

AMERICAN INVASIONS AND WITHDRAWALS POST- 9/11

While the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq was a destructive idea, its withdrawal from these countries is much worse since Americans will be leaving the two countries without ensuring peace, stabilizing and improving the political system, and eliminating terrorist groups. Such policies are not only a repetition of the Vietnam War but also indicators of how unplanned and gradual withdrawals can harm both the US and victim countries. As the history of withdrawing is repeating itself, so will the post-withdrawal circumstances. This article, by reviewing the literature, reveals how sudden withdrawals create more chaos in war-torn countries.

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When the United States was hit by al-Qaida's terrorist attack on 11 September 2001 (hereafter 9/11 attacks), not only Americans but the whole world was shocked: The world's only superpower was attacked at home and had lost more than three thousand people. To take revenge for the attack as well as to prevent new ones, the Bush administration decided to invade both Afghanistan and Iraq, which they claimed were sheltering and supporting al-Qaida. Afghanistan was invaded on 7 October 2001 because the US wanted (1) to eliminate Osama bin Laden (the mastermind of 9/11) and al-Qaida; (2) to remove the Taliban group from power and bring stability to Afghanistan by creating a democratic and peaceful state.¹ The US Army subsequently invaded Iraq in 2003, claiming that Saddam Hussain was supporting terrorism and producing chemical weapons. There were also allegations that the Hussain regime was behind the 9/11 attacks, but it was never proven. The US eventually removed both Taliban and Saddam Hussain from power and captured Hussain, who was later judged and executed by the new Iraqi government on 30 December 2006. US special forces killed Laden on 2 May 2011.

As of today, the US has killed its two archenemies and changed regimes allegedly supporting terrorism in both Afghanistan and Iraq, yet could not bring stability. What is more, the remaining US troops are preparing to leave the two countries. Neither Afghanistan nor Iraq is in better condition than the pre-invasion era as both states have failed, lack a strong authority, and cannot fight terrorism. In Afghanistan, the Taliban was the enemy to be removed, however the US's recent agreement with the organization has paved the way for re-control of the country by the group. On the other hand, Iraq has become a land of widespread terrorism, and the country is more divided than before, not mentioning Iranian influence on Baghdad. Based on the current situation, my arguments are that (1) the US is about to make the same mistake it did in Vietnam, and (2) Afghanistan and Iraq might again become the hub of terrorist organizations as well as regional rivalries. Although I do not approve of the US invasions, as Afghanistan and Iraq saw the worse with its invasion, these countries will face the worst with the US's withdrawal.

US Invasions and Withdrawals

The US, as the leader of the liberal-democratic West, tried to stop communist expansion during the Cold War. While Washington directly intervened in the Korean and the Vietnam wars, it avoided confronting the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, out of fear of causing a nuclear war. However, the US supplied militants and weapons to *mujahedeen* of Afghanistan to oust Soviets from the country. It spent between 3.5

¹ETH Zurich, "Iraq After the US Withdrawal: Staring Into the Abyss," May 2012, <https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CSS-Analysis-113-EN.pdf>

and 5 billion dollars for them, which ultimately forced the Soviet Union to withdraw from Afghanistan, leaving more than one million people dead and causing a civil war in addition to a mass migration of 6.3 million Afghans.² When the US stopped funding foreign fighters, the latter formed al-Qaida, led by Osama bin Laden, and began to turn their rifles to Americans in the 1990s. The 9/11 attacks were a milestone for America's patience. The Bush administration invaded Afghanistan 26 days after the attack and Iraq in 2003. While the invasion of Afghanistan led to the death of more than 100,000 Afghans and the loss of 2,400 US soldiers, it has cost the US 822 billion dollars since 2001.³ On the other hand, the invasion of Iraq has led to more than 500,000 Iraqis being killed and the burden of more than 3 trillion dollars on the US.⁴

“The US withdrawal from both Iraq and Afghanistan resembles how it left Vietnam and the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan in 1989.”

Despite all these costs, one can hardly argue that America got what it wanted. Leaving aside American goals, neither Afghanistan nor Iraq has stabilized or prospered. A better regime has not replaced the older one either. Further to unstable circumstances, terrorism is at its peak level, and the withdrawal of US forces will probably exacerbate the situation as failed states are not capable to rule their countries. The US withdrew its forces from Iraq during the Obama era in 2011. Yet, when ISIS emerged (because of the absence of US forces and lack of authority across the country), American troops came back at the request of the Iraqi government. Nowadays, they are on the way to the US as the Trump administration wanted so, particularly due to the increasing attacks of Shiite groups after the assassination of Qasem Soleimani in January 2020. Pay attention that, though the Iraqi government had asked for the withdrawal of US troops, the decisive factor has been the murder of an Iranian general rather than an issue related to Iraq. Regarding Afghanistan, US officials signed an agreement with the Taliban, for which it invaded Afghanistan together with some other reasons, this time bypassing the Afghan government. The US withdrawal from both Iraq and Afghanistan resembles how it left Vietnam and the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan in 1989.

² Daniel Runde, “Preventing Catastrophe in Afghanistan,” *CSIS*, 12 April 2019, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/preventing-catastrophe-afghanistan>

³ Timothy S. Rich, Sofia Kamali, and Kaitlyn Bison, “Surveying Opinion on Withdrawing US Troops from Afghanistan and South Korea,” *E-IR*, 17 July 2020, <https://www.e-ir.info/2020/07/17/surveying-opinion-on-withdrawing-us-troops-from-afghanistan-and-south-korea/>

⁴ ETH Zurich (2012).

US Withdrawal from Iraq

The US invaded Iraq because of the 9/11 attacks as well as the Hussain regime's support of terrorism and its production of chemical weapons. However, while Saddam Hussain's link with al-Qaida was not proven, US officials themselves confessed later that the Hussain regime did not have chemical weapons.⁵ Thus, Hussain was overthrown for a crime he was not involved in but for his staunch anti-American and anti-Israeli stance. Saddam Hussain was hanged to death but, as even the Bush administration confessed, the post-Hussain era was a period of instability and anarchy in Iraq.⁶ The Iraqi state apparatus, institutions, clerks, and even the army were all abolished so that the new era could have a brand-new government and tools. However, since there was no strong authority to unite the country, the Iraqi population was divided into three parts, namely Shiite Arabs, Sunni Arabs, and Kurds. Since Shiites held the majority of the population, they were the natural winner of elections, excluding some exceptions. Thus, it is not a coincidence that all prime ministers of Iraq have had Shiite faith. The dominance of Shiites in Baghdad was also a gift to Iran. The mullah regime invested in its political Iraqi allies like the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), the Badr Organization (ISCI's former militia), the Islamic Dawa Party, and the Sadrist.⁷ Besides politics, Iran is dominant in Iraq via its militant proxies such as Kata'ib Hizballah, Al-Hash Al-Sha'bi, Jays-al Mahdi and many others. In a case of combat between the Iraqi army and Iranian proxies, the former may not defeat the latter.

Regarding Iraqi Kurds, while the president is a Kurd as per the constitution, the presidential seat has a weak authority and influence on state affairs. Yet, Kurdish people could secure themselves and their lands with the support of Americans. As for Sunnis, they suffered more than any other community in Iraq. The Sunni community was relatively comfortable during Saddam Hussain's reign, as he was a Sunni. However, as soon as Shiites took power, they oppressed, sentenced, or executed Sunnis, which made Sunnis think that the reconstruction of Iraq was being made at their expense.⁸

Such thoughts also led Sunnis to open their doors to al-Qaida (and later ISIS). Al-Qaeda militants targeted the newly formed Iraqi army and US troops, which helped the terrorist organization gain root in the Sunni community. Moreover, Abu Mus'ab

⁵ Jon Schwarz, "Twelve Years Later, US Media Still Can't Get Iraqi WMD Story Right," *The Intercept*, 10 April 2015, <https://theintercept.com/2015/04/10/twelve-years-later-u-s-media-still-cant-get-iraqi-wmd-story-right/>

⁶ Toby Dodge, "The Causes of US Failure in Iraq," *Survival*, Vol. 49, No.1 (2007), p. 85.

⁷ Michael Eisenstadt, Michael Knights, and Ahmed Ali, *Iran's Influence in Iraq* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2011), p. ix.

⁸ Carlos Pascual and Ken Pollack, "Salvaging the Possible: Policy Options in Iraq," *Brookings*, September 2007, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/pascual_pollack200709.pdf

Al-Zarqawi, one of the top al-Qaida leaders, seeded the roots of ISIS in Iraq in 2007. The influence of Iran on the Iraqi government, the proliferation of Shiite militant groups, and the entrance of al-Qaida into Iraq happened during the American occupation, when 1.5 million US soldiers were deployed in shifts in Iraq. The number of American soldiers was at its highest when there were 147,000 servicemen and 100,000 contractors in 2008.⁹ However, despite huge numbers of soldiers and expending 3 trillion dollars, the US either could not or did not want to stabilize Iraq.

“...Iran, Russia, and a China-backed Shiite Iraqi government will not be compelled to have indiscriminative policies against minority groups.”

What was wrong with American policies? According to Paigham: “Things could have been different had Washington also prioritized institution-building beside hunting down terrorists.”¹⁰ In fact, the US was about to finish the civil war and break the influence of al-Qaida after the death of Al-Zarqawi. When al-Qaida enforced rigid Sharia law and used violence excessively, Sunni tribes turned against them and began to fight alongside US troops against the terrorist group. American officials welcomed tribes’ resistance and supplied them weapons as well as integrated them with Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). The Sunni forces were called Sons of Iraq, which grew to more than 100,000 in strength.¹¹ This achievement was a milestone for the American administration since it could lure Sunnis to its side. However, in 2010, when non-sectarian Shiite opponents of Nuri Al-Maliki, then Prime Minister, and Sunni tribes combined their power against him and won the elections, US President Barack Obama supported Maliki against opponents’ leader Ayad Allawi, undermining Iraq’s weak democratic process.¹² What is more, claiming that Iraq is a sovereign, self-reliant, and stable country, Obama withdrew all US troops in 2011. Shocked by the decision, Sunni troops again relied on ISIS, which al-Qaida gave birth to in Iraq. Therefore, terrorism resurged in Iraq due to the absence of US forces, which led to the resumption of the Shiite oppression of Sunnis. ISIS became so powerful that it quickly took Fallujah, Ramadi, and Mosul in 2014, thus the Iraqi government, which wanted US forces to leave for years, had to invite

⁹ Thomas Bowditch, “Policy Options and the U.S.: Withdrawal from Iraq,” *CNA*, August 2009, https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/D0019765.A4.pdf

¹⁰ Nawid Paigham, “Unfinished Business,” *D+C Development and Cooperation*, 12 May 2020, <https://www.dandc.eu/en/article/hasty-withdrawal-us-troops-afghanistan-likely-result-mess>

¹¹ Ryan N. Mannina, “How the 2011 US Troop Withdrawal from Iraq Led to the Rise of ISIS,” *Small War Journal*, 23 December 2018, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jml/art/how-2011-us-troop-withdrawal-iraq-led-rise-isis>

¹² Mannina, “2011 US Troop Withdrawal.”

back the forces. ISIS was defeated both in Syria and Iraq with US help, and nowadays US troops are leaving Iraq again as the Iraqi government requested and the Trump administration accepted.

As Joe Biden is also not against troops returning home, it seems that the last 3,000 troops will leave Iraq next year.¹³ Thus, after Vietnam, the US will leave another country without bringing peace. When the US army left South Vietnam, the latter was invaded by North Vietnam, thereby wasting all human, economic, and military power it used during the war. The withdrawal also shows that the Washington government will repeat the same mistake, a sign that there are no lessons learned from previous experiences. In addition, leaving Iraq means spending trillions of dollars and killing hundreds of thousands of Iraqis just in return for killing Saddam Hussein and as a bonus, Qasem Soleimani. Iraqis might not miss the Hussain regime but it will not be surprising to see that they favor stability during the regime. Moreover, there will be no reason for Shiite parties to consider the demands of the Sunni community and Kurds, who were America's best allies during the invasion. When the Iraqi parliament passed a non-binding resolution for expulsion of US forces, Sunnis and Kurds were absent in the hearing. Both Sunnis and Kurds are expecting more disenfranchisement after the withdrawal of US troops.

Besides deprivations, it is highly likely that ISIS or a similar group may take the lead and cause another civil war. Therefore, it can be concluded that while sectarianism is already at its peak, it may reach a new high, as the strife between Shiites and Sunnis as well as Kurds is already worrisome. Also, it will not be out of the question that the support of the Iranian regime to Baghdad and the presence of more than 100,000 Shiite militias will encourage the central government to crush minorities. In addition, the absence of the US army does not mean that Iraq will be free of foreign influence. As Iran is already there, Russia and China may knock on the door of Iraqis as well; China's soft power in particular should not be underestimated in Iraq. If all these projections come true, Iran, Russia, and a China-backed Shiite Iraqi government will not be compelled to have indiscriminative policies against minority groups. Yet, Kurds and Sunni groups will probably not surrender and defend themselves through legal and illegal ways, causing an inevitable civil war.

US Withdrawal from Afghanistan

While the decision to gradually withdraw from Afghanistan was given by the

¹³ "Would You Set a Hard Date for Withdrawal From Afghanistan Of All U.S. Military Forces?" *Washington Post*, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/policy-2020/foreign-policy/withdraw-troops-afghanistan-timeline/>; Barbara Starr and Ryan Browne, "US Announces Troop Drawdown in Iraq," *CNN*, 9 September 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/09/09/politics/us-troops-iraq/index.html>

Obama administration, the Trump administration agreed with the Taliban to reduce its troops to 8,600 within 135 days and finish the complete withdrawal by April 2021.¹⁴ The US had invaded Afghanistan because Osama bin Laden and other al-Qaida members took refuge there before and after the 9/11 attacks.¹⁵ Taliban, controlling 90 percent of Afghan territories at that time, did not accept the US request to oust Laden from the country. Thus, to remove the Taliban and destroy al-Qaida, the Bush administration together with its NATO allies invaded Afghanistan. Taliban was defeated quickly but Laden and al-Qaida militants continued to live in Afghan and Pakistani mountains. Laden could only be killed ten years after the 9/11 attacks in Pakistan. Although al-Qaida was pacified, the group's Salafist radical ideology later metastasized to ISIS. On the other hand, one can hardly say that both Taliban and al-Qaida were eliminated. On the contrary, they just left urban locations and maintained their activities in rural and mountainous areas. According to Bays, the Taliban was running schools and hospitals in Helmand province, as many regions were under the control of the group in 2007.¹⁶

“A US-Taliban peace is guaranteed via a face-saving agreement that does not prioritize intra-state clashes and the Taliban's increased influence in the country.”

On the other hand, despite limited participation, free elections were held in the country and, as a result, a democratic government took power in Kabul. In addition, though not at the desired level, women could go to school and work, and universal values such as freedom of speech and the protection of minorities were introduced. However, there was never a full control of the central government over Afghan territories as the US itself reinstated some strong warlords with private armies such as Abdul Rashid Dostum, Muhammad Fahim, Burhanuddin Rabbani, and Abdul Rasul Sayyaf.¹⁷ Moreover, drug production peaked as opium worth 1.4 billion dollars, the equivalent of 590,000 jobs and 328,000 hectares, were cultivated.¹⁸ Thus, there were various power centers as there were warlords of the Northern Alliance under the

¹⁴ Congressional Research Service, “Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy: In Brief,” 10 November 2020, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R45122.pdf>

¹⁵ Robert Burns and Zeke Miller, “US Withdrawing Thousands of Troops from Iraq and Afghanistan,” *Military Times*, 9 September 2020, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2020/09/09/centcom-boss-says-us-cutting-troops-in-iraq-to-3000-this-month/>

¹⁶ James Bays, “Taliban ‘in control’ in Helmand,” *Al Jazeera*, 24 June 2007, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2007/6/24/taliban-in-control-in-helmand>

¹⁷ Hakan Cem Çetin, “War on terrorism: What went wrong in Afghanistan?” *International Journal of Human Sciences*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (2013), p. 539.

¹⁸ Runde, “Catastrophe in Afghanistan.”

protection of the US, a US-supported government in Kabul, Iranian influence in the Shiite minority, and Taliban in rural areas.

Taliban continued to be influential because the US administration ousted them from power instead of destroying; thus the group found shelters in far locations and Pakistan. While it had 25,000 fighters in 1995, controlling 90 percent of Afghanistan, the group now has more than 50,000 fighters and controls almost 70 percent of the country.¹⁹ The group was founded by former *mujahedeen* supported by the US and other countries. However, as the US turned into an enemy over time, other countries continued their support. For example, while Iran secretly allied with the US against the group during and after the invasion, Tehran is now supporting them.²⁰ Pakistan also allegedly supports the Taliban; the group has popular support, particularly from the Pashtun community, against the US. Besides, there are almost 20 other groups on the side of the Taliban such as the Haqqani Network, the Pakistani Taliban, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, and the East Turkestan Islamic Movement.²¹ When pro-government groups are also counted, it can be seen that Afghanistan is more fragmented than before.

Despite the likelihood of civil war and instability, the US preferred to make an agreement with the Taliban and withdraw from Afghanistan. Regarding the details of the agreement, the US asked the Taliban not to allow international terrorist groups like ISIS and al-Qaida to use Afghan lands to attack America and its allies.²² In addition, the agreement necessitates negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government but there is no mention of punitive responses in case a clash erupts between the two. What the US seems to be only concerned about is not fighting with the Taliban, as it does not oblige the group to avoid attacking the Kabul government.²³ In other words, a US-Taliban peace is guaranteed via a face-saving agreement that does not prioritize intra-state clashes and the Taliban's increased influence in the country. Therefore, the US withdrawal from Afghanistan is similar to the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. The Soviets left the country to Mohammad Najibullah but he was overthrown two years later. A civil war erupted by various factions in the aftermath, which eventually ended up with the victory of the Taliban. When all US troops leave Afghanistan, as almost all scholars, analysts, and journalists agree, the

¹⁹ Hiram Ruiz, "Afghanistan: Conflict And Displacement 1978 to 2001," *Forced Migration Review*, No. 13 (2004), pp. 8-10; Runde, "Catastrophe in Afghanistan."

²⁰ Sajjan M. Gohel, "Iran's Ambiguous Role in Afghanistan," *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (2010), pp. 13-16.

²¹ Runde, "Catastrophe in Afghanistan."

²² US Department of State, "Joint Declaration between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan," 29 February 2020, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/02.29.20-US-Afghanistan-Joint-Declaration.pdf>

²³ Amin Saikal, "Will the US Withdrawal from Afghanistan Put the Taliban in Power?" *The Strategist*, 13 August 2020, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/will-the-us-withdrawal-from-afghanistan-put-the-taliban-in-power/>

events in the 1990s might be repeated in the poor country. The incumbent government may be abolished by the Taliban as the Najibullah government. Furthermore, owing to sectarian, ethnic, and radical-moderate clashes, more Afghans might leave their country, too.

It is almost certain that either Taliban will take the full power of the state or there will be different armed groups including terrorist organizations controlling some parts of the country. In the same vein, foreign countries might support these groups for their ends. For instance, Iran will get involved in the case of a sectarian conflict while Pakistan may back the Taliban. Russia and China will also extend their influence into Afghanistan, changing the balance of power toward themselves.²⁴ All these are expected to happen because the US leaves Afghans alone against the Taliban and other armed groups instead of supporting the incumbent government and army for a foreseeable future.²⁵ According to a Rand Corporation report, such developments will take place after the withdrawal:²⁶

- The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces will also leave.
- The US and other international civilian presence will sharply be reduced.
- External economic and security assistance will diminish.
- The government in Kabul will begin to lose influence and legitimacy.
- Power will move from the center to the periphery.
- Responsibility for security increasingly will devolve to regional militias and local warlords.
- Extremist groups, including al-Qaida and the Islamic State, will gain additional scope to organize, recruit, and initiate terrorist attacks against US regional and homeland targets.

Consequently, it can be said that the withdrawal is not a *fait accompli*, though the US administration says otherwise. As Hussain and Jahanzaib express: “If there is lack of planning for the post-withdrawal period, then it leads to more instable situation for regional security and economy... at the time of planning or waging wars, the focus remains on the strategies for the course of action to win wars in anyway and very less importance is given to the future considerations.”²⁷ This is what has more or

²⁴ Patrick Nopens, “The Impact of the Withdrawal from Afghanistan on Russia’s Security,” *AEI*, March 2014, <http://aei.pitt.edu/63590/1/SPB54.pdf>

²⁵ Luke Coffey, “The Keys to the Success of a US Withdrawal from Afghanistan,” *Arab News*, 29 May 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1681891>

²⁶ James Dobbins, Jason H. Campbell, Sean Mann & Laurel E. Miller, “Consequences of a Precipitous US Withdrawal from Afghanistan,” *Rand Corporation*, January 2019, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE300/PE326/RAND_PE326.pdf

²⁷ Ejaz Hussain and Muhammad Jahanzaib, “Afghanistan: The Western Withdrawal and its Implications for Security and Economy”, *Research Gate*, November 2015, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286924950_Afghanistan_The_Western_Withdrawal_and_its_Implications_for_Security_and_Economy

less happened in Afghanistan. The US invaded Afghanistan with the fury of the 9/11 attacks and harshly punished its enemies but did not win the war. The war became the US's longest war. The longevity of war(s) also indicates that their nature has changed. A strong country can easily defeat a weak one, but it does not mean the former will win the war, as armed groups that use guerilla tactics are hard to be found and defeated. Thus, the more time passes, the more regular armies get exhausted and war-costs increase. Eventually, strong countries inevitably stop the invasion and withdraw. The Soviet Union had this impasse against *mujahedeen* while Americans faced similar consequences in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Supposing that this theory is correct, if the US or any great power invades a country in the future, the result will be the same should they leave without ensuring peaceful circumstances.

Based on these arguments, overall, it can be concluded in the context of its withdrawal from both Iraq and Afghanistan that, first, the US gives priority to its vengeance rather than the stability of the invaded country. Otherwise, it would leave gradually or create modern state institutions. As Paigham asserts, Washington ignored institution-building and focused on hunting terrorists; therefore people saw foreign troops not as foreign liberators but as oppressors.²⁸ Second, one can think that deaths, violence, and oppression are not of concern for the American administration. In 1996, referring to US sanctions on Iraq, former State Secretary Madeleine Albright said on a TV program that killing "500,000 Iraqi children was worth it."²⁹ If she had talked about soldiers, it could be understandable to some extent, but what she was approving of was the death of children, who did not even know who Saddam Hussain was. Third, America always had allies in the invaded countries, including Afghan governments since the invasion and Kurds in Iraq. Such sudden moves certainly disappoint US partners and erode America's reliability. Finally, the fragile order built by Americans in Iraq and Afghanistan will probably collapse, thereby putting the two countries into more conflicts that will cause deaths, polarization, oppression, and migration.

Conclusion

The American administration is making the same mistake it did during the Vietnam War. The US army fought, killed enemies and civilians, left casualties, and spent trillions of dollars but is now withdrawing without bringing democracy, defeating terrorism, and generally ensuring the security of Afghans and Iraqis as it promised. The US spent approximately 4 trillion dollars but its only gains were to kill Saddam Hussain, Osama bin Laden, and Qasem Soleimani. If the aim was only

²⁸ Paigham, "Unfinished Business."

²⁹ Madeleine Albright, "The Deaths of 500,000 Iraqi Children was Worth it," YouTube video, 27 August 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bntsfAXMEEc>

to kill them, Soleimani's assassination shows that it could have been done with less cost. Meanwhile, terrorism surged due to the invasions. While al-Qaida was founded by former US allies, ISIS is a result of post-invasion conditions in Iraq. The US policy indicates that rationality can hardly be found behind invasions and withdrawals since they are a zero-sum game. Besides losing human, economic, and hard power, America's soft power is damaged by wrong policies as well. The claims that the US struggles for spreading democracy and is a reliable partner have little projection in practice.