Why Afghanistan?

By Budd E. MacKenzie

Over the years I've often been asked, "Why Afghanistan"? A few are forward enough to also say "We have problems here". The shortest answer is, we can do both. One does not preclude the other.



A somewhat longer response is, here is not a place. Here is where we define it. For some, "here" means only family and close friends. Others include their local community.

My "here" now includes the world, having seen what I've seen during my twenty visits to Afghanistan. I understood early on that the difference between "them" and me is where I was born. If you were to visit Afghanistan, your "here" would also include Afghanistan. Of this, I'm certain.

Finally there is a historical moral imperative for helping Afghan families. In 1979 the United States began financing the mujahedeen ("freedom fighters") in Pakistan to wage war inside Afghanistan. Very few know that the support began before the Russians invaded. The purpose in providing support to the mujahedeen was, according to Zbigniew Brezezinski, national security advisor to President Carter to draw the Russians in "so Russia could get its Viet Nam".



Ten years later, in 1989, the Russians were driven out and the Berlin wall came down shortly thereafter. The Soviet Union "disintegrated and dissolved into fifteen separate countries". Three years later in 1992 we discontinued all humanitarian aid. "Mission accomplished", resulting in five million Afghans to flee their homes and one million to lose their lives.



The warlords we had armed to bring down the Soviet Union fought for control of the country. Thirty-nine years later the fighting continues and we are once again winding down our military commitment. Will we abandon the Afghan people again and discontinue humanitarian aid? I strongly believe we have an obligation to rebuild what we helped destroy.

A Taliban captive reportedly said "Americans have the watches but we have the time". To him we say, we will make the time.

