

Lessons from America's Afghan Debacle

America spent about 2.6 trillion USD in Afghanistan over the course of 20 years. That's about exactly the total [combined nominal GDP of all African countries](#) in 2019. One would think that America was generous to Afghans if it weren't for the CNN lamentations over "[the world's biggest deposits of lithium](#)" that American troops have left in the hands of the Taliban. If anything, there is one simple lesson Africans should learn from America's shocking and chaotic exit from Afghanistan: Uncle Sam is not your uncle.

I have in the recent past [called attention to](#) the dangers of western intervention in Africa, highlighting Libya as one catastrophic example. A once successful, prosperous middle-income country was turned into a medieval hellhole teaming with slave traders and terrorists in just a couple of years, all because the West didn't like the guts of its strong, nationalist, pan-African, if authoritarian, leader.

Ghaddafi's cardinal sin in the eyes of the powers that be in Washington DC, Paris, London and Brussels was his stubborn refusal to allow his country's oil wealth be pillaged by marauding western oligarchs. Ten years after they murdered him on a dusty street, Libya is in a shambles and, in perhaps one of the greatest ironies to grace western adventurism into the third world, recent polling and numerous [reports](#) indicate that millions of Libyans now miss the Gadhafi years and many intend to vote for the late Dictator's son, Saif al-Islam in the next elections!

If history is anything to go by, little, if any, good has ever come from America's military adventurism in Africa. From the time the CIA assassinated Lumumba in 1961, plunging the Congo into an eternal abyss, to their 1993 Somalia debacle that

resulted in the 'Black Hawk Down' iconography, it seems troubles follow Uncle Sam wherever his mischief takes him, and misery is visited upon indigenous populations.

The American public seems to be genuinely shocked and dismayed by the nature of their military's withdrawal from Afghanistan and the fear and uncertainty that followed it. But countries that have been at the receiving end of America's raw predatory military forays and those of fellow NATO allies will not find a lot to be surprised by in this Afghan debacle.

In 2019, years after they had valiantly fought ISIS and suffered unimaginable casualties, the Kurds were left hanging when President Trump's decision to pull U.S. troops away from the [Syria-Turkey](#) border tacitly endorsed a Turkish assault on their posts in Northern Syria, which killed and displaced lots of them.

In April 1994, France and Belgium sent their troops to airlift their citizens from Rwanda as genocidaires began a 100-day genocidaire extermination of that country's Tutsi minority. According to the [PBS Documentary](#) "100 Days of Slaughter: The Triumph of Evil," not even the Rwandans employed by Western governments in their embassies and consulates were rescued.

For those whose memory is intact, the act of Americans leaving behind thousands of Afghan allies that helped them in their 20-year nation-building project is not surprising.

Currently, thousands of troops from western armies are operating in several African countries, from the Sahel region to the Congo. Most are there, ostensibly, to support these countries' counter-terrorism operations against insurgents. What this America-Afghan imbroglio should remind these countries is that these western troops are not in Africa to win the wars for us and build our nations. We should address the root causes of these conflicts ourselves, and yes, fight and die addressing our national and pan-African interests!

Indigenously hard-fought victories tend to be more sustainable and impactful. This is why the pan-African dreams of Nyerere, Nkrumah, Mandela, Seko Toure and Lumumba must be revived and fulfilled.

These people paid the ultimate price to achieve their own liberation.

On the contrary, America propped up a corrupt and feckless South Vietnamese government to fight the more determined Vietcong. We know how that ended. It's as if they had not learnt from the Bay of Pigs debacle only 5 years earlier, where they thought that arming a few hundred opportunistic Cuban exiles against Fidel Castro's popular revolution would end the reign of El Comandante. Of course, it ended in embarrassment for President Kennedy and nearly led to the first nuclear war between the USA and the USSR, briefly putting the entire world on the cusp of nuclear annihilation.

Supporting a corrupt but spineless Afghan army against a determined Taliban was therefore bound to end in disaster, and it would be shocking and surprising that, as Biden claimed, nobody in America's military brass 'saw it coming.'

The good news

Currently, some African countries are beginning to realize that the way to address Africa's challenges is through Pan-Africanism. Rwanda's Army's support to Mozambique in that country's battle against an Islamist insurgency has already started returning positive results merely weeks into their mission. Similarly, the pacification of Somalia, however temporary (temporary because, just like in Afghanistan, the western conceived model that undermines the Somali elite's ability to imagine solutions that are rooted in their historical, cultural and socio-economic realities will likely doom the country once foreign forces leave) is in large part thanks to huge sacrifices made by African Union troops

supporting that government, albeit with the financial and technical support of western powers.

This shows that local agency is far better than the mirage of comfort that may be provided by American dollars and hi-tech weapons. These are never meant for the national interest of the country they purport to be helping, but the power's own interests. When those interests are met or when the cost of upholding them becomes too high, Uncle Sam normally leaves as he has done in the case of Afghanistan. Better than that, African countries should fight their own battles and should not look up to Uncle Sam for salvation, for he's no well-intentioned messiah.