

## **The War that Time Forgot**

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As we come upon the fifth anniversary of the start of the war in Afghanistan, nothing but grim news seems to be coming out of the region. In September the Senlis Council, an international security and development policy group, published a report entitled 'Afghanistan Five Years Later: the Return of the Taliban', which highlighted the growing crisis in that country.

For those of you who have forgotten, the United States began bombing Afghanistan on October 7, 2001 after the Taliban regime refused to hand over Osama bin Laden. Afghanistan was already in the midst of a civil war, and we gave support to the Northern Alliance. The month long bombing campaign failed to achieve any results until November 9th when the Taliban front lines dissolved and the Northern Alliance marched to victory. Only later did the public learn that the United States had spread around millions of dollars to pay off tribes who had been supporting the Taliban. One month later Osama bin Laden was cornered in the mountains at Tora Bora, but our Afghan mercenaries proved to be less than effective and allowed him to escape.

Despite a bloody nose at the battle of Shah-i-Kot, the war wound down for the next several years and settled into a routine of rocket attacks and overly hyped patrols that rarely found anything other than Soviet era weapons caches. In 2005, however, the war heated up again and over 90 US soldiers were killed, as well as 266 wounded. Our European allies in Afghanistan also suffered an increasing number of casualties. However, the war became a political non issue, and even President George W. Bush declared that he wasn't concerned about where Osama bin Laden was.

As of September of this year, 80 US soldiers have been killed. Our NATO allies have suffered 79 dead, more than in the past four years combined. Meanwhile, despite repeated claims of hundreds of Taliban casualties in every battle, the Taliban enjoys wider support than ever and has secured an ideological base in northern Pakistan. According to the Senlis Council report, the Taliban now have de facto control over the southern half of Afghanistan, Opium production is the highest it has ever been, and Afghan public opinion has turned against the United States.

We are in very real danger of losing the war in Afghanistan. The recent handover of operations to NATO command is a disaster. NATO has neither the political nor the martial will to defeat the resurgent Taliban. The United States must realize military conquest is not going to end militant Islam. We need to adjust our international policy to meet a changing world or risk being left behind.