



LOSING THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

By Harry Braun

A recent U.S. State Department Report confirms that the U.S. is essentially unable to provide any security beyond the city of Kabul in Afghanistan. In a story that appeared in *The New York Times* (September 18, 2002), the Report, which has been delivered to Congress, states that "providing needed security to the rural hinterlands in Afghanistan would be almost impossible for any outside force," and that even trying to protect the other major Afghan population centers "would impose significant logistical and command burdens." As such, the Report concludes that it will be up to the Afghans themselves to extend security throughout the lawless countryside. According to David T. Johnson, the State Department's coordinator for Afghanistan, the country has poor roads, high mountains and wide expanses that pose problems for any international peacekeeping force.

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It is worth noting that the Russians also won every battle in Afghanistan, but ultimately they lost the war and control of the harsh country that has been ruled by violent warlords for centuries. Given the assassination attempts against President Hamid Karzai and other members of his government have occurred in spite of the U.S. security forces in Kabul certainly gives the impression that Afghanistan crisis is rapidly spiraling out of control. Indeed, in speeches in New York City, Mr. Karzai warned about the spreading disorder and urged the expansion of peacekeeping forces to at least three outlying cities of Kabul, but neither the U.S. or any other nation has offered any additional soldiers for the existing 4,700-member security force. In remarks quoted in *The New York Times* (September 27, 2002), Secretary of State Colin Powell confirmed that one-third of \$2 billion pledged by a number of countries had not been provided, and that without such assistance, Afghanistan will quickly be reduced to chaos.

Afghanistan is not only lacking security forces, it is in a sever drought; it has virtually no infrastructure; millions of Afghans are now faced with starvation, and there is apparently no nation in the world -- including the U.S. -- that will provide the necessary financial resources to help. As most American are aware, these were the very conditions of chaos that allowed the Taliban to come to power in Afghanistan in the first place. While it is a relatively easy matter for a superpower like the U.S. to use advanced high-flying aircraft to win major military battles with the relatively primitive armed forces in countries like Afghanistan or Iraq, trying to provide order and social and economic stability in these countries over the long-term is another matter. As has often been said, those who do not learn from history are forced to repeat it.



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