

# End geopolitics to end permanent war

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## Lead Editorial

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How it started: Margaret Thatcher meeting Afghan Mujahideen leaders in 1981. Twenty years later came 9/11; 40 years later another ignominious end to a pointless war. Photo: Screenshot

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, 20 years ago next month, the USA and its allies, including Australia, rushed to retaliate against Afghanistan, where, we were told, the Taliban had provided Osama bin Laden a safe haven to conduct his global terrorism campaign. This correspondent (Robert Barwick) remembers thinking at the time: "Whoever organised the 9/11 attack would have known, with absolute certainty, that the USA would retaliate with overwhelming force. Shouldn't the US government consider that, and perhaps consider that a counter-attack is what the perpetrators wanted, and look for an alternative way to respond?" Whatever the value of that reasoning, the fact is there was never going to be an alternative response. The USA and its allies were always going to strike with overwhelming force, and the result was always going to be inevitable: early instant "success", followed by a long, drawn-out quagmire in the "graveyard of empires" as Afghanistan is known, ending eventually in humiliation and chaos.

It is not only in retrospect that the outcome was clearly inevitable: many experienced hands warned at the time that invading Afghanistan broke one of the cardinal rules of military strategy: never start a land war in Asia. People old enough to remember the chaotic fall of Saigon at the end of the last meat-grinder land war in Asia saw all-too-similar wretched scenes in Kabul this week.

What was the alternative? The alternative is not so much a different response to a specific incident like 9/11. The real alternative is nations choosing a different approach to global affairs, specifically to the insanity of divide-and-conquer, balance-of-power geopolitics; replacing geopolitics with economic cooperation is the only way to reduce the possibility of attacks like 9/11 happening in the first place. That is not a naïve statement. Remember, Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda were a creation of the US, UK, and Saudi governments, which deliberately sponsored and armed their fanatical jihad against the Afghan government and Soviet Union starting in the late 1970s. This was part of British "orientalist" Bernard Lewis's "Arc of Crisis" strategy of fostering extremists in central Asia to destabilise the Soviet Union and China, which the AAS reviewed in its recent [series on Xinjiang](#), where the policy is still being pursued.

It's not simply the case that the tactics our "side" used in Afghanistan in the 1980s blew back on us on

9/11 and in subsequent attacks (like the Bali bombing that killed 88 Australians the following year). The true story of 9/11 still hasn't been properly told, but we know the US government tried for many years to cover up the "28 pages" of the US Congressional 9/11 report that revealed the role of Saudi Arabia; when those pages were eventually declassified in 2016, following a global campaign in which the Citizens Party participated, they revealed funding conduits that also implicated the highest levels of the British establishment, including the Crown. It is the nexus between the British elite, whose global outlook is rooted in centuries of divide-and-conquer meddling all over the world, and the US neoconservatives who at the time of 9/11 dominated the Bush-Cheney administration, that seized on 9/11 to advance their permanent war agenda.

This same Anglo-American neoconservative nexus is the greatest threat to an alternative approach in Afghanistan and central Asia succeeding today. Afghanistan is surrounded by countries that are members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, which meet regularly to foster cooperation on regional security. Led by China, these countries would readily engage the Taliban to reach agreements that can bring Afghanistan into regional economic development opportunities, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, through investment in infrastructure. Perversely, it is because the Anglo-American neoconservatives fear this approach could succeed, not fail, that they would seek to destabilise it. This is the evil of balance-of-power geopolitics. Ending permanent war starts with renouncing this murderous insanity.

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