

# America Has Lost its Moral Compass



By Cliff Kincaid

The disgraced former CIA director David Petraeus, once called “America’s greatest living general,” is lecturing America that we didn’t try hard enough at building a democratic Muslim nation in Afghanistan. This retired General cheated on his wife with his biographer, as he bungled the military operation in Afghanistan and then took over Obama’s CIA.

The Wall Street Journal devotes a whole [story](#) to the self-righteous ramblings of this man who disgraced the uniform and betrayed his wife but then built a lucrative career in the financial and high-tech world.

The Wall Street Journal story has these headlines: “David Petraeus Reflects on the Afghan Debacle. He offers unsparing words about Trump and Biden, a defense of nation-building, and he says U.S. soldiers may have to re-enter Kabul in force to rescue Americans.”

His role as commander of forces in Afghanistan is just as disgraceful as his personal life.

Under the headline, “China is Big Winner in Afghanistan,” Peter Flaherty of the National Legal and Policy Center [notes](#) that with the Taliban takeover and the terror group’s ties to Beijing, China will dominate the economy. “Afghanistan has significant mineral resources, including rare earth elements, which are increasingly under Chinese control worldwide,” he points out.

But another outcome is China's control of a narco-state.

The Afghan Army praised by Petraeus developed a [reputation](#) as the "Hashish Army," as many in the Afghan army and police forces were taking drugs and engaging in pedophilia. A Journal article from 2010 [noted](#), "Use of marijuana, opium and heroin among Afghan troops, even while on patrol, is just one of the challenges coalition forces face in working with the Afghan National Army..." A 2013 [documentary](#), "This is What Winning Looks Like," showed Afghan soldiers using drugs as evidence surfaced of Afghan police commanders sexually abusing young boys.

The Commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan (2010–11), Petraeus was not asked by the Journal writer about the use of drugs by the Afghan forces. Instead, he predicts a Taliban regime will use drug money to help finance its national budget. This is undoubtedly true. But part of his job was stopping this.

A 2016 [report](#), "The War on Drugs in Afghanistan: Another Failed Experiment with Interdiction," found that General David Petraeus and General Stanley McChrystal "became the centerpiece of newly elected President Barack Obama's renewed counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan," combined with the "troop surge" beginning in 2009, that was intended "to encourage provincial governors to provide local farmers with economic alternatives to opium cultivation." The billions of dollars were wasted, as "poppy cultivation continued to rise." The money was used to produce additional opium, with "the opium economy" getting "stronger and more concentrated in Taliban hands than at any time before or during the invasion."

Analyst Vanda Felbab-Brown had [predicted](#) last October that, with the possible collapse of the Afghan state, "The drug economy will become further entrenched." She added, "Most counter narcotics measures adopted since 2001 have been ineffective or outright counterproductive economically,

politically, and with respect to counterinsurgency and stabilization efforts.”

Now, with China taking over the country, including the drug trade, it will be able to supply addicts with more lethal heroin, to complement the fentanyl the communists are providing to Mexican cartels, for shipment to the United States. At the same time, the Chinese will get richer as they dominate the rare earth metals market.

These failures didn't cost Petraeus his job, even though by his own admission he had lost his “moral compass” through an adulterous affair.

Apparently, however, none of his personal failings are considered to have tainted his advice on how to run the world. Hence, the Wall Street Journal gives us his “reflections” on how Afghanistan went down the drain, under his leadership and others.

At the time the scandal broke, I covered it, noting that the CIA director was caught leaking classified information to his mistress, Paula Broadwell, who served in the United States Army and the United States Army Reserve. It was one of the worst [scandals](#) of the Obama Administration. He turned over his “Black Books,” containing national defense information, including Top Secret//SCI and code word information, to his biographer, in order to write and publish, *All In: The Education of General David Petraeus*.

Petraeus lied about this to the FBI. He was sentenced to two years' probation and a \$100,000 fine. His mistress was demoted from lieutenant colonel to major after the affair, lost her top-secret security clearance and received a formal reprimand.

All of this is now forgotten. “In a Zoom interview,” reported Journal writer Tunku Varadarajan, “I ask Mr. Petraeus, 68, what effect the ignominious withdrawal will have on military morale.” His answer was, in part: “I think—particularly for

those who served there—that it is very sad. It is heartbreaking. It is tragic. And I think it is disastrous.”

What about the effect on morale of a retired general cheating on his wife and leaking classified information and still being treated as a respected commander? He avoided prison time through a political plea deal. He could have been charged with lying to the FBI and violating the Espionage Act.

Rather than being prosecuted for a felony, he went on to establish the KKR Global Institute, described as “an integral part of the KKR investment process – working in partnership with KKR deal teams, portfolio companies, and limited partners to help enable smarter investing through a better understanding of the world.” KKR is a private-equity firm.

Not only that, but he became “a member of the boards of directors of Optiv and OneStream, a venture investor in some 20 startups, and engaged in a variety of academic endeavors,” his [bio](#) says. Optiv is a cyber security solutions provider while OneStream is a software company.

He is a member in good standing of the Trilateral Commission.

It appears he bounced back as a member in good standing of the military-industrial complex.

The Petraeus bio notes trivia, such as that he threw out the first pitch of a World Series game and did the coin toss for a Super Bowl but carefully avoid his admitted loss of a moral compass.

It looks like the Afghan operation lost a moral compass, too.

Perhaps, before we do more nation-building abroad, we ought to do more nation-building at home. If we don't find our moral compass, we are doomed.

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