The war in Afghanistan that began with the invasion in October 2001 by the United States and its allies is now in its 19th year. There is periodic talk in the western media of the Trump administration reaching a peace deal with the Taliban, leading to the Taliban resuming political control over the whole country.

Such talk is delusional. The western commentators who have seized on the latest round of talks between officials of the Trump administration and Taliban leaders are completely unable to correctly interpret the relevant history of Afghanistan or the real reasons why the United States invaded in the first place, why they are staying, and why they are highly unlikely to make a voluntary exit.

The United States and its allies cannot win the war in Afghanistan. They were bound to fail, just as the British failed three times in the 19th century. But winning the war is not and never has been the point. The real reasons for the United States presence, and their extreme reluctance to leave, are never discussed in the mainstream western media. The real reasons for the invasion, the occupation and the unwillingness to voluntarily leave, fall into three broad categories.

The first of these reasons is narcotics, specifically the production of heroin, for which Afghanistan accounts for more than 90% of the world's supply. Pre the 2001 United States invasion the Taliban government had virtually eliminated the poppy crops that are the source of the crude heroin.
After the United States occupation, production of heroin radically increased. The western media have been reluctant to even note this obvious point. They are equally reluctant to note the fact that the opium market is controlled by the CIA. Chemicals necessary to refine the crude opium into sellable heroin are flown in on United States planes and the refined product flown out on the same planes for worldwide distribution.

The revenue the CIA obtains, in the tens of billions of dollars each year, does not have to be accounted for to any Congressional committee. This is not new. The CIA has been doing the same thing for decades before the United States invasion of Afghanistan. The American author Alfred McCoy provided the details in his book The Politics of Heroin in 1972. McCoy was explaining the United States heroin trade in south-east Asia. The venue has changed; the policy has not.

Apart from huge revenues that do not have to be accounted for, the heroin trade has the added benefit from the United States point of view of creating addiction problems among the population of enemy countries, such as Iran and Russia.

The second major reason the United States is not going to leave Afghanistan willingly is geography. Afghanistan shares borders with Iran, Pakistan and China, as well as three “Stans” Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan and close proximity to two more, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

It is not a random coincidence that United States Secretary of State Pompeo has recently visited the area. All of the “stans” with the exception of Pakistan, were formerly part of the Soviet Union. More recently they have established strong ties with China through the Shanghai Corporation Organisation and the Belt and Road Initiative. The BRI now has more than 150 countries signed up. It is bitterly opposed by the United States, loyal supported by Australia. The latter country nonetheless has China as its largest trading partner by a huge margin.

12 of Australia’s 15 largest trading partners are in Asia, plus New Zealand, Germany and the United States. New Zealand was the first non-Asian country to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with China on the BRI. The German city of Duisburg is already the European terminus and transit hub for Chinese exports. Japan, after initial caution, has progressively become closer to the BRI and is likely to sign a memorandum of understanding sooner rather than later.

The United States is working hard to discourage any such Japanese move. President Trump’s recent visit to India was intended in part to shore up Indian reluctance to formally join the BRI. Indian reluctance is not the same as adopting a pro United States stance. India has a long history of cooperation with Russia, recently buying Russian fighter jets and consulting with Moscow on key regional issues.

Also very significant in this context is the North South Transportation Corridor from India to Russia, a more than 7000 km link through Afghanistan, Iran, Armenia and Azerbaijan to Russia and hence to Europe. There is no United States involvement. One of the significant features of recent developments is the overlapping membership of the various Eurasian countries in these huge schemes.

It would be naïve to assume that recent United States’ interest in some of the countries involved, as shown by Pompeo’s recent trip, is intended as other than an attempt to drive a wedge between various projects and undermine the respective countries ability to create important relationships, independent of United States involvement.

The third reason grows out of the second. The United States is a fading power, economically and politically and at least in comparison to its major geo-political rivals, also militarily. It has long ceased to be able to offer meaningful cooperation in the Eurasian region. Its role for the past several years has essentially being one of a spoiler. Unable to compete militarily with Russia and China and increasingly unable to assert its political will in the Eurasian region, it has essentially opted for a spoiler role.

Its presence in Afghanistan was unwanted and unwelcome, and as is now well established based on a series of fundamental lies about the true perpetrators of the attacks on American cities on 11 September 2001. As United States power in Afghanistan has faded it was totally unsurprising to see the emergence there of Islamic terrorist groups. Pushed out of the Middle East where they have been actively promoting United States geopolitical goals in the region, they are now in Afghanistan, hoping to subvert the Taliban’s rule.

The presence of the United States in Afghanistan was unwanted, unwelcome and illegal. As United States power there has faded it was totally unsurprising to see the emergence of Islamic terrorist groups. Pushed out of the Middle East where they have actively promoted United States geopolitical goals in the region, they are now in Afghanistan, hoping to subvert the Taliban’s rise.
The beneficiary of the activities of the terrorist groups are invariably the geopolitical goals of their western controllers. It never occurs to western journalists to ask why these alleged Islamic fanatics have never attacked Israel, the supposed antithesis of their religious foundation.

Not only are the numbers of United States troops in Afghanistan unlikely to change in any meaningful way in the foreseeable future, the role of their erstwhile allies is totally absent from the discussion. Australian forces, allegedly training Afghanistan troops, have given absolutely no signals about a possible withdrawal.

When Australian news organisations attempted to investigate reports of atrocities by Australian troops in Afghanistan, the organisations were threatened by the government and individuals placed under investigation.

The reality is that Afghanistan is too big a prize for western powers to voluntarily forgo, as it has been for centuries. They will not leave voluntarily. The real victims are the people of Afghanistan itself, with millions forced to flee to Pakistan and Iran, tens of thousands killed, and no real end in sight.

The western mainstream media have lied about Afghanistan for decades. It would be naïve to expect any voluntary change in their behaviour. The one glimmer of hope is that Afghanistan’s neighbours envisage a different future for their region, and have implemented an array of projects with Afghanistan’s participation that offers the first real glimmer of hope for at least two generations.

Afghanistan's progress will be despite, rather than because of, the interference of the United States and its Western allies.

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