevent the ship from reaching Lebanon.

He highlighted that the 2006 war which created a security equation with Israel is what prevented the regime from stopping the fuel from arriving. This is despite the fact that Tel Aviv is very well aware the arrival of the fuel would increase Hezbollah's popularity even more, something Israel has, for decades, tried to prevent.

Four: Those who said America will prevent this operation. Nasrallah noted the U.S. knows any action would lead to a reaction "from a certain party".

The Hezbollah Chief says America only knows sanctions, tried to pressure Lebanese officials and when that did not work, the U.S. embassy in Beirut presented an

alternative plan.

The "U.S. embassy in Beirut plan" had already been widely ridiculed among Lebanese commentators and analysts.

Those who said the import of oil would cause problems for the new government and this never happened.

Five: Finally, those who said this was a sectarian move, and the energy would only be distributed to Hezbollah strongholds in Southern Lebanon. Nasrallah says the oil would be sent to every region of Lebanon.

In the upcoming days, the second ship will dock in Syria and will also contain diesel.

A third ship has been loaded with gasoline and the paperwork has been completed for it to sail. The fourth tanker will contain diesel. Nasrallah says the fourth ship will contain diesel because it will arrive at a time when some areas of Lebanon get cold and more diesel is needed than gasoline.

The Hezbollah Chief has reiterated the movement is not after trade and profit or competing with energy companies. The initiative is simply adding to a product short in supply.

Hezbollah is now preparing to work on distributing the first shipment which contains the diesel.

Nasrallah says the resistance movement has studied the distribution process from a humanitarian point of view and came up with the following.

A month's worth of supply will be offered, free of charge, to government run hospitals, centers who care for the elderly and vulnerable, every facility that cares for orphans, water facilities in poorer provinces, fire stations, the Lebanese Red Cross.

The reality of this humanitarian mission cannot be emphasized enough when Hezbollah says it is offering the diesel to the above free of charge.

The second list will be sold, but also in terms of priority, to those that need the energy most and at a reasonable price whereby other energy supplier's business are not affected.

Private hospitals, pharmaceutical manufacturers, mills, bakeries selling bread, companies purchasing, storing and selling vital food products, food manufacturers, agricultural companies. Among

those also considered high-priority, that will be offered the diesel, are electricity companies who provide generators to help people with power outages.

According to the Hezbollah Chief, the oil will not be sold to individuals, but he did leave this door open when the suffering among the priority lists is gone.

A Lebanese company has been chosen to assist and Hezbollah says this company has been chosen because it is suffering under U.S. sanctions.

Nasrallah added this commodity is for all Lebanese, regardless of faith or political allegiance. It will be sent to every province in the country.

Every effort will be done to prevent the oil from entering the black market "because the black market has already profited significantly". Hezbollah says this operation will hopefully break the black market, which is selling oil at unreasonable prices and hurting ordinary Lebanese waiting in line for hours.

Hezbollah says it will not consider the import costs of the oil tankers when it sells the oil. The movement says it will bear responsibility for these costs and says it doesn't want to make a profit. The Hezbollah Chief says the movement wants this initiative to be considered as a gift to Lebanese people from the Islamic Republic of Iran and from Hezbollah.

Nasrallah says Hezbollah won't use the dollar to sell any of the oil imports. Any fuel sold will be done using the Lebanese Lira.

Sayyed Nasrallah also says Hezbollah could have imported a flotilla of oil tankers and not begin with one ship. He pointed out this would have led to extensive media speculation about the whereabouts of the ships and when they will arrive; something that would have boosted Hezbollah's popularity.

The Hezbollah chief says "we could have done that with the first tanker". However, the moment chose to keep a low media profile because it didn't want to frighten the Lebanese people. Especially when there are officials and enemies' scampering on the public.

He says the goal is easing the suffering of the people, serving the Lebanese "nothing more, nothing less".