

## **Afghanistan: The Graveyard Of Empires**

**Ross** Welcome to Renegade Inc. Famously, Afghanistan is called the Graveyard of Empires. Now we know why. Scott Ritter, great to have you back on Renegade Inc.

**Scott Ritter** Well, thanks for having me,

**Ross** Scott, reading some of your writing recently, you are unequivocal. You're a veteran. You're a military man. You've studied war, conflict and interventions. You say without mincing your words, 'We lost.' And then you go on to say: 'Blame the generals. Blame the troops. Blame the spies. Blame the diplomats. Blame the politicians. Blame the American public. But most importantly, blame the generals'. Why do you say that?

**Scott Ritter** Well, first of all, we lost because we lost. I mean, in 2001, we had special operations teams running amok in Afghanistan, 12 strong guys on horseback, however you want to couch it, dropping bombs and slaughtering the Taliban. And we did. We annihilated them. It was a massive defeat for the Taliban and we drove them out of power and we drove them pretty much out of Afghanistan. And that's what victory looks like. Twenty years later, Afghanistan belongs to the Taliban. That's what defeat looks like. Anybody who can say that we won with that result, I'd like to know what they're smoking, because maybe it's time I partake. You have to be on hallucinogenics to think that somehow what has occurred here is anything other than an absolute utter defeat.

**Ross** Why are you singling out the generals?

**Scott Ritter** Well, that's what I'm going to get to. You know, first of all, we have to acknowledge this is a national defeat. This is a defeat on every level. It's a defeat - let's start at the bottom - of the American people, because for 20 years we we just sat back and turned on TV and watched this war unfold. We didn't give a damn. I mean, anybody who thinks the American people gives a damn about Afghanistan, you don't know what you're talking about. The only people who care about Afghanistan are the men and women who served there and their immediate families. That's it. They care. They have a vested interest. Every other American can turn on the TV, turn off the TV and Afghanistan doesn't exist. So I blame the American people. I blame the people they elected. I blame Congress. After all, Congress controls the budget. Nothing happens without money. And Congress continued to funnel money. People keep saying it's a 2.4 trillion dollar thing. Well, who the hell gave them the money? But at the end of the day, you got to blame the implementer, the person on the ground doing the job. That's who everybody's looking to. We sent the generals in to do a job. The generals, first of all, have to demand to know up front, what job do you want done? And if you keep changing the goalposts, the generals have to be honest enough to say, hey, you can't change the goalposts and expect an outcome that's going to be positive. And then the generals have to be honest with you haven't given me sufficient resources or you haven't framed this problem in a proper way that I can accomplish the mission. Instead, the generals kept showing up before Congress saying. 'Everything's good, we're making progress. This will be over soon'. And then the general would leave. He'd be replaced by another general who would say the same thing. This happened for 20 years where the generals were feeding Congress and the American people absolute hooey.

**Ross** Why did the US military reward failure so much for so long?

**Scott Ritter** Understand that the dual conflicts of Afghanistan and Iraq defined the military careers of everybody in the military today - every senior leader. I mean, the average career, you know, you get to retire after 20 years. We just had a 20 year war. So we have guys who joined while we were at war and retired and their whole career was defined by this conflict. They got medals. Other promotions were dependent on their performance so they were one hundred percent vested in this conflict and the need to keep this conflict going because you understand, the only way this conflict was going to end was with defeat, because we weren't winning. We stopped winning in 2002 and ever since then we've been lying to ourselves about victory - about a victory that we were unable to achieve for a number of reasons. But careers depended upon the perception of victory, the need to tell Congress that we are winning, that we are capable of winning, the need to tell the American people we are capable of winning, the need to transform our entire military establishment away from the kind of combined arms warfare focus we had prior to this, where we built a military that could stand toe to toe with Russia, that could stand toe to toe with China and instead transform it into this door-kicking counter-insurgency military that can't do anything right. They can't even kick doors down right because all they do is kill civilians. So we ruined the military. And yet if you want to survive in the military, you can't admit that you ruined it. You have to continue the lie, continue the sham.

**Ross** So reading what you've written and studying your thinking, would you have sat down and negotiated with the Taliban or would you have been as quick as the Americans were to put boots on the ground?

**Scott Ritter** I would have negotiated with the Taliban right up front as early as September, October, definitely before we started military operations against Afghanistan. And I actually expressed this in a discussion with Richard Holbrooke in an appearance on the History Channel. I said, you know, we need to identify the moderate element in the Taliban and sit down to talk to them about how to deal with al-Qaeda. He said there's no such thing as a moderate element. I said there's Muttawakil whose the foreign minister. He's the epitome of moderation. But they refused to accept the notion of a moderate Taliban. They also showed an absolute ignorance to something called the Pashtunwali, the complex tribal code of the Pashtun.

**Ross** That has an unwritten ethos, does it not?

**Scott Ritter** Absolutely.

**Ross** But they protect their way of life and define their traditional lifestyle of the Pashtun people. Really, they protect it with everything, right?

**Scott Ritter** It defines them.

**Ross** So if you can tap into that, suddenly you've got leverage over hearts and minds?

**Scott Ritter** Right. The Pashtunwali was a double edged sword. They invited Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda operatives into Afghanistan and in doing so, they assume responsibility for them. Now everybody says, well, that's responsibility, meaning they're going to protect them. Therefore, if we go after al-Qaeda, the Taliban is going to defend them. And that's true. But it also means that Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda must behave properly while they're under protection. And the Taliban, Mullah Omar and his subordinates said, if Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda did what you claim they did, if they ordered a terrorist attack against the United States that killed thousands of innocent civilians, that is a violation of Sharia law, and therefore, they have violated Pashtunwali and we will evict them. We will send them down. Now, we're not going to give them to you. We're not going to give them to America, but we will give them to a third party Islamic nation. You will leave Afghanistan and we will evict al-Qaeda. And all you have to do is prove to us that he did, in fact, do this. If you can do that, we will handle this problem. And I'm like, that's the easiest solution there is. The problem with that solution is, a) it required people in the United States to respect Afghan culture and the Pashtunwali code. We don't. And, b) it didn't solve the problem of bloodlust. You see, after 9/11, it wasn't just about holding Osama bin Laden to account. We needed to kick the hell out of something. We needed to stack bodies. We needed dead people. Remember Cofer Black, the CIA guy? He wanted Osama bin Laden's head on a pike. He ordered the first CIA team in there to bring in dried ice so that they could literally pack the head of Osama bin Laden and ship it back home so he could present it to George W. Bush. He wasn't joking that that's what he wanted. That's what the American people wanted. And when you when you're operating that level of bloodlust, you're not going to get sound policy. We needed to kill people and the Taliban became the easiest ones to kill.

**Ross** Be very careful when you go to enact revenge. You know, people often say, 'dig two graves'. The point here is that you went for a revenge and this has been the blowback. One of the unintended consequences of putting boots on the ground is how much military equipment you have now armed the Taliban with. It wasn't an edifying sight seeing a Black Hawk helicopter do a fly past over all sorts of military equipment outside Kabul. What are the long-term consequences of gifting a terrorist organisation upwards of 80 billion dollars worth of military equipment?

**Scott Ritter** Well, first of all, I'll push back on the Taliban being a terrorist organisation. The Taliban is an Afghan political reality. It's not a terrorist organisation anymore than we're a terrorist organisation. You know, we actually committed far more acts of terrorism in the 20 year experience in Afghanistan the Taliban ever did. But let's talk about the military equipment. Taliban will fly the Blackhawk helicopter around until it needs to be repaired and then it won't fly anymore because they don't know how to repair it. They don't have the means to repair it. They'll drive the Humvees around until it needs an oil change or until, you know, the carburetor blows out or until something goes wrong and then they can't repair it and just gets parked and it rots. This doesn't change anything. None of that equipment matters. This is again, if you keep in mind, one of the big criticisms of our withdrawal, the way we withdrew, is that we gave the Afghan army all this equipment, but we never trained them how to maintain it. They were totally dependent upon contractors, American contractors, to do the maintenance. So when we withdrew from Afghanistan and we withdrew those contractors, I mean, the big debate back in March and April is what are we going to do about the Afghan Air Force? We just gave all this equipment and then we had all our generals - who I hate with a passion you can't believe - sit there and look in the camera

and say, 'We will develop an over horizon maintenance capability'. What the hell does that mean - over the horizon maintenance capability? You would never suggest that for American troops in harm's way because, you know, you're giving them a death sentence. It was garbage put out there to confuse politicians, confuse the American people, make it seem like we're doing something when all the while we knew there was no over the horizon maintenance programme, that this Air Force was never going to fly and that this equipment was never going to be maintained. And if that was the reality with the Afghan army, which we ostensibly supported, what makes you think the Taliban are going to be any different? They're suddenly magically going to have people that can maintain this equipment? No. It's just 88 billion dollars worth of junk.

**Ross** So what happens now, then? Because what you've painted is a very stark, honest, visceral picture of what went wrong. I don't think that you're on the general's Christmas card list, if I'm honest with you.

**Scott Ritter** Good.

**Ross** So what happens now?

**Scott Ritter** What should happen now is that we should recognise that the Taliban that's in power today is not the Taliban that we kicked out, that they've matured. They spent the last 20 years in diaspora, their leadership, learning English. A lot of them speak really good English, becoming educated in Western universities or Westernised universities and understanding how the world works. I mean, the Taliban in 1998/1999/2000 had no clue how the world works. They only knew how their village works. They knew how their region works, their province works. They didn't even know how Afghanistan worked. They were very crude. The Taliban today understand the realities of the world. They've been negotiated on a world stage. They've played global geopolitics like no one else has. I mean, remember, these guys that we're mocking beat us not only on the battlefield, but in diplomacy. They've been going around the world negotiating with the Russians in Moscow, negotiating in Doha, negotiating everywhere. These guys are world travelers. They know what end is up when it comes to diplomacy. They also understand what's needed for Afghanistan to succeed as a society. Look at what they've done. Instead of continuing the practice of, for instance, hunting down the Hazara or other Shia minorities in Afghanistan, they've reached out. They've brought Hazara members into their shura, into their council. They're working with the Tajiks to be respectful of different cultures in an effort to bring everybody on board. The Taliban desperately want to succeed. They want China to come in and extend the Belts and Roads Initiative. In 2001, you couldn't have gotten the Taliban to acknowledge what China's role and in the world was. The modern day Taliban know exactly what China's role is and they want them to have that role in Afghanistan. These guys have reached out to Russia. They have the maturity to put a ten year war with the Soviet Union behind them and reach out to Russia to find a way to work together with the former Soviet republics in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan. They're working with the Iranians, their sworn enemy. In 1998, Iran was ready to go to war against the Taliban. Today, Iran is working with the Taliban. The Taliban recognise that they are part of a Eurasian reality. Next week, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is getting together to meet. A couple of things are going to be on the agenda. One, bringing Iran in is a permanent member. That means now Iran is part of an economic, political and military alliance with Russia, China, Pakistan, India. Afghanistan

will be there as an observer. The whole idea is if you can get Afghanistan functioning as a nation state, you will finally have a Eurasian geopolitical entity that can fire on all cylinders. That's a huge threat to the United States, which is why everything I just said isn't going to be allowed to happen. A successful Afghanistan, a successful Taliban, is a threat to the United States of America. We spent 40 years perfecting the art of destabilising that nation. And I think we're going to continue to implement destabilisation policies going forward, because the last thing we need, the last thing we want, is for the Taliban to succeed.

**Ross** Welcome back to Renegade Inc. We're talking Afghanistan, the withdrawal. I'm joined by the founder of Krainer Analytics, Alex Krainer. Alex, welcome. Great to have you back on the programme.

**Alex Krainer** Thank you. Privilege to be with you again.

**Ross** We heard in that first half about the monumental mishaps that have gone on with the Afghanistan withdrawal. I want to come to you and talk about geopolitics and geostrategy. Let's start with a guy who maybe people haven't heard too much about, Sir Halford Mackinder. In 1904, he published and talked about, The Heartland Theory. How much you know about that? Explain it to us.

**Alex Krainer** Well, basically, Sir Halford Mackinder's theory had to do with basically it formed the geopolitical imperative for the British Empire, and that was to assert dominance, hegemony, over the Eurasian landmass. And I believe that the reason for this is because the Eurasian landmass holds something like two-thirds or more of the global population, most of the world's GDP, something like 75, 80 percent of global energy reserves and resource wealth, both in terms of enterprises and in terms of natural resources that are available for exploitation there. So having hegemony over that landmass would have been very advantageous for the British Empire.

**Ross** So why when we jump to today, why is it now such a critical moment for the Empire, as you call it, the West, if you like? Why is it such a critical moment that Afghanistan has been lost from a geostrategic point of view?

**Alex Krainer** Well, I think it's a confluence of several things. We have a metastasizing financial crisis in the West, which hasn't still broken in its full force. The financial system requires collateral. And we're really past peak collateral. And so for the Western financial system to remain stable, it needs to add collateral so that it can continue the process of extending and expanding loans and the money mass and so on, and to keep the economic machine humming. And in order for the economic machine to harm, it has to grow. So if it stagnates, it mathematically starts to decompose. So adding collateral into the system is essential. And so most of it is on the Eurasian continent and Africa. And so holding on to that Eurasian continent, making it the exclusive domain for your own banks, for your own corporations, is part of what building the empire is all about. And I think that for, be it Great Britain, France, United States, it's simply impossible to hold on to that huge Eurasian landmass by military force. It's just simply impossible. So the way that it's been done for the last 200 years is basically through the schemes of divide and conquer, pitting small nation against small nation, lending them means of fighting each other and propping up dictators in these political entities, in these little countries. And so by having control over these rulers

who are your own servants and bidding one against the other, you can control this Eurasian landmass. And this is basically how it's been done for two or three hundred years now. Now, this game may be up because you have over the last 20 years, we've seen the rise of rival powers, notably China and Russia, who are not only now strong enough to push back against the empire, but who have also understood the game, the way it's been played for the last 200 years. So we've seen the empire's gambit in Syria fail. We see that it's failing in Ukraine. The loss of Afghanistan, I think, has been particularly egregious because the West went into Afghanistan 20 years ago with overwhelming military force. They took Afghanistan relatively easily and then they got defeated by an army of peasants with World War Two weapons. And the reason why this looks very, very, bad is because we've seen on the 15th August, we've seen the country's president flee in panic with bags of cash. Two days later, the country's central bank chief followed suit. And one of the very essential elements of maintaining this empire is for your servants and your propped-up dictators to feel safe and protected. The fact that the empire was not able to protect their own people in Afghanistan is a very bad lesson for everybody else. So throughout the Middle East, North Africa, South America and elsewhere, I think that the dictators who have worked in service of the empire now have to kind of think twice about making nice with their own people and about cooperating with the other global powers like Russia and China.

**Ross** The cost of this war has been estimated at 2.3 trillion dollars over 20 years. And many people say that's a conservative figure. Do you agree with the Chinese entrepreneur and founder of Alibaba, Jack Ma, when Jack Ma says, 'the problem with America, too much war, not enough investment'? Imagine if that 2.3 trillion dollars over 20 years was invested into infrastructure and business, health care and other aspects of American life that actually create value. You'd probably get a lot more back, wouldn't you?

**Alex Krainer** Well, yeah, that's an excellent question. And I think that that's exactly where the where the crux of the problem is. You know, like you're taking away, you're squandering your nation's economic power, your nation's military power to build these nations halfway across the world. And it isn't working because they're not even building the nations halfway across the world. I mean, the recent reports from Amnesty International found that more than 90 percent of the Afghan population was living under the level of poverty. More than 55 percent of Afghan children have suffered irreversible malnutrition deformities. And so you squander all this money, you create misery at home, and you create even greater misery in the countries in which you're pretending to build up nations with freedom and democracy. So the whole thing is, you know, like when you strip it down, it devolves to plunder. And I find it staggering that with this 2.3 trillion dollars, relatively minor sums could not be invested locally, let's say, in Afghanistan to give people access to clean water, to health care, schools and so forth, to make life in Afghanistan tolerable for ordinary people. Because this rampant corruption and plunder is exactly what has provided support to the Taliban, and which is why they've been able to recruit so many people into their service and why they've been able to take over Afghanistan so easily.

**Ross** Very briefly, let's come to cui bono. Who has benefited from this the most? Now, we know that it's the military-industrial complex and those that it places orders with. Is it just them?

**Alex Krainer** Well, yeah, and then above them still is is the banking system because they all bank with the same banks, with the network of systemically important banks in the world. They are the ones who obtain collateral through this funder, right? So when, I don't know, KBR or or BP or one of these large corporations get concessions to exploit oil or mineral rights in Afghanistan, the collateral accrues to the banking system. And based on that collateral, they can then ramp up the money creation process and rake in profits. So I think it's primarily the Western banking cartel and then the corporations that grow up around them.

**Ross** This domino has fallen. Is Afghanistan a canary in the mine? And is this if it is, is this a mortal wound to the empire?

**Alex Krainer** I believe it is the mortal wound to the empire. And I think that the process of decay of the weakening of this empire has been going on for many years now. But I think that Afghanistan makes it very difficult to deny. It's too obvious to everyone. And I think that people are waking up to the fact that this is an unsustainable process and it's going to come apart. It's a house of cards.

**Ross** What should we expect, Alex Krainer now? You've talked a lot about bubble everything. We see a chart you've created and you've put 'you are here' on it and everyone can see from the I system trend following data, S&P 500, that isn't sustainable. What happens next?

**Alex Krainer** I think that the devil in part depends on how we fill in the vacuum. And I think that this largely is going to be up to us, the grassroots movement. As the empire starts to implode, it's going to, and it already is, turning in on their own populations. So the foreign adventures are failing. So you start with repression of your own populations because you want to retain control by hook or by crook. And so we're going to have to push back and we're going to have to replace the systems that are failing with more robust and more sustainable systems. I think that that will depend on solutions we put forth. One of the guests that you have from time to time, Richard Werner, I think he's one of the one of the people who is pointing in the right direction. I think it will depend on alternative systems of banking. It'll depend on the currencies. We create an event and circulate in place of the failing fiat currencies that we have now. And this from there, I think we have the opportunity and the privilege to build a better world for the coming generation. So I am actually very optimistic, but it will depend on us. You know, we cannot passively watch this happen and expect that the committees of experts selected by the same you know who's, the same suspects, are going to magically contrive solutions that are going to be satisfactory.

**Ross** Alex Krainer, always great to have you and always great to hear a warning against spectator democracy, which we've been very good at for a long time.

**Alex Krainer** Thank you very much. It's my privilege to be with you again.