

FRANK R. WOLF
10TH DISTRICT, VIRGINIA



241 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-4610
(202) 225-6136

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

SUBCOMMITTEES:

CHAIRMAN—COMMERCE—JUSTICE—SCIENCE

TRANSPORTATION—HUD

STATE AND FOREIGN OPERATIONS

CO-CHAIR—TOM LANTOS
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

July 19, 2011

13873 PARK CENTER ROAD
SUITE 130
HERNDON, VA 20171
(703) 709-5800
(800) 945-9653 (IN STATE)

110 NORTH CAMERON STREET
WINCHESTER, VA 22601
(540) 667-0990
(800) 850-3463 (IN STATE)

wolf.house.gov

The Honorable Leon Panetta
Secretary of Defense
The Pentagon Rm 3E 880
Washington DC 20301

Dear Secretary Panetta

I write today concerning the U.S. mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan. My amendment, which gives the secretary of Defense the authority to establish an Afghanistan/Pakistan (Af/Pak) Study Group, was included in the House-passed FY 2012 Defense Appropriations bill. I pressed for the amendment because I believe fresh eyes are needed now to examine the situation on the ground and the overall U.S. mission.

I envision the Af/Pak Study Group being modeled after the Iraq Study Group (ISG). Both you and your predecessor Bob Gates served on the ISG and know better than most the benefits it provided after three years of fighting in Iraq. Now that the U.S. is in its 10th year in Afghanistan, I believe a similar effort is necessary.

Before he was appointed as ambassador to Afghanistan, Ryan Crocker supported creating an Af/Pak Study Group, along with Ambassador Ronald Neumann and Jim Dobbins from the RAND Corporation. American men and women are fighting and dying in Afghanistan. If we are asking them to put their lives on the line daily, I believe we have an obligation to provide an independent evaluation of the U.S. mission. We owe our military forces nothing less.

I do not have the answers. But as you know, there is a movement building in Congress in favor of pulling troops out of Afghanistan. An amendment offered by Rep. Jim McGovern earlier this year to the National Defense Authorization Act to accelerate U.S. departure from Afghanistan was narrowly defeated 204-215. If six members had changed their vote, the amendment would have passed. I have talked to several members who voted against the McGovern amendment who are seriously concerned about the war in Afghanistan and could change their vote if the situation on the ground does not improve rapidly.

I also believe it is critical that Afghanistan be examined in tandem with the facts on the ground in Pakistan. It is clear that in order to be successful in Afghanistan, we must have a clear understanding of how Pakistan is influencing U.S. operations. Just look at the recent news from the region. Hamid Karzai's half-brother was murdered and his funeral bombed, Karai advisor Jan Mohammed Kahn was murdered, and militants attacked and laid siege to

The Honorable Leon Panetta
July 19, 2011
Page 2

the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul. The enclosed article printed recently in the *Washington Post* states, "...optimism and energy vanished long ago, gradually replaced by cynicism and fear. The trappings of democracy remained in place...but the politics of ethnic dog fights, tribal feuds and personal patronage continued to prevail."

The men and women serving in Afghanistan deserve to have fresh eyes look at this region as soon as possible. With House passage of the A/Pak amendment, I ask that you use your authority as secretary and move quickly to create this study group. I have discussed my amendment with John Hamre at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and he has offered to coordinate the group with professionals with a wide range of expertise.

I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss this important initiative and look forward to working with you to ensure we are successful in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Best wishes.

Sincerely,

Frank R. Wolf
Member of Congress

FRW:cw
enclosure
cc: Joint Chiefs of Staff

THANK YOU

Dysfunction and dread in Kabul

Correspondent Pamela
Constable on how corruption
and malaise are the real
threats to Afghanistan now

Kabul, a place I once called home, has become a city of security barriers and fantasy palaces.

I can't find my old house, my old street or the bakery where I used to watch the early-morning ritual of men slapping dough into hot ovens beneath the floor. They've all vanished behind a high-security superstructure of barricades and barbed wire, a foreign architecture of war. Elsewhere in the Afghan capital, a parallel construction boom is underway. The slapdash sprawl of nouveau riche development has sprouted modern apartment buildings, glass-plated shopping centers, wedding halls with fairy lights, and gaudy mansions with gold swan faucets and Greco-Roman balustrades, commissioned by wealthy men with many bodyguards and no taxable income.

Both of these facades are conspiring to cover up the past, paving over the rubble and the lessons of war, distancing ordinary people from the local elites and the bun-

kered foreigners alike. Most tragically, they are erasing the hope and the promise of change that burst forth in Afghanistan's post-Taliban liberation nearly a decade ago.

I was privileged to witness that awakening and to experience the exhilaration of a society being given a new chance after a generation of war and ideological whiplash. In those early years, I met Afghan exiles who had given up careers in Germany or Australia to participate in their homeland's renaissance, and American jurists and agronomists who had come to help rebuild an alien land.

Foreigners were welcome everywhere, and a new generation of Afghans was in a hurry to catch up. In the cities, I met girls who led exercise classes and boys who took computer lessons at dawn. In rural areas, women still hid behind curtains and veils, but schools reopened in tents, and mud-choked irrigation canals were cleaned. In 2004, long lines of villagers proudly flashed their ink-dipped thumbs after voting in the country's first real democratic election.

That optimism and energy vanished long ago, gradually replaced by cynicism and fear. The trappings of democracy remained in place, propped up by a vast international apparatus, but the politics of ethnic dogfights, tribal feuds and personal patronage continued to prevail.

Government agencies were awarded to ethnic factions as fiefdoms for petty extortion. Aid money vanished into powerful pockets, and the once-moribund drug trade flourished.

The parliament became a gallery of old Islamist militia bosses and new war rackets, locked in crippling disputes with the executive. The 2009 presidential election, a fraudulent parody, was ultimately accepted by international officials because it left the more familiar devil, President Hamid Karzai, in power as Washington prepared to ratchet up the war effort.

As corruption and malaise spread throughout the Karzai government, Taliban aggression and influence filled the void. As the countryside became more vulnerable, foreign aid projects shrank, and tea with tribal elders gave way to convoys of monster vehicles and helmeted warriors kicking in doors. As the gulf between Western intentions and public perceptions widened, Karzai made it worse by denouncing NATO bombings but ignoring Taliban beheadings, in the vain hope that his fellow tribesmen would return to the fold.

The disillusionment worked both ways. By the time President Obama ordered a high-profile civilian and military surge in 2009, hundreds of frustrated American mentors and aid workers had lost heart or left. A Western lawyer who worked with

Afghan anti-corruption officials told me recently that "even the most promising few people I was training turned out to be corrupt." And a woman working to improve rural services said, "I still have to practically force officials in Kabul to pick up the phone or visit the provinces."

Even U.S. Ambassador Karl Eikenberry, usually upbeat and polite, was goaded to an emotional outburst last month by Karzai's suggestion that Western forces — who have lost more than 2,500 lives fighting the Taliban and training Afghan troops since 2001 — were "using" Afghanistan for their own interests and could be viewed as unwelcome occupiers. In a June 20 speech, Eikenberry warned that such "hurtful" comments could cause Americans to grow "weary" of the Afghan effort and demand that all U.S. troops return home.

Psychologically, though, the withdrawal is well underway. Despite assurances by Eikenberry and other officials that the United States will maintain a robust presence after most of its fighting forces leave by 2014, many Afghans believe that the end is near. After 1989, the last time a great foreign power pulled out, civil war soon erupted, and Afghanistan nearly destroyed itself. No one knows what will happen this time, but everyone is bracing for the worst. As one American diplomat said last month, "In their hearts they want us to leave, but in their heads they want us

to stay."

Already, there is a growing sense of order unraveling. The assassination Tuesday of the president's half-brother Ahmed Wali Karzai — a powerful and controversial man with many enemies — is an example of the brutal pre-transition power struggle. There have been other signs of trouble, such as the missing Central Bank president who surfaced in Northern Virginia last month, saying he feared for his life after exposing high-level official involvement in a private banking scandal.

The Taliban, in a spectacular attack that mocked months of hopeful rhetoric about a nascent peace process, sent a suicide squad on June 28 to lay siege to an iconic hotel on a hill overlooking the capital. Afghan forces were unable to stop them after a night-long battle, requiring NATO gunships to blast the remaining assailants from the hotel roof. Even in the heavily policed capital, Afghans were unprepared to protect themselves.

In many ways, though, the great battle for the country's future is not the one NATO and Afghan troops are waging against Islamist insurgents in far-flung provinces such as Konar and Khost. It is the messier struggle for money and power taking place in urban centers such as Kabul and Kandahar, where old ethnic rivals are settling scores and new mafia barons are fighting to establish turf.

It includes the scandal of Kabul Bank, whose officers and rich shareholders casually "borrowed" nearly \$1 billion of depositors' money to invest in private schemes. It is set amid a self-defeating culture that romanticizes past exploits and yearns for revenge rather than reaching for opportunities. It is a fight with few

heroes and no principles at stake, only the spoils of war and drugs.

The real tragedy of Afghanistan is how little advantage it has taken of the enormous international goodwill that followed the defeat of the Taliban in 2001. Showered with far too much aid, clever Afghans have learned to imitate Western jargon, skim project funds and put their relatives on the payroll — while many show little interest in learning the modern skills that would propel their country forward. At its core, this remains a society of tribal values and survival instincts. Goals such as democracy and nationhood come much further down the list.

Today, stuck in Kabul's rush-hour traffic, I marvel at the blinding video billboards, the ATMs, the supermarkets filled with cat food, tin foil and other items unknown here a decade ago. Like everyone else, I also curse at the roadblocks and detours, the trunk searches, the militarization of daily life.

I sometimes think back to the Taliban era, when the same streets were empty, shops were shuttered, and the only sound was the jingle of a passing horse cart. Life was harder then, isolated and primitive. But often, I hear Afghans complain that everything today is chaotic and corrupt. At least under Taliban rule, people say, there was safety and order and Islam. They may not want to return to that era, but they dread what lies ahead.

constablep@washpost.com

Pamela Constable has reported frequently from Afghanistan for The Washington Post since 1998. She is the author of "Playing With Fire: Pakistan at War With Itself."

FRANK R. WOLF
10TH DISTRICT, VIRGINIA



241 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-4610
(202) 225-5136

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

SUBCOMMITTEES:

CHAIRMAN—COMMERCE-JUSTICE-SCIENCE

TRANSPORTATION-HUD

STATE AND FOREIGN OPERATIONS

CO-CHAIR—TOM LANTOS
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

August 1, 2011

13873 PARK CENTER ROAD
SUITE 130
HERNDON, VA 20171
(703) 709-6800
(800) 945-8653 (IN STATE)

110 NORTH CAMERON STREET
WINCHESTER, VA 22601
(540) 667-0990
(800) 850-3463 (IN STATE)

wolf.house.gov

The Honorable Leon Panetta
Secretary of Defense
The Pentagon Rm 3E 880
Washington DC 20301

Dear Secretary ~~Panetta~~ *Leon*

I want to follow up on my previous letter regarding Afghanistan policy and bring to your attention a book I am reading, The Wars in Afghanistan, discussed in the enclosed *Washington Post* book review. Its author, Ambassador Peter Tomsen, is a veteran of the Foreign Service and has an impressive background in the South Asia region. If you have not read his book, I highly recommend it to you. The *Post* review concludes: "This long overdue work...is the most authoritative account yet of Afghanistan's wars over the last 30 years and should be essential reading for those wishing to forge a way forward without repeating the mistakes of the past."

After three years of the Iraq war, the formation of the Iraq Study Group garnered the support of Secretary Rumsfeld, Secretary Rice, and Joint Chiefs General Pace. Our military men and women have been putting their lives on the line in Afghanistan every day for 10 years, seven years longer than when the decision was made to create the ISG to provide the independent assessment needed for U.S. policy in Iraq. I believe we owe it to our brave soldiers to focus now with fresh eyes on the target in Afghanistan.

I have spoken with Ambassador Tomsen about a framework for moving forward in Afghanistan, and he would be happy to meet with you and your team to discuss his breadth of experience there. I urge you to take him up on his offer.

Best wishes.

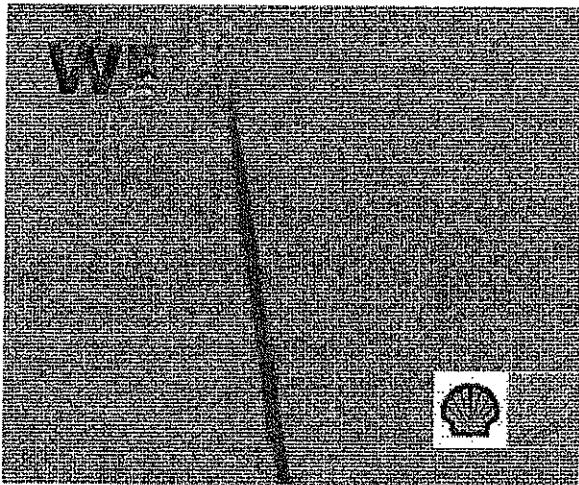
Sincerely,

Frank R. Wolf
Member of Congress

FRW:cw
enclosure

The Washington Post

[Back to previous page](#)



“The Wars of Afghanistan: Messianic Terrorism, Tribal Conflicts, and the Failures of Great Powers” by Peter Tomsen

By Stephen Tanner, Published: July 28

In “The Wars of Afghanistan,” Peter Tomsen builds a compelling case for blaming much of the U.S. heartache in Afghanistan on its supposed ally in the region, Pakistan. Indeed, Tomsen’s book, which provides a sweeping look at Afghanistan and its legacy of turmoil, offers among its many policy prescriptions that the United States withhold military aid to its ally, because the more funds that go to Islamabad, the stronger the Taliban seems to become. I took it as a sign of Tomsen’s acuity that on the day I finished reading his book, the United States announced it would not release \$800 million intended for Pakistan’s military support.

Tomsen was the U.S. special envoy to the Afghan resistance groups from 1989 to 1992, the years right after they drove out Soviet troops. He had close relationships with a range of major players — Afghan commanders, mullahs and politicians, Pakistani generals, Soviet diplomats and Saudi princes — and he pours his insights into this thick, important volume adding up to more than 700 pages of text.

The book begins with a brief look at Afghanistan’s history. Tomsen calls the country a “shatter zone” because it was repeatedly invaded by stronger powers and then it invariably defeated or outlasted its occupiers. The key to the nation’s resilience, he notes, is its reliance on thousands of isolated communities that were always willing to fight but never willing to give up their independence. This fragmented structure affected how Afghanistan was governed: The leadership in Kabul survived only by

forging alliances with enough tribes and ethnic groups to achieve critical weight and maintain stability. Tomsen's historical narrative helps us understand how Afghanistan in the 20th century was able to achieve not only intermittent calm and prosperity but also gradual democratization. Afghan progress was undermined in the 1970s, however, when a right-wing coup was followed by a left-wing takeover and the disastrous Soviet intervention.

Tomsen expresses his dismay at U.S. policy toward the triumphant Afghan factions that finally forced the Soviet withdrawal. The United States took a neutral stance toward the disparate Afghan resistance groups — a lack of attention at a critical time that Tomsen and other observers argue allowed for the rise of undesirable factions. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia favored the most fanatical Islamist groups to the detriment of religious moderates and nationalists.

It was at this time that for a full decade the United States "outsourced" its Afghan policy to Pakistan, Tomsen says. The country crumbled into civil war that ceased only after Pakistan formed, funded and supplied the rigidly Islamist Taliban, which calmed the fighting and spread Pakistan's influence. But the deal backfired when the Taliban proved not so pliable and played host to al-Qaeda, which inspired the country's latest invasion — by America. Pakistan promptly promised cooperation with the United States and its coalition but, Tomsen argues, Islamabad has been double-dealing the United States ever since its involvement in Afghanistan after 9/11. Pakistan had handled the Soviet incursion into its sphere of influence in similar fashion, Tomsen says, and now the United States is operating under a "Grand Delusion" in which policymakers refuse to recognize that their ally is both fireman and arsonist in its determination to maintain its strategic depth in the Afghan nation. Tomsen is clearly sympathetic to the Afghans and details their nuances intimately, while tending to generalize about Pakistan — I wished the book had more on that state's own fragility and its geopolitical dilemmas.

"The Wars of Afghanistan" contains many compelling vignettes, which demonstrate the author's proximity to the principals. Tomsen provides unprecedented detail in recounting the death of the resistance icon Ahmed Shah Massood two days before 9/11. His account of Massood reading poetry on the night before his assassination, which his companion found portentous, adds a poignant touch to the hero's death. Tomsen was also in the same convoy as Hamid Karzai in 2002 when a Taliban assassin thrust an AK-47 through the Afghan leader's car window but the weapon fortunately misfired.

This long-overdue work, which takes us up to the recent killing of Osama bin Laden, is the most authoritative account yet of Afghanistan's wars over the past 30 years and should be essential reading for those wishing to forge a way forward without repeating the mistakes of the past.

Stephen Tanner is author of "Afghanistan: A Military History, from Alexander the Great to the War Against the Taliban."

FRANK R. WOLF
10TH DISTRICT, VIRGINIA

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

SUBCOMMITTEES:

CHAIRMAN—COMMERCE—JUSTICE—SCIENCE

TRANSPORTATION—HUD

STATE AND FOREIGN OPERATIONS

CO-CHAIR—TOM LANTOS
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

August 8, 2011

241 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-4610
(202) 225-5136

13873 PARK CENTER ROAD
SUITE 130
HERNDON, VA 20171
(703) 709-5800
(800) 945-9653 (IN STATE)

110 NORTH CAMERON STREET
WINCHESTER, VA 22601
(540) 667-0980
(800) 850-3483 (IN STATE)

wolf.house.gov

The Honorable Leon Panetta
Secretary of Defense
The Pentagon Rm 3E 880
Washington DC 20301

Dear Secretary Panetta

I want to draw your attention to the enclosed letter I received from retired Marine Corps General Charles Krulak regarding an Afghanistan/Pakistan (Af/Pak) Study Group.

General Krulak makes an important point that we cannot be successful in Afghanistan if we do not address the ongoing tensions and frequent hostilities between Pakistan and India. I again ask you to take the language in the FY 2012 Defense Appropriations bill and use your authority to create the Af/Pak Study Group. Every day we delay is another missed opportunity to successfully address U.S. policy in South Asia.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to meeting with you in the near future to discuss this important issue.

Best wishes.

Sincerely,

Frank R. Wolf
Member of Congress

FRW:cw
enclosure

AUG 03 2011

BSC

BIRMINGHAM - SOUTHERN COLLEGE

Office of the President

Box 549002
900 Arkadelphia Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35254

205 226-4620
National 1 800 523-5793
Fax 205 226-7020

July 25, 2011

Congressman Frank R. Wolf
241 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-4610



Dear Congressman Wolf,

Thank you so much for your letter of July, 20, 2011 forwarding me your letter to Secretary Panetta. You asked for my thoughts on the proposed Af/Pak Study Group and here they are:

I think you are spot on! It should be obvious to everyone concerned that the time has come to do a professional evaluation of the current policy in the region. When I mention "region", I believe it is important to include India. At the end of the day, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India are inextricably linked...you cannot establish policies in a stove pipe manner. The Study Group will immediately recognize that fact and accommodate it.

It is important to understand that conflict occurs at three levels....Strategic, Operational, and Tactical. Too often we look at the tactical level...see the heroism and accomplishments of our servicemen and women...and make conclusions re. the conduct of the war. Unfortunately, that is NOT the way to look at this current conflict. Like Vietnam, we can do a solid job at the Tactical Level and lose the war at the Operational and Strategic Levels. This is where we find ourselves today in Afghanistan...and the path to any kind of victory is closely linked to success in Pakistan and India. The possibility of achieving such success across all three countries is small....certainly following the policies in place today (and yesterday.)

Again, I applaud your work and on behalf of those young men and women who are sacrificing so far from home, I thank you.

Semper Fidelis,

Charles C. Krulak
General, USMC (Ret.)
31st Commandant of the Marine Corps
13th President, Birmingham-Southern College

FRANK R. WOLF
10TH DISTRICT, VIRGINIA



241 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-4610
(202) 225-5136

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

SUBCOMMITTEES:

CHAIRMAN—COMMERCE-JUSTICE-SCIENCE

TRANSPORTATION-HUD

STATE AND FOREIGN OPERATIONS

CO-CHAIR—TOM LANTOS
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

13873 PARK CENTER ROAD
SUITE 130
HERNDON, VA 20171
(703) 709-5800
(800) 945-9653 (IN STATE)

110 NORTH CAMERON STREET
WINCHESTER, VA 22601
(540) 667-0990
(800) 850-3463 (IN STATE)

wolf.house.gov

Congress of the United States House of Representatives

August 31, 2011

The Honorable Leon Panetta
Secretary of Defense
The Pentagon Rm 3E 880
Washington DC 20301

Dear Secretary Panetta:

I know you care deeply about the men and women in uniform fighting in Afghanistan. That's why I am disappointed that no one from your staff has contacted former Ambassador Peter Tomsen, an expert on Afghanistan, to meet with him, as I requested in my letter to you of August 1 (enclosed).

Ambassador Tomsen's new book, The Wars of Afghanistan, is receiving positive reviews, including the enclosed review in the recent edition of *Foreign Affairs*. The review praises the book as providing an in depth description of the social structure of Afghanistan and the mistakes repeated by numerous foreign countries that have tried to help establish military and political cohesion in the country. The review states, "Whether one agrees with Tomsen, however, there is no denying that his descriptions of Afghanistan's society and politics are a valuable foundation for any discussion of how the country should be governed... Given Tomsen's track record, Americans should give a respectful hearing to his call for a thorough policy reformulation – something beyond tweaks to troop numbers and counterinsurgency tactics."

I believe this book should be required reading for you and your team at the Pentagon. Ambassador Tomsen is ready and willing to lend his expertise to this important effort and I again ask that you or your staff meet with him.

Leon, I renew my call that you use your discretion as secretary and create the Af/Pak Study Group. We owe it to the men and women serving and the families and spouses at home to ensure we have the correct strategy. After 10 years of fighting, it is time to have a fresh set of eyes examine U.S. strategy. Far from a sign of weakness, creating an independent Af/Pak study group would show the nation that we are doing everything possible to achieve our goals in this region.

I would welcome the chance to speak with you on this matter.

Best wishes.

Sincerely,

Frank R. Wolf
Member of Congress

FRW:cw
enclosures

THIS DOCUMENT IS PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER MADE SURE BY LETTERHEADS

**WIT REALTY NEED
FRESH EYES ON
THE TARGET.**

BEST WISHES

FRANK R. WOLF
10TH DISTRICT, VIRGINIA

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

SUBCOMMITTEES:

CHAIRMAN—COMMERCE-JUSTICE-SCIENCE

TRANSPORTATION-HUD

STATE AND FOREIGN OPERATIONS

CO-CHAIR—TOM LANTOS
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

August 1, 2011

241 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-4610
(202) 225-5135

13873 PARK CENTER ROAD
SUITE 130
HERNDON, VA 20171
(703) 709-8800
(800) 945-9653 (IN STATE)

110 NORTH CAMERON STREET
WINCHESTER, VA 22601
(540) 667-0990
(800) 850-3463 (IN STATE)

wolf.house.gov

The Honorable Leon Panetta
Secretary of Defense
The Pentagon Rm 3E 880
Washington DC 20301

Dear Secretary Leon

I want to follow up on my previous letter regarding Afghanistan policy and bring to your attention a book I am reading, The Wars in Afghanistan, discussed in the enclosed *Washington Post* book review. Its author, Ambassador Peter Tomsen, is a veteran of the Foreign Service and has an impressive background in the South Asia region. If you have not read his book, I highly recommend it to you. The *Post* review concludes: "This long overdue work...is the most authoritative account yet of Afghanistan's wars over the last 30 years and should be essential reading for those wishing to forge a way forward without repeating the mistakes of the past."

After three years of the Iraq war, the formation of the Iraq Study Group garnered the support of Secretary Rumsfeld, Secretary Rice, and Joint Chiefs General Pace. Our military men and women have been putting their lives on the line in Afghanistan every day for 10 years, seven years longer than when the decision was made to create the ISG to provide the independent assessment needed for U.S. policy in Iraq. I believe we owe it to our brave soldiers to focus now with fresh eyes on the target in Afghanistan.

I have spoken with Ambassador Tomsen about a framework for moving forward in Afghanistan, and he would be happy to meet with you and your team to discuss his breadth of experience there. I urge you to take him up on his offer.

Best wishes.

Sincerely,

Frank R. Wolf
Member of Congress

FRW:cw
enclosure

**FOREIGN
AFFAIRS**

Published by the Council on Foreign Relations

September/October 2011
REVIEW ESSAY

Invading Afghanistan, Then and Now

What Washington Should Learn From Wars Past

Jonah Blank

*JONAH BLANK is the author of *Mullahs on the Mainframe: Islam and Modernity Among the Daudi Bohras* [1] and *Arrow of the Blue-Skinned God: Retracing the Ramayana Through India* [2].*

"As the result of two successful campaigns, of the employment of an enormous force, and of the expenditures of large sums of money," the secretary of state observed, "all that has yet been accomplished has been the disintegration of the State . . . and a condition of anarchy throughout the remainder of the country." A highly decorated general, recently returned from service in Kandahar, concluded, "I feel sure that I am right when I say that the less the Afghans see of us the less they will dislike us." The politician was Spencer Cavendish, Marquis of Hartington, the British secretary of state for India. The general was Sir Frederick Roberts, who eventually became a field marshal and the subject of three ballads by Rudyard Kipling. The year was 1880. As U.S. President Barack Obama tries to wind down the longest war in U.S. history, while leaving behind some measure of stability, he would be wise to keep in mind this bitter truth: most of Afghanistan's would-be conquerors make the same mistakes, and most eventually meet the same disastrous fate.

All serving consuls and prospective invaders interested in avoiding such an end would do well to read Peter Tomsen's magisterial new book, *The Wars of Afghanistan*. A career U.S. diplomat, Tomsen served as Washington's special envoy to the Afghan resistance in 1989-92, an experience that gave him almost unrivaled personal insight into Afghanistan's slide from anti-Soviet jihad into civil war. His account of the country's political dynamics before, during, and after this period is exhaustively researched, levelheaded, and persuasive. Throughout the book, he highlights two lessons that most of Afghanistan's invaders learn too late: no political system or ideology imposed by an outside power is likely to survive there, and any attempt to coax political change from within must be grounded in a deep knowledge of local culture and customs.

In Afghanistan, legitimate authority has traditionally been highly localized, a product of consensus rather than brute force, and firmly anchored in tribal, clannish, and kinship structures. Afghanistan only developed the barest bones of a centralized state in the twentieth century, and even today, Kabul's control over the country's periphery remains

tenuous at best. These attributes make Afghanistan a difficult country for foreign military planners to occupy. Then again, as former U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, under whose tenure the United States began its operations in Afghanistan, might have put it, you go to war in the country you have, not the country you want.

Tomsen compellingly argues that these salient features of Afghan political life will not disappear anytime soon. His conclusions about how Washington might stabilize Afghanistan, given the country's decentralization and independent culture, range from the uncontested (better understand local practices) to the slightly contestable (do not hope to centralize power) to the problematic (reinvent the U.S. relationship with Pakistan). Whether one agrees with Tomsen, however, there is no denying that his descriptions of Afghanistan's society and politics are a valuable foundation for any discussion of how the country should be governed.

DEJA VU ALL OVER AGAIN

Although the British and Soviet wars in Afghanistan may be the closest analogues to the United States' experience today, Tomsen starts his tale from the beginning. He usefully summarizes 3,000 years of Afghan history, during which the Greeks, the Romans, the White and the Black Huns, the Mongols, the Moguls, the Persians, and the Turkmens all tried to dominate the land. Every campaign eventually came to naught, either because the invader paid insufficient attention to local culture or because he sought to impose centralized control on ferociously independent tribes and clans. The pattern was basically the same each time: a brutally competent conqueror sweeps through Afghanistan, wreaking enough carnage to terrify all his enemies into submission, but he soon finds himself mired in a swamp of tribal customs and feuds that he does not begin to comprehend. When he loses enough in men and gold, he retreats -- not infrequently with fewer limbs than he had when he arrived.

Unlike previous invaders, the British troops that marched into Afghanistan in 1839 did not come to conquer; such a goal would have been far too expensive for the frugal bureaucrats back home. Instead, they aimed to place a puppet on the Afghan throne, or at least to establish a buffer between British India and the expanding tsarist Russia. The newly installed monarch would govern far more justly than his ousted rival: his British patronage was proof of his enlightenment. The British, much like the Soviets and the Americans decades later, were amazed to discover that Afghans did not believe in their benevolence. Suspicion quickly flared into insurgency, and when the British pulled out of Kabul in 1842 with a convoy of 16,000 troops and camp followers, only a single survivor (the assistant surgeon William Brydon) reached the border town of Jalalabad alive. Still, the lesson did not sink in. The British intervened in Afghanistan again in 1878 to compel the Afghan emir to at least accept a British diplomatic mission, and within just two years, they were left with some 3,000 dead or wounded. The Third Anglo-Afghan War, waged just after World War I to repel an ill-advised Afghan raid into British-held territory, lasted barely three months but killed 236 Britons in action. In each case, the colonial power arrived with increasingly modest goals -- and left with those goals only barely met.

At first, some Afghan city dwellers may have welcomed the Soviet invasion of 1979 as a respite from half a decade of coups and near coups, and those in the countryside may barely have known that it was happening. But any warm or neutral feelings were quickly swept away by the Soviets' attempts to impose their communist ideology and their conducting of a counterinsurgency campaign through carpet-bombing. By conservative estimates, more than one million Afghans were killed during the decadelong Soviet presence in the country -- many times the number of Afghans who have died as a result of the NATO-led war since 2001.

Tomsen, a Russian speaker who served as a political counselor in the U.S. embassy in Moscow immediately prior to the Soviet invasion, makes clear that there is no moral equivalence between the Soviets' occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s and the ongoing U.S.-led campaign there. He points out, however, that the Soviets made the same core mistakes that have haunted invaders before and since them: they attempted to impose a centralized order on a highly decentralized nation, and they displayed complete ignorance about the realities of Afghan society. There were few nations in the 1970s less ripe for a Marxist-Leninist revolution than Afghanistan. The country had no proletariat; indeed, it had little capitalist structure of any kind.

Yet even as communism failed to catch on, Moscow refused to jettison its ideological framework and instead tried to shore up its puppet government by patching together the two rival factions of the ruling national communist party. The Khalq faction was overwhelmingly made up of members of the Ghilzai Pashtun tribes; and the other, the Parcham faction, was mostly made up of Tajiks and Durrani Pashtuns, the Ghilzais' traditional foes. The feud between the two groups was coated with a thin veneer of socialist rhetoric, but it was really only a continuation of centuries-old tribal struggles. The result was a government in Kabul wholly uninterested in governance, utterly removed from the day-to-day concerns of the Afghan people, and consumed with petty struggles over the spoils of rule. Meanwhile, the government simultaneously parroted and plotted against its foreign patron. If this doesn't sound familiar, it should.

THE ENEMY WITHIN

To a specialized reader, the most valuable parts of Tomsen's book are those in which he recounts what he actually witnessed. His recitation of the political maneuvering of the Soviet era in Afghanistan may strike some as overly detailed: the Ghilzai warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar betrays the Tajik warlord Burhanuddin Rabbani; Rabbani betrays the Uzbek warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum, Dostum betrays everyone, and so on. But it is precisely with such detail that Tomsen breaks the most new ground. For this reason alone, *The Wars of Afghanistan* should have a place among the indispensable books on the topic.

The general reader will also find much to ponder in Tomsen's firsthand accounts. It is here that Tomsen most fully articulates his criticisms of the United States' own Afghanistan strategy, which he sees as having been remarkably static over the last few decades. Of the Clinton administration, he writes that the White House seemed not to have had any policy at all, "only a strategy that [was] marginally adjusted in reaction to events." (The critique also applies, in varying degrees, to every modern U.S. administration before and since.) As the United States' war in Afghanistan went from cold to hot, Washington made the same mistakes again and again.

According to Tomsen, another recurrent problem has been the United States' incoherent implementation of its policy, with every White House failing to enforce unified action across all branches of the government. Tomsen describes the CIA, in particular, as having conducted a foreign policy of its own, sabotaging U.S. attempts to build a unified moderate Afghan front and instead channeling support to Pakistan-based extremists. Meanwhile, U.S. presidents have been unwilling to devote sufficient time, attention, and political capital to formulating an effective Afghanistan policy. Most damaging of all, Tomsen argues, the United States has essentially outsourced its strategy to Pakistan's intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), funneling billions of dollars and military equipment to rabidly anti-American military officers and their jihadist proxies. The result, he argues, is that the United States has been continuously hoodwinked as Pakistan has taken the money for nothing in return.

U.S. President Ronald Reagan, for example, praised the anti-Soviet mujahideen as "the moral equivalent" of George Washington and looked the other way as the ISI funneled most of the American money and arms to Hekmatyar and other incompetent, anti-American figures while sidelining more capable and more broadly representative ones, such as the resistance leader Ahmad Shah Massoud. Tomsen is kinder to George H. W. Bush, who appointed him as special envoy to the region, than to other U.S. presidents, but he writes that he himself lacked the bureaucratic support to rein in the CIA when it undermined agreed-on policies, such as supporting the development of a moderate and broad-based government. During Bush's tenure, Tomsen writes, the agency continued to call all the shots, and money kept flowing to the ISI. Clinton made a few diplomatic feints, such as limited outreach to the ISI-backed Taliban, and lobbed a few cruise missiles when the Taliban continued to shelter al Qaeda, but he otherwise largely ignored Afghanistan. And even after 9/11, George W. Bush failed to wrest power from the CIA, the Pentagon, and the ISI. Tomsen sees traces of promise in Obama's 2009 decision to renew top-level emphasis on Afghanistan, but he is skeptical that such a commitment will work without a wholesale reexamination of U.S. policy. In sum, Tomsen sees most outside potentates, whether politiburo chairmen or presidents, as making the same set of errors.

UNCOMMON COMMON SENSE?

Trying to learn from the mistakes of their predecessors, today's war planners have settled on a comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy that is supposed to create enough security to help a civilian government establish legitimacy among the local populace. Observers with longer memories will recall, of course, that the principles of counterinsurgency have been discovered many times before: by the British in Malaya, the French in Algeria, the United States in Vietnam and the Philippines, and even the Soviets in Afghanistan. And discovering (or rediscovering) a principle is easier than implementing it. Ten years into the current counterinsurgency in Afghanistan, the military piece of the mission seems to have progressed far more rapidly than the civilian portion. Troops have pacified the major cities enough to allow for the formation of a central government. But the government of President Hamid Karzai seems to have little more popular support than did that of the Soviet puppet (and eventual light-post adornment) Muhammad Najibullah. As General Stanley McChrystal, then commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, candidly noted in his 2009 assessment of U.S. progress in Afghanistan, the military piece of counterinsurgency can do little more than provide the time and space for a civilian government to take root. It remains to be seen whether in 2014, by which time U.S. troops will have withdrawn from their combat role in Afghanistan, the Afghan government will resemble a stable oak or a flimsy reed.

Tomsen's policy recommendations are the flip side of his critique. He calls on the Obama administration to ensure a coherent policy by relegating the U.S. military and intelligence agencies to "policy-implementing, not policymaking." He also urges the administration to stay engaged in Afghanistan for the long haul but to "de-Americanize the Afghan war across the board as rapidly as possible" by disentangling the United States from Afghan governance and development, finding Afghan moderates worth backing, and helping the Afghan regime build its governance capacity so long as its practices are "honest and effective." If some of Tomsen's recommendations are common sense (who could object to greater policy coherence?), others are somewhat contradictory (how should one stay engaged enough to back moderates and build the regime's capacity, all while shifting responsibility for security to Afghan forces?). The government in Kabul may not inspire much confidence today, but Tomsen avoids the question of what the United States should do if Afghan politics are as corrupt and dysfunctional in 2014 as they are in 2011.

Tomsen also urges a get-tough approach with Pakistan: "The most valuable contribution that America can make to Afghan peace," he writes, "lies not in Afghanistan but in Pakistan." In addition to enforcing existing conditions on military aid more strictly, Tomsen argues, Obama should threaten to designate the country a state sponsor of terrorism if the ISI does not cut its ties to militants. Some readers will wholeheartedly endorse Tomsen's call, even if following it might lead to a severing of relations between the United States and Pakistan. Others will question the wisdom of trading a potential disaster in Afghanistan (a country of 40 million people and of dubious strategic interest to the United States) for a potential disaster in Pakistan (a nation of 185 million and with the world's fifth-largest nuclear arsenal). Even those who share Tomsen's intense frustration may scratch their heads trying to figure out what leverage the United States could possibly hold over the Pakistani military as long as the Pentagon remains so logistically dependent on it: half the supplies for U.S. troops in Afghanistan (and almost all the lethal equipment, from ammunition to the weapons that fire it) are transported daily by the convoys that come through the Khyber Pass and Spin Boldak, a town right on the border with Pakistan.

And even those who agree with the basic elements of Tomsen's approach will remain hungry for a fallback option if his approach fails. "Afghanistan is an unpredictable place," Tomsen writes. "Things almost never turn out as planned, especially when the planning is done by foreigners." How should U.S. policy deal with this problem? If the Afghan National Security Forces are unable to provide security by 2014, should the United States delay the withdrawal of its troops indefinitely? If the Karzai regime fails to address corruption and poor governance, should the United States continue to give it money? And if Pakistan continues to be "fireman and arsonist," which Tomsen says it has been consistently over the past three decades, should the United States disengage from it completely and accept the consequences? As bad as things are now, they could easily get much worse.

Inevitably, any book with the breadth of *The Wars of Afghanistan* will have a few nits for the picking, but there are two reasons to read Tomsen's book carefully. First, it is extremely well written; an entire career spent drafting State Department cables miraculously failed to grind down the author's narrative spirit. Second, and more important, Tomsen has often been right in the past -- even, or especially, when many others were wrong.

Before 9/11, for example, he was in favor of cooperating with the two moderate mujahideen leaders Massoud and Abdul Haq when the U.S. government was against doing so. He was against working with the decidedly nonmoderate Hekmatyar and Hamid Gul, the ISI head who helped create several of the worst terrorist groups still operating in the region today, when Washington was for it. He was also right to sound the alarm about an obscure figure named Osama bin Laden at a time when the U.S. government was turning a blind eye to the ISI's support for him. Tomsen writes of the al Qaeda chief's sanctuary in Pakistan, "[Pakistani President Pervez] Musharraf and the ISI practiced plausible deniability concerning bin Laden's whereabouts. They knew exactly where he was." This is a bold claim, and much more so for having been written long before the May 2 U.S. raid in Abbottabad that killed bin Laden.

It is also worth quoting at length a prediction Tomsen made while testifying to Congress in 2003:

The stunning American-led military victory in Afghanistan which ousted the Taliban-al Qaeda regime has not been followed up by an effective, adequately funded reconstruction strategy to help Afghans rebuild their country and restore their self-governing institutions. The initial enthusiasm genuinely felt by the Afghan people that peace was returning has clearly faded. . . . If present trends continue, five years from now Afghanistan is likely to look very much like it does today: reconstruction stagnation, a weak

central government starved of resources, unable to extend its influence to the regions where oppressive warlords reign, opium production soars, and guerrilla warfare in Afghan-Pakistani border areas generated by Pakistan-backed Muslim extremists continues to inflict casualties on coalition and Afghan forces.

Today, he writes, even this take is overly optimistic.

Given Tomsen's track record, Americans should give a respectful hearing to his call for a thorough policy reformulation -- something beyond tweaks to troop numbers and counterinsurgency tactics. And given the merits of his book, they should heed his warning not to repeat the mistakes of the past.

Copyright © 2002-2010 by the Council on Foreign Relations, Inc.

All rights reserved. To request permission to distribute or reprint this article, please fill out and submit a Permissions Request Form. If you plan to use this article in a coursepack or academic website, visit Copyright Clearance Center to clear permission.

Return to Article: <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/68214/jonah-blank/invading-afghanistan-then-and-now>

Home > Review Essay > Invading Afghanistan, Then and Now

Published on *Foreign Affairs* (<http://www.foreignaffairs.com>)

Links:

[1] <http://www.amazon.com/Mullahs-Mainframe-Islam-Modernity-Bohras/dp/0226056767>

[2] <http://www.amazon.com/Arrow-Blue-Skinned-God-Retracing-Ramayana/dp/0802137334>

FRANK R. WOLF
10TH DISTRICT, VIRGINIA

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

SUBCOMMITTEES:

CHAIRMAN—COMMERCE-JUSTICE-SCIENCE

TRANSPORTATION-HUD

STATE AND FOREIGN OPERATIONS

CO-CHAIR—TOM LANTOS
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

September 15, 2011

241 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-4610
(202) 225-5136

13873 PARK CENTER ROAD
SUITE 130
HERNDON, VA 20171
(703) 709-5800
(800) 945-9653 (IN STATE)

110 NORTH CAMERON STREET
WINCHESTER, VA 22601
(540) 667-0990
(800) 850-3463 (IN STATE)

wolf.house.gov

The Honorable Leon Panetta
Secretary of Defense
US Department of Defense
The Pentagon Room 3E 880
Washington DC 20301

Dear Secretary Panetta

It was good to be with you at the Pentagon on Sunday to honor the lives lost there 10 years ago in the 9/11 attacks. I want to congratulate you on a moving ceremony that showed reverence to the Pentagon employees and the passengers of American Flight 77 that perished on that awful morning. I appreciated your comments and those of Admiral Mullen. Several of my constituents died at the Pentagon and the first U.S. service member killed in Afghanistan was my constituent. I thank you and all those who have served in public office and in uniform in the 10 years we have waged war against global terrorism.

As I waited for the program to begin on Sunday, I saw you and former Defense Secretary Rumsfeld and was struck by a vivid memory from 2005 of the events surrounding the Iraq war. We were three years into the war, the security situation in Iraq was deteriorating, and our soldiers were dying every day. As a member of Congress who voted to send our troops to fight, I believed I had the added responsibility to make sure the administration was receiving the best advice possible on our Iraq strategy.

So I proposed creating the Iraq Study Group (ISG) made up of experts outside government to bring what I called "fresh eyes" on the target. Secretary Rumsfeld, General Pace, Secretary Rice, and NSC Chairman Hadley all came to see the value in the ISG. By your participation, I think it is fair to say you also saw its benefit, and I greatly appreciated your outstanding service on the bipartisan panel. You and the other Democratic members who gave your time during a Republican administration exemplified the true meaning of service to your country.

We are now into the 10th year of fighting in Afghanistan and the challenges we face there continue. In 2001, I was the first member of Congress, along with Rep. Joe Pitts, to visit Afghanistan after the U.S. invasion, against the wishes of the Defense Department. We saw firsthand the devastation that the Taliban had visited on Kabul as well as the remnants of the U.S. Embassy that was abandoned in 1979. I have also traveled to Pakistan and seen the difficulties that country faces combating the Afghan Taliban and other terror groups. Despite the current conditions, all my experience in this region tells me that success is possible if we formulate the right strategy to deal with both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The Honorable Leon Panetta
September 15, 2011
Page 2

As with the ISG, I believe fresh eyes are needed now to examine U.S. policy in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The security situation continues to erode as evidenced by coordinated insurgent attacks on heavily fortified U.S. and NATO compounds just this week. The Taliban still finds safe haven in the tribal wilderness of Pakistan and the ISI actively funds terrorist groups.

Given these and other concerns on the ground in Afghanistan, I continue to be puzzled why you, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary Clinton are not supporting the Af/Pak Study Group idea in the same manner that Secretary Rumsfeld and other Bush administration officials supported the ISG. Having the experience of serving on the ISG and now serving as secretary of Defense with a Democratic president (who I acknowledge inherited the war in Afghanistan), you are in a unique position to make this group a reality. The authorization and funding for the Af/Pak Study Group in the House-passed Defense Appropriations bill gives you the authority to create this group today.

I have to tell you that I continue to be disappointed that your staff has yet to contact former Ambassador Peter Tomsen to discuss his book, The Wars of Afghanistan. His book provides insightful information on the tribal structure of both Afghanistan and Pakistan and the political allegiances that underlie all actions in the region. I believe his knowledge and experience in this region would be invaluable in formatting future policy in South Asia. I respectfully ask again: please take advantage of his work and meet with him as soon as possible.

Leon, I don't have the answers on Afghanistan. Perhaps current U.S. strategy is the best way forward. But we owe it to the men and women in uniform who have served and continue to serve there – some paying the ultimate sacrifice – to know definitively. I continue to believe that fresh eyes from outside government focused on assessing the situation is the prudent action to take. I ask that you take the advice of those who support an Af/Pak Study Group, including Jim Dobbins, General Charles Krulak, Ryan Crocker, who I spoke with prior to his appointment as ambassador to Afghanistan, and other prominent Americans with experience in this region.

I believe it would be a sign of strength to appoint a study group and let the American people know that the administration is willing to examine all possible policies to achieve a successful outcome in this troubled region.

Best wishes.

Sincerely,

Frank R. Wolf
Member of Congress

FRW:cw



FRANK WOLF