

Scenario 232

WHY THE US DEFEATED: MASSIVE CORRUPTION

....CORRUPTION by all;
Afghan governments,
the US officers of establishment, Afghan Warlords,
the US & Afghan Contractors
- all inclusive.

What prompted the US government and the President Trump to conclude negotiations with the Taliban leadership [on their terms] in Doha on 29th February 2020? See the background factors of this hard decision in **Craig Whitlock's** article appearing in Daily **'INDEPENDENT'** dated 9th December 2019, written about 80 days before signing that agreement - title being ***'US officials distorted statistics to mislead [American] public about Afghan war, confidential documents reveal'***.

An 18-year [till then], trillion-dollar conflict was known to be failing from an early stage - but this was concealed from the public; what had been going on behind closed doors in Washington's power corridors. The senior US officials failed to tell the truth about the **War in Afghanistan**, making rosy proclamations they knew to be false and hiding unmistakable evidence the war had gone out of their hands.

Referring to the same essay but titled as ***CONSUMED BY CORRUPTION*** appearing on media channels on the same day - the US flooded Afghanistan with money — then turned a blind eye to the graft it fuelled.

The author was pointing towards **THE AFGHAN-WAR PAPERS** - a secret treasure trove of the Afghan-war spread over nearly two decades then. The salient remarks, gathered from the hundreds of state-managed interviews of the high ranking Generals, Diplomats, Advisors, Commanders, Secretaries of State, Trainers and Afghani Warlords.

The interviews were conducted during 2014-18 by the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction [SIGAR]. The agency was created by the US Congress to investigate fraud and waste,

but it used the interviews for a special academic project, titled 'LESSONS LEARNED' to diagnose policy failures from the war.

Lessons Learned Report about corruption omitted the names of the vast majority of those who were interviewed, as well as the most unsparing criticisms about how Washington was seen at fault. The Washington Post sued SIGAR in federal court — twice — to force it to release the interview records under the Freedom of Information Act [FOIA] – and ultimately won the case in 2019. The documents made clear that the ***seeds of runaway corruption were planted at the outset of the war.***

- *Americans used the bad guys to get the 'badder guys' - but couldn't circle back and get the bad guys later; we never did.*

In September 2016, SIGAR published a 164-page report that chronicled how corruption had harmed the US mission in Afghanistan. Emphasizing that *'The US government should take into account the **amount of assistance a host country could absorb....**'* BUT no one in White House, Pentagon or CIA bothered. Little glimpses:

- The war was intended as a short-term tactic but the practice ended up binding the United States to some of the ***country's most notorious figures*** for years.
- Facts remained that about halfway into the 18-year war; Afghans stopped hiding how corrupt their country had gone. Dark money sloshed all around. Afghanistan's largest bank liquefied into a cesspool of fraud. Travellers lugged suitcases loaded with millions, or more, on flights leaving Kabul.
- President Hamid Karzai won re-election after cronies stuffed thousands of ballot boxes. He later admitted the CIA used to deliver bags of cash to his office for years, calling it **'nothing unusual'**.
- In public, as President Obama escalated the war and Congress approved billions of additional dollars in support, the Commander in Chief and lawmakers promised to crack down on corruption and hold crooked Afghans accountable – but could do nothing.
- In reality, US officials backed off, looked away and let the thievery become more entrenched than ever.
- Key figures in Washington and Afghanistan tolerated the worst offenders — warlords, drug traffickers, defence contractors — because they were so-called allies of America.

- In return they blamed the US government which failed to confront a more distressing reality — that it was responsible for fuelling the corruption, by doling out vast sums of money with limited foresight or regard for the consequences.
- The US and allied officials were “*so desperate to have the alcoholics to the table, we kept pouring drinks, not knowing [or] considering we were killing them.*”
- Scale of corruption was the unintended result of swamping the war zone with far more aid and defence contracts than impoverished Afghanistan could absorb. There was so much excess, financed by American taxpayers, that opportunities for bribery and fraud became almost limitless.
- The basic assumption remained that corruption was an Afghan problem and we were the solution. But there was one indispensable ingredient for corruption — money — and we [the US] were the ones who had the money.
- To purchase loyalty and information, the CIA gave cash to warlords, governors, parliamentarians, even religious leaders. The US military and other agencies also abetted corruption by doling out payments or contracts to unsavoury Afghan power brokers in a misguided quest for stability.
- We had partnerships with all the wrong players. The US kept on standing shoulder-to-shoulder with these people, even through all these years. It was a case of security trumping everything else.
- **Gert Berthold**, a forensic accountant, helped analyze 3000 Defence contracts worth \$106 billion to see who was benefiting. The conclusion: About 40% of the money ended up in the pockets of insurgents, criminal syndicates or corrupt Afghan officials.
- And it was often a higher percent. We talked with many former [Afghan] ministers, and they told us: *‘you’re under-estimating it’.*
- No one [in US] wanted accountability. *‘If you’re going to do anti-corruption, someone has got to own it. From what I’ve seen, no one is willing to own it.’*
- The CIA, the US military, the State Department and other agencies used cash and lucrative contracts to win the allegiance of Afghan

warlords in the fight against al-Qaeda and the Taliban – but entangled themselves deep into sand-grave of un-paralleled corruption.

The documents were part of a project examining the root failures of the longest armed conflict in US history. They included more than 2,000 pages of previously unpublished notes of interviews with people who played a direct role in the war, Generals and diplomats.

The interviews were managed by the **Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction** [SIGAR]; it was created by Congress in 2008 to investigate waste and fraud in the war zone. In 2014, at Mr Sopko's direction, SIGAR departed from its usual mission of performing audits and launched a side venture titled as '**Lessons Learned**'.

The \$11m project was meant to diagnose policy failures in Afghanistan so the US would not repeat the mistakes the next time it invaded a country or tried to rebuild a shattered one. More than 600 people with firsthand experience in the war were interviewed - mostly Americans, NATO allies and about 20 Afghan officials.

SIGAR published **Seven Lessons Learned** reports since 2016 that highlighted problems in Afghanistan. James Dobbins, special envoy to Afghanistan under Presidents Bush and Obama said:

"We don't invade poor countries to make them rich... We invade violent countries to make them peaceful and we clearly failed in Afghanistan".

RUMSFELD's 'SNOWFLAKES' MYTH:

The **Rumsfeld memos** were released by the Pentagon in response to a FOIA lawsuit filed in 2017 by the National Security Archive, a non-profit research institute at George Washington University. There are hundreds of pages of memos, known as '**SNOWFLAKES**', which Rumsfeld dictated about the Afghan war during 2001-05.

Since 2001, more than 775,000 US troops were deployed to Afghanistan, many repeatedly. Of those, 2,300+ died there and 20,589 were wounded in action, according to Defence Department figures; see the core failings of the war that persist to this day.

How the three consecutive presidents - George Bush, Obama and Donald Trump - and their military commanders were unable to deliver on their

promises to prevail in Afghanistan. The US officials acknowledged that their **war-fighting strategies were fatally flawed** and that Washington wasted enormous sums of Tax-payers' money trying to remake Afghanistan into a democratic modern nation.

The US government didn't carry out a comprehensive accounting of how much it spent on the war in Afghanistan, but the costs were staggering. Since 2001, the Defence Department [DOD], State Department and the US Agency for International Development [USAID] spent nearly \$978bn. These figures didn't include money spent by other agencies such as the CIA and the Department of Veterans Affairs responsible for medical care for wounded veterans.

Jeffrey Eggers, a retired **Navy SEAL** and **White House** staffer for Presidents Bush and Obama, told government interviewers that:

"What did we get for this \$1 trillion effort? Was it worth \$1 trillion? After the killing of Osama bin Laden, I said that Osama was probably laughing in his watery grave considering how much we have spent on Afghanistan."

The said secret documents also contradicted a long chorus of public statements from US presidents, military commanders and diplomats who assured Americans year after year that they were making progress in Afghanistan and the war was worth fighting. Several of those interviewed described explicit and sustained efforts by the US government to deliberately mislead the public. They said it was common at military HQ in Kabul - and at the White House - to distort statistics to make it appear the US was winning the war; while in fact they were facing cheats and defeats.

On 11th October 2001, four days after the US started bombing the Taliban, a reporter asked Mr Bush: **'Can you avoid being drawn into a Vietnam-like quagmire in Afghanistan?'** Mr Bush replied confidently:

"We learned some very important lessons in Vietnam. People often ask me, 'How long will this last?' This particular battlefield will last as long as it takes to bring al-Qaeda to justice. It may happen tomorrow, it may happen a month from now, it may take a year or two. But we will prevail."

In those early days, other US leaders mocked the notion that the nightmare of Vietnam might repeat itself in Afghanistan. Mr Rumsfeld

had rather joked at a news conference on 27th November 2001, saying: 1 **'All together now - quagmire!'** But throughout the Afghan war, 2 documents proved that US military officials had resorted to an old tactic 3 from Vietnam - **manipulating public opinion**. In news conferences and 4 other public appearances, those in charge of the war followed the same 5 talking points for 18 years. No matter how the war was going - and 6 especially when it was going badly - they emphasised how they were 7 making progress. 8

To augment the **'Lessons Learned'** interviews, hundreds of pages of previously classified memos about the Afghan war that were dictated by the then Defence Secretary Rumsfeld during 2001-06 were also made open by the Trump administration. Those secret memos were roughly 59,000 pages, given code-named **'SNOWFLAKES'** by Mr Rumsfeld; the memos comprised of brief instructions or comments that the Pentagon boss dictated, often several times a day, to his subordinates. See a **hand-written note** of 17th April 2002, worded in Mr Rumsfeld's abrupt style: 9

"I may be impatient. In fact I know I'm a bit impatient. We are never going to get the US military out of Afghanistan unless we take care to see that there is something going on that will provide the stability that will be necessary for us to leave. - Help!" 10

On 18th April 2002; President George W Bush, in a speech at Virginia Military Institute, said: 11

"The history of military conflict in Afghanistan [has] been one of initial success, followed by long years of floundering and ultimate failure. We're not going to repeat that mistake." 12

The intelligentsia generally believed that at the outset, the US invasion of Afghanistan had a clear, stated objective: To **retaliate against al-Qaeda** and prevent a repeat of the 9/11 attacks but as the war dragged on, the goals and mission kept changing and a lack of faith in the US strategy took root inside the Pentagon, the White House and the State Department. Rumsfeld, the then Defence Secretary had to note down in 2003 that: **"I have no visibility into who the bad guys are . . . We are woefully deficient in human intelligence."** 13

It was year 2006 when the US officials feared that **narco-traffickers had become stronger** than the Afghan government and that money from the drug trade was powering the insurgency. No single agency or country was in charge of the Afghan drug strategy throughout the war years; so 14

the State Department, the DEA, the US military, NATO allies and the Afghan government all felt astray in this field. Then there were also the rumours that, at later stage, the US and the NATO military officers had also joined hands with certain warlords in poppy export trade.

In October 2006; Mr Rumsfeld's speechwriters delivered a paper titled ***Afghanistan: Five Years Later***. Packed with optimism, it highlighted more than 50 promising facts and figures, from 19,000+ Afghan women trained in 'improved poultry management' to the 'average speed on most roads' - up 300%. The report said:

"Five years on, there is a multitude of good news. While it has become fashionable in some circles to call Afghanistan a forgotten war, or to say the US has lost its focus, the facts belie the myths."

Defence Secretary Rumsfeld thought it was brilliant, so wrote a memo under his own hand, that:

"This paper is an excellent piece. How do we use it? Should it be an article? An op-ed piece? A handout? A press briefing? All of the above? I think it ought to get it to a lot of people."

Next day, the report was circulated to media reporters and also posted on Pentagon websites. Since then, US Generals always preached that the war was progressing well, no matter the reality on the battlefield. Two years later, as the casualty rate among US and NATO troops was touching another high, Lt Gen David Rodriguez held a news conference in Kabul and said that the US forces were steadily making deliberate progress.

It has been discussed in another chapter in detail, that the US flooded Afghanistan with far more aid than it could possibly absorb. During the peak years of fighting, 2009-12, the US admin and military commanders believed the more they would spend on schools, bridges, canals and other civil-works projects, the faster security would improve – but ultimately all the projects were found on drawing charts only.

However, it proved to be a colossal misjudgement – that too through corrupt mafias of Afghan warlords in connivance with the American, mostly retired, soldiers via so-called contractors. One US-AID worker guessed that 90% of what they spent was overkill:

"We lost objectivity. We were given money, told to spend it and we did, without reason."

At first, Afghan poppy farmers were paid by the British to destroy their 1 crops - which only encouraged them to grow more the next season. 2 Later, the US government eradicated poppy fields without compensation 3 - which only infuriated farmers and encouraged them to side with the Taliban.

After returning from a fact-finding mission to Afghanistan in June 2006, **Gen Barry McCaffrey** reported that:

"The Taliban had made an impressive comeback and predicted that 'we will encounter some very unpleasant surprises in the coming 24 months.' The Afghan national leadership are collectively terrified that we will tip-toe out of Afghanistan in the coming few years - leaving NATO holding the bag - and the whole thing will collapse again into mayhem."

Two months later, **Marin Strmecki**, a civilian adviser to Mr Rumsfeld, gave the Pentagon chief a classified, 40-page report loaded with more bad news. It said that enormous popular discontent was building against the Afghan government because of its corruption and incompetence. It also said that the Taliban were growing stronger, thanks to support from Pakistan, a US ally. The Pentagon buried that report and released a very different story to the public.

No one bothered about the warnings narrated by two above officers. On 8th September 2008; Maj **Gen Jeffrey Schloesser**, in an open news briefing from Afghanistan, commented:

"Are we losing this war? Absolutely no way..... Can the enemy win it? Absolutely no way"

In March 2011, during congressional hearings, cynical lawmakers pelted **Gen David Petraeus**, the then commander of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan, with doubts that the US strategy was working. The General responded that the past eight months had seen important but hard-fought progress – but not giving details of gains if any.

One year later, during a visit to Afghanistan, the then Defence Secretary Leon Panetta stuck to the same script saying to the reporters that ***'...the US campaign made significant progress'***. He had to say that to save his country's honour though he had just personally dodged a suicide attack.

Some of the interviews taken by SIGAR were mysteriously short. The interview record with **John Allen**, the Marine General who commanded

US and NATO forces in Afghanistan during 2011-13, consisted of five paragraphs. In contrast, other influential figures, including former US ambassador Ryan Crocker, sat for two interviews that yielded 95 transcribed pages. However, mostly the principles of State-Security were followed. For instance, the State Department asserted that releasing portions of certain interviews could jeopardize negotiations with the Taliban to end the war. The Defence Department [DOD] and Drug Enforcement Administration [DEA] also classified some interview excerpts.

SEE SOME MORE FACTS:

A US military officer estimated that one-third of the police recruits were **'drug addicts or Taliban from inside'**; yet another called them **'stealing fools'** who looted so much fuel from US bases that they perpetually smelt of gasoline. Thinking about and then making out a policy that the US could build the Afghan military that fast and that was insane in fact. Meanwhile, as US hoped for the Afghan security forces failed to materialise, Afghanistan became the world's leading source of a growing plague: OPIUM.

The US spent about \$9bn to fight the opium problem over the past 18 years, but Afghan farmers continued with cultivating more opium poppies than ever. In 2018, Afghanistan was responsible for 82% of global opium production, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. **Douglas Lute**, the White House's Afghan war advisor in 2007-13 told SIGAR:

"....almost everything they [the US commanders] did to constrain opium farming backfired. We stated that our goal is to establish a 'flourishing market economy,' I thought we should have specified a flourishing drug trade - this is the only part of the market that's working [here in Afghanistan]."

Col Bob Crowley, who served as a senior counter-insurgency Adviser to US military commanders in 2013-14, told government interviewers that:

"Every data point was altered to present the best picture possible. Surveys, for instance, were totally unreliable but reinforced that everything we were doing was right and we became a self-licking ice cream cone."

Gen Douglas Lute, who served as the White House's Afghan war kingpin during the Bush and Obama administrations, gave statement in 2015:

"We were devoid of fundamental understanding of Afghanistan - we didn't know what we were doing. What are we trying to do here? We didn't have the foggiest notion of what we were undertaking.

If the American people knew the magnitude of this dysfunction..... 2,400 lives lost. the deaths of US military personnel are [blamed] on bureaucratic breakdowns among Congress, the Pentagon and the State Department - Who will say this was in vain?"

John Sopko, head of the federal agency [SIGAR] that conducted the interviews, acknowledged that the documents show: ***"The American people have constantly been lied to."***

But the reports, written in dense bureaucratic prose and focused on an alphabet soup of government initiatives, left out the harshest and most frank criticisms from the interviews. The introduction to one report released in May 2018 reads:

"We found the stabilisation strategy and the programmes used to achieve it were not properly tailored to the Afghan context, and successes in stabilising Afghan districts rarely lasted longer than the physical presence of coalition troops and civilians."

The reports also omitted the names of more than 90% of the people who were interviewed for the project; it was to avoid controversy over politically sensitive matters.

LIES & COOKED FIGURES AT HEIGHT:

With descriptions of how the US got stuck in Afghan War and the regime's resolve to conceal them from the public - broadly resembled Pentagon's top-secret history of the Vietnam War. When they were leaked in 1971, the **'Pentagon Papers'** caused a sensation by revealing the US government had long misled the public about how the US came to be entangled in Vietnam. ***The 7,000 pages in 47 volumes*** were based entirely on secret state dossiers, diplomatic cables, decision-making memos and intelligence reports. To preserve secrecy, the Defence Secretary McNamara had issued an order prohibiting the authors and reporters from interviewing the key figures mentioned in that luminous report.

In Afghan War too; at the admin level, deep-seated disagreements were seen unresolved. Some US officials wanted to use the war to turn Afghanistan into a democracy. Others wanted to transform Afghan

1 culture and elevate women's rights. Still others wanted to reshape the
2 regional balance of power among Pakistan, India, Iran and Russia; see
3 high official's remarks:

4
5 *"With the Pak-Afghan strategy there was a present under the Christmas*
6 *tree for everyone. By the time you were finished you had so many*
7 *priorities and aspirations it was like no strategy at all."*
8

9 Here in Afghanistan context; the SIGAR interviews also revealed how US
10 military commanders struggled to articulate who they were fighting, let
11 alone why. Was al-Qaeda the enemy, or the Taliban? Was Pakistan a
12 friend or an enemy? What about the Islamic State and the confusing
13 selection of foreign *jihadists*, which warlords were on the CIA's payroll?
14 - the answers could not be settled by any US government during the two
15 decades. As a result, in the field, US troops often couldn't differentiate
16 between friends and foes, for and against. A former adviser to the Army
17 Special Forces told the SIGAR in 2017:

18
19 *"They thought I was going to come to them with a map to show them*
20 *where the good guys and bad guys live. It took several conversations*
21 *for them to understand that I did not have that information in my*
22 *hands. At first, they just kept asking: 'But who are the bad guys, where*
23 *are they?' - The view wasn't any clearer from the Pentagon even."*
24

25 President **Obama**, on 1st December 2009, said during his speech at the
26 US Military Academy at West Point New York, that:

27
28 *"The days of providing blank cheques are over.....It must be clear*
29 *that Afghans will have to take responsibility for their security and that*
30 *America has no interest in fighting an endless war in Afghanistan."*
31

32 Presidents Bush, Obama and Trump all promised the public that they
33 would avoid falling into the trap of '**nation-building**' in Afghanistan –
34 but all failed miserably on this score; they collectively allocated more
35 than \$133bn to build up those tribal lands. From the Secret Papers trove
36 it appeared that the philosophy of high-flying projects were failing from
37 the first day. The US officials tried to create a democratic government in
38 Kabul modelled after their own in Washington. It was a foreign concept
39 to the Afghans, who were accustomed to tribalism, monarchism and
40 Islamic law. A former State official told in an interview [2015]:

41
42 *"Our policy was to create a strong central government which was*
43 *idiotic because Afghanistan does not have a history of strong central*

governments. The timeframe for creating a strong central government is 100 years, which we didn't have."

The INDEPENDENT, the UK's newspaper, cited an instance that:

"...one contractor told he was expected to dole out \$3m daily for projects in a single Afghan district roughly the size of an American county."

The same contractor once asked a visiting congressman whether the lawmaker could responsibly spend that kind of money back home:

"He said hell no. Well, sir, that's what you just obligated us to spend and I'm doing it for communities that live in mud huts with no windows."

Enough is on record that the US Generals continued to lie in public - they were making steady progress on their strategy: to train a robust Afghan army and national police force that could defend the country without foreign help - but they all collapsed like a house of cards. However, the US military trainers described the Afghan security forces as incompetent, unmotivated and rife with deserters.

*[They also accused Afghan commanders of pocketing salaries - **paid by US taxpayers - for tens of thousands of 'ghost soldiers.'** Due to their un-soldier like attitudes, 50-60,000 members of Afghan forces were killed - an unsustainable casualty rate.]*

John Garofano, a Naval War strategist in *Helmand* during 2011, said military officials in the field used to spend huge amount of resources making out colour-coded large sized charts on expensive machines - just to show heralded positive results. Nobody dared to question whether the charts and numbers were credible or meaningful. There was no willingness to answer questions like actual number of schools built. Where are strategic bridges? How many male or female students admitted and taught etc. Other senior officials said they placed great importance on one point in particular, albeit one the US government rarely likes to discuss in public.

Col Bob Crowley, an Advisor on counter-insurgency in Afghanistan during 2013-14, told government interviewers that:

"...truth was rarely welcome at military HQ in Kabul. Bad news was often stifled. There was more freedom to share bad news if it

1 *was small - we're running over kids with our armoured vehicles*
2 *- because those things could be changed with policy directives. But*
3 *when we tried to air larger strategic concerns about the willingness,*
4 *capacity or corruption of the Afghan government, it was clear - it*
5 *wasn't welcome."*
6

7 **In July 2016**, after a surge in Taliban attacks on major cities, **Gen John**
8 **Nicholson Jr**, Commander of the US forces in Afghanistan at the time,
9 repeated the same lie before the reporters urging that *'we are seeing some*
10 *progress'*. One can recall the history that during Vietnam War, the US
11 military commanders had relied on same-like dubious dimensions to
12 persuade Americans that they were winning.
13

14 In Afghanistan, the tragedy remained that the Pentagon had started
15 highlighting the **body counts or the number of enemy fighters killed**; and
16 inflated the figures as a measurement of success. The US military had
17 generally avoided publicising body counts but a stage came when the
18 government opted to speak about [touted] statistics that officials knew
19 were distorted, spurious or downright false.
20

21 Perhaps the said policy was made out due to constant pressure from
22 President Obama and Pentagon to produce figures to show the troop
23 surge of 2009-11 was working, despite hard evidence to the contrary.
24 Then the Generals and officers tried using troop numbers trained,
25 violence levels, control of territory though none of it was accurate; the
26 metrics were always manipulated for the duration of the war.
27

28 Even when casualty counts and other figures looked bad, the White
29 House and Pentagon turned them ridiculous. Suicide bombings in Kabul
30 were portrayed as a sign of the Taliban's desperation; and a rise in US
31 troop deaths was cited as proof that American forces were taking the
32 fight seriously. A senior NSC official said:
33

34 *"It was their explanations. For example, attacks are getting worse?*
35 *'That's because there are more targets for them to fire at, so more*
36 *attacks are a false indicator of instability.'* Then, three months later,
37 *attacks are still getting worse? 'It's because the Taliban are getting*
38 *desperate', so it's actually an indicator that we're winning."*
39

40 And this went on and on for various reasons; and all field reports were
41 sent up like that regardless of conditions on the ground. From the
42 ambassadors down to the low level, they all said they were doing a great
43 job. Upon arrival in Afghanistan, US army brigade and battalion

commanders were given the same basic mission: to protect the population and defeat the enemy – but only on papers or through sermons.

So they all went in for whatever their periods of stay were and were given that mission and got executed that [rogue] mission. At the time of return each officer held that *'you know, we couldn't accomplish our mission.'* So the next guy got screwed up . . . coming and going.

THE TOLL OF WAR

Since 2001, an estimated 157,000 people were killed in the war in Afghanistan.

Afghan civilians	43,074*
Afghan security forces	64,124*
Humanitarian aid workers	424
Taliban fighters and other insurgents	42,100
U.S. contractors	3814
Journalists and media workers	67
U.S. military personnel	2300+
NATO and coalition troops	1145

Sources: Defence Department; Costs of War Project, Brown University; UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan; Committee to Protect Journalists

Note-1: US military number is current through November 2019. The other figures and estimates are current as of October 2019.

Note-2: The above figures do not include the 80,000+ deaths occurred in Pakistan due to the [TTP] Pakistan Taliban's suicide bombings and 450+ American DRONE assaults on civilian and Armed forces – totalling c 16,000 attacks.

US-STOLEN ARMS DEALS

See a STORY OF ARMS DEALS IN AFGHANISTAN [Nov 2018] by *James & Jason* appeared at www.apNews.com on 16th December 2021.

This write-up, by www.ap.org, is based on extensive interviews, text messages associated with a **federal criminal case**, private FB group

messages, court records and documents from military investigative proceedings.

It was November 2018, and the driver, Tyler Sumlin, bearded former US Army soldier, was [feeling] uncomfortable, and understandably tense: He was transporting a platoon's worth of stolen rifles, enough C4 to blow up his car and those around him, a live hand grenade – [perhaps] too late to turn around.

Riding shotgun was Sumlin's military blood brother, Sgt 1st Class Jason Jarvis, a soldier on active-duty from Fort Bragg's 18th Ordnance Company in North Carolina.

The two men, who'd been close **since they served in Afghanistan**; a few months earlier, Jarvis had reached out to ask if Sumlin had interest in making some money. Jarvis was looking to sell stolen military equipment from an armory at Bragg.

Sumlin said he might be able to find a buyer.

Then they were heading to El Paso, Texas, to sell the stolen weapons. In a **series of stories**, The Associated Press [AP New] had detailed how the US military had problems with **missing and stolen guns and explosives**, and how some weapons were used in domestic crime.

But the inside story of how two men attempted to sell stolen Army weapons revealed another threat: ***an organized group of soldiers and veterans taking advantage of flaws in the military's system to make fast money***. Here are details about a case that left other soldiers appalled and enraged — betrayed, by two of their own.

In 2009 as Sumlin and Jarvis sat together on a rock in Kunar Province, Afghanistan. The two young men had become brothers amid the breakneck tempo of wartime Afghanistan. Sumlin and Jarvis **specialized in explosive ordnance disposal**, or EOD, the kind of work — with its stifling & hulking bomb suits. Their work eliminating improvised explosive devices set by the Taliban was nonstop, and gave them little time to process what they saw, heard and smelled. It was a pressure cooker of a job inside a pressure cooker, intense even in the high stakes world of the battlefield.

Like many soldiers, they found some balm in the friendship of others who'd seen what they'd seen. Like many military subcultures, the

tight-knit EOD community had its own code of conduct, ethics and language. Sumlin joined a private **Facebook** group where the EOD community commiserated, argued and joked one another. They also held each other to account, debating whether a member's conduct violated the brotherhood's code.

Sumlin left the Army in December 2017, but deployed again to do bomb disposal with a private defense contracting company. Meanwhile, Jarvis remained in the Army. At Fort Bragg, home to some of the Army's most elite units, Jarvis worked in an armory. And that gave him access to a wealth of military firearms, parts and other equipment such as night vision goggles and explosives. Inside the Fort Bragg armory, Jarvis took photographs of weaponry — and then he stole it, and set out to sell it.

His buddy, Sumlin, sent the photos and an inventory list of the pilfered weapons and explosives to an accomplice who called himself 'Mr. Anderson.' a former Army combat engineer who had served in both Iraq and Afghanistan; and was one of several other soldiers or veterans connected to the scheme.

In May 2018, Sumlin and Jarvis began mining their contacts to offload the haul through a promising person identified as 'Evan,' who they hadn't met before. Here is an Inventory: **"NVG-13, Aimgoint-8, ACOG-18, PEQ2A-10, DD Rail-24, DD-Barrel-15, Various Troy toys,"** Anderson texted to Evan, including Jarvis' photos. The letters and numbers described a litany of arms and night vision goggles, rifle optics and lasers designed for aiming, and rifle parts. Evan texted back saying:

'Wow, items are good, any idea on price if I take everything?'

"I'll let you know as soon as I hear back from him," Anderson wrote, referring to Sumlin.

Over the next few days, the conversation continued, copies of messages show. Anderson and Evan complained about the weapons' high prices. They sounded paranoid when they discussed dealing with amateur gun dealers like Sumlin and Jarvis, and feared they would attract attention from law enforcement.

After a few days, Evan said he'd found a buyer who wanted it; all of it. What Anderson didn't know was that Evan was a longtime confidential informant working with Homeland Security Investigations, an arm of the Department of Homeland Security.

1 In his communication with Sumlin and Anderson, Evan said, he
2 represented a buyer who claimed to be connected to narco-traffickers.
3 [Sumlin denied that the weapons were meant to be sold to **drug-runners**.]
4

5 *"I didn't know (the buyer) was south of Texas,"* Anderson wrote.
6

7 *"Yep he goes between Texas and Mexico all the time,"* Evan wrote
8 back.
9

10 *"I wouldn't sell anything to anyone down there,"* Anderson
11 replied.
12

13 *"Lol ... well he has always been a cash buyer without question and*
14 *never any issues at all,"* Evan responded. *"It sounds like they've*
15 *made a deal."*
16

17 *"I hope so. They still have to meet and conclude,"* wrote Anderson.
18

19 By mid-November 2018, Jarvis had rented a Chevy Tahoe SUV in North
20 Carolina and drove the stolen cache south. He met Sumlin in Inverness,
21 a small town in central Florida's lakes region, so they could prepare the
22 weapons for sale, according to a federal criminal complaint.
23

24 **Sumlin and Jarvis had initially sought \$250,000 for the firearms and**
25 **explosives. After some back-and-forth, they settled on a much lower**
26 **price: \$75,000.**
27

28 According to the ***Army Criminal Investigation Division's case file,***
29 Jarvis and Sumlin later told agents about '***criminal transactions***' in
30 Colorado, North Carolina, Florida, Georgia and Texas. **Another**
31 **soldier confessed to stealing** multiple rifle optic systems and a bomb
32 suit, which were given to Sumlin.
33

34 In Florida, Jarvis and Sumlin cleaned the firearms to remove their
35 fingerprints. They also paid to have some parts modified to fit the rifles.
36 With the cache assembled, cleaned, packed in storage containers and
37 loaded for delivery, the men got into the SUV for the 24-hour drive to
38 Texas.
39

40 **On 14th November 2018;** arriving in El Paso, they pulled into a truck
41 stop where a man they thought was the buyers' contact, known as
42 Andy, waited with some others. They told Sumlin and Jarvis to follow
43 them to a nearby warehouse — [it was a real trap]. There, the agents

confirmed that the two men were indeed carrying multiple firearms, military equipment and C4 plastic explosives. A SWAT team pounced, arrested them and secured the cache.

Homeland Security agents seized more than 30 firearms; several blocks of C4; a hand grenade; shaped charges; body armor; night vision devices; binoculars; ammunition; lasers and magazines. In Mexico, where drug traffickers have fought openly, the equipment could unleash carnage.

According to the report by Army criminal investigators, the items stolen by Sumlin, Jarvis and their accomplices between 2014 and 2018 were valued at close to \$180,000. But the US government only recovered roughly \$25,000 worth.

Jarvis and Sumlin were indicted on eight different federal charges, including conspiracy and gunrunning. Sumlin posted bail and returned to his Florida home to pick up the pieces; he faced a **possible 70 years in prison.**

Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technicians work on the border amid Mexican drug-related violence. What if the weapons had ended up with narcos? They might have been used against the good guys. Sumlin had crossed a line by selling items that could have killed one of their own. [In the last] the two, Sumlin and Jarvis, had faced decades in prison, but both reached deals with federal prosecutors. They pleaded guilty so the other seven counts were dropped; the term was then reduced to 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

But they didn't even get that - each was sentenced to five years' probation, and Jarvis was ordered to mental health counseling and required to take prescribed medication.

To Evan, Sumlin and Jarvis are terrorists. If they were Muslim or Black, he said, they wouldn't have gotten off so easily. Evan wrote a Homeland Security that:

"It was very frustrating. There were other guys who got much worse for much less."

Now see another article of the recent times but based on the same investigative file of November 2018 – an extension of the Stolen Arms

deals. Referring to an article by JAMES LAPORTA appearing at **www.apNews.com** dated 15th June 2021:

“A guide to US military stolen arms: An Associated Press [AP] investigation found that at least 1,900 US military firearms were lost or stolen during the 2010s. Civilians later used some of the missing weapons in violent crimes.

To reach its total, AP culled criminal investigations, court records and property loss forms, and analyzed data from military registries of small arms. AP's analysis shows that alarming number of guns was missing.”

Referring to a fact-story published at **www.apnews.com** [dated 16th June 2021] next day in the same that weapon theft or loss spanned the military’s global footprint, touching installations from coast to coast, as well as overseas. In Afghanistan, someone cut the padlock on an Army container and stole 65 Beretta M9s. The theft went undetected. After two weeks, empty pistol boxes were discovered in the parking compound; the weapons were not recovered.

[Even elite units were not immune. A former member of a Marines special operations unit was busted with two stolen guns; a Navy SEAL lost his pistol during a fight in a restaurant in Lebanon.]

The American Police caught hold of a gun from within a street fight; it was a 9mm Beretta which was later found to be linked with four shootings in Albany, New York.

And there was something else; the pistol was US Army property, a weapon intended for use against America’s enemies, not on its streets.

The Army couldn’t say how its Beretta M9 got to New York’s capital. In June 2018 police realized that someone had stolen from a safe inside Fort Bragg, North Carolina - 600 miles away. *‘It’s incredibly alarming. It raises the other question as to what else is seeping into a community;’* Albany County District Attorney held.

An Associated Press investigation had found that at least 1,900 US military firearms were lost or stolen during the 2010s, with some resurfacing in violent crimes. The fact remained that AP’s total was a certain undercount because Pentagon was not eager to release the true figures. Government records had vanished from armories, supply warehouses, Navy warships, firing ranges and other places where they were used, stored or transported.

The Pentagon used to share annual updates about stolen weapons with Congress, but the requirement to do so ended years ago and public accountability has slipped. The members floated their opinions:

'There must be full accountability in Congress with regular reporting of missing or stolen weapons;' one senator roared. The Army and Air Force couldn't readily tell the AP News how many weapons were lost or stolen from 2010 through 2019. Sometimes, weapons disappeared without a paper trail. Military investigators regularly close cases without finding the firearms or person responsible because shoddy records lead to dead ends.

[As a general principle, the military's weapons are especially vulnerable to corrupt insiders responsible for securing them. They know how to exploit weak points within armories or the military's enormous supply chains. Often from lower ranks, they may see a chance to make a buck from a military that can afford it. It's all about the money in which all related offices could be involved.]

During the Afghan War especially, theft or loss happened more than the US Army had publicly acknowledged. During an initial interview, Miller significantly understated the extent to which weapons disappeared citing records that only a few hundred missing rifles and handguns. But an internal analysis done by the Army's Office of the Provost Marshal General tallied 1,303 firearms.

The AP's investigation began a decade ago. From the start, the Army gave conflicting information on a subject with the potential to embarrass -- and that's when it provided information at all. Top officials within the Army, Marines and Secretary of Defense's office said that weapon accountability remained a high priority, and *'when the military knows a weapon is missing it does trigger a concerted response to recover it.'* But for the Pentagon, the missing weapons were not a widespread problem and that the number was a tiny fraction of the military's stockpile -- US Army always has a very large inventory of several million weapons.

In the recent past [mid 2021], an Army trainee, who fled Fort Jackson in South Carolina with an M4 rifle, hijacked a school bus full of children, pointing his unloaded assault weapon at the driver before eventually letting everyone go.

In October 2019, police in San Diego were startled to find a military grenade launcher on the front seat of a car they pulled over for expired

license plates. The driver and his passenger were middle-aged men with criminal records. Alarming side is that the stolen military guns from Afghanistan were sold or passed on to street gangs and cartels involved in violent crimes. The AP identified eight instances in which five different stolen military firearms were used in a civilian shooting. The Pentagon does not track crime guns, and its spokesman Kirby said his office was unaware of any stolen firearms used in civilian crimes.

In a case the police recovered a stolen service pistol before troops at Fort Bragg realized it was missing. AP News found a second instance, involving a pistol that was among 21 M9s stolen from an arms room. Another steady North Carolina source of weapons had been Marine Corps Base Camp *Lejeune*. Detectives in Baltimore found a Beretta M9 stolen from a Lejeune armory during a cocaine bust. The Naval Criminal Investigative Service found in the 2011 case that three guns were stolen; no one was charged.

Investigators found sensitive and restricted parts for military weapons on sites including eBay, which normally adhere to the statement it has '**zero tolerance**' for stolen military gear on its site. At Fort Campbell, Kentucky, soldiers stole machine gun parts and other items that ended up with online buyers in Russia, China, Mexico and elsewhere. The civilian ringleader, who was found with a warehouse of items, was convicted. Authorities said he made hundreds of thousands of dollars.

When an M203 grenade launcher couldn't be found during a 2019 inventory at a Marine Corps supply base in Albany, Georgia, investigators sought surveillance camera footage. It didn't exist. The warehouse manager said the system couldn't be played back at the time.

An analysis of 45 firearms-only investigations in the Navy and Marines found that in 55% of cases, no suspect could be found and weapons remained missing. In unresolved cases, relevant records were destroyed or falsified. Numerous security lapses in the 2012 case were unearthed, including that missing pistols weren't properly logged in the ship's inventory when they were received and what day they disappeared because sailors' gun-decked inventory reports by not doing actual counts.

Seems like in Afghanistan, the armed services, were responsible for about 3.1 million small arms. Across all four branches, the US military had an estimated 4.5 million firearms, according to an organization Small Arms Survey. The Marines and Navy were able to produce data covering the 2010s - the Navy showed that 211 firearms were reported lost or stolen.

In addition, 63 firearms previously considered missing were recovered. ¹ The Marines showed that 204 firearms were lost or stolen, with 14 later ² recovered. *For missing weapons, the Pentagon relies on incident reports ³ from the services, which it keeps for only three years.*

Pentagon officials told the AP News that nearly 100 firearms were unaccounted during 2018-19 – the figures were higher than what the services reported to the Pentagon. However, the number of missing weapons was down significantly in 2020, when the pandemic curtailed many military operations – and in Afghanistan the army operations were stalled after signing of Doha Accord in February 2020.

The AP News asked the Army for details on missing weapons in 2011 and filed a formal request a year later for records of guns listed as missing, lost, stolen or recovered in the Department of Defense Small Arms and Light Weapons Registry. In 2013, the flow of information over this subject was blocked on the pre-text that ‘they’ were dealing with millions of weapons.....there’s so much room for discrepancy. However, the reports guided that there were 230 lost or stolen rifles or handguns between 2010 and 2019.

AP News obtained two memos covering 2013 through 2019 in which the Army tallied 1,303 stolen or lost rifles and handguns though the in-charge army offices didn’t agree with figures.