

**My Thoughts as Afghanistan Falls**  
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I find myself wondering a great deal about the events of the past few days. Just yesterday, the capital of Afghanistan, Kabul, fell to the Taliban, the same group driven out of power nearly twenty years ago at the dawn of military action in response to the attacks of September 11, 2001.

I reflect on it in many ways and from many different vantage points. I am a veteran of the Afghanistan conflict, serving in Kabul in 2007; I am a husband and father who wants to ensure that, through the service of me and my colleagues in arms, another attack does not take place on American soil; as a Christian who saw such abject poverty and now sees people jumping on the outside of military cargo planes to get out of their country from fear.



In 2007 while I was in Kabul, I served at the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan and was part of this group tasked with mentoring and training the Afghan National Defense Force (ANSDF), it was an honor to be there. I felt I was able to be a small part of making a difference. Now, I am not sure what that difference was as I watch the unfolding tragedy fourteen years later.

While there, I experienced the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks and wrote this:

*“It is hard to believe that it is September 11, 2007 - six years after that fateful and*



*horrible day in 2001. I, like so many others, will never forget where I was on that day... when I learned of the first plane that flew in to the World Trade Center; now here I am six years later in the country from which those attacks were planned by the terrorists... Despite all that, I think about all that has changed here in Afghanistan in those six years - what a difference - a stable, non-oppressive government is in place; ministries are developing and taking ownership of their role in the defense of their country; the people are working against the great poverty that*

*grips this land; women and girls are getting an equal education; commerce and*

*industry are coming on line; and, most importantly, peace is near at hand after nearly thirty years of constant warfare.*

*I am blessed to be here to witness this day. It brings me great hope for the people of Afghanistan and for their future and great hope as well for the future of my country and how the Lord has blessed us and continues to - as we are willing to do what is right in places such as this one.*

*As we each reflect on the events of six years ago, I pray we can again find that unification we had in the aftermath of the attacks and again dedicate ourselves to the faith and heritage of our Founding Fathers - the Lord who has been with us from the beginning and continues with us today and always."*



So many media pundits and former government officials are taking their sides and, to be honest, it is hard not to join in and raise questions about what happened. There is a time for that, and it is a responsibility of a free people in a republic to do that. That's not what I want to do here, though.

As I experience so many different emotions – frustration, sadness, concern, disbelief, I find myself wondering about the sacrifices of the last twenty years. The United States

lost thousands of young men and women in Afghanistan, spent billions of dollars, and demonstrated great sacrifice and yet, it seems as though we are right back where we started with the Taliban in control.

How do I convey to others what I feel? On Veterans Day 2007, I wrote the following:

*...for me to be in a distant land remembering all who have sacrificed so much so that we can live in a free country. As I looked around at all the men and women in uniform, I thought how blessed our nation is to have so many willing to answer the call to leave their families and face danger. I know so many of them do this as their primary job and have been deployed three and four times to Iraq and Afghanistan; I am honored to serve with them.*

*Certainly on a more sobering note, the names of the twenty-two members of Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan who have paid the ultimate sacrifice were read and a single bell tolled for each name, followed by a 21-gun Salute and the sounding of Taps.*

*To all our country's veterans and their families, from everyone here in Afghanistan, we thank you so very much for your sacrifice and for your provisions for our freedom. You are in our thoughts and prayers especially on this day.*

Here is what I realize – the sacrifices of the men and women of the United States, our allies, and the Afghan people were not in vain. Those who gave the ultimate sacrifice did not do so for no reason. Those who were maimed or still suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder or other long-term physical, emotional, or mental wounds did not do so for nothing.



Though the end is far from what we hoped for or envisioned, we fought a noble fight. We protected our land and ensured we were free from a terrorist organization bent on destroying our nation and we helped a people to stand for themselves.

Though it seems their own government crumbled without a fight, it is now the time for the will of the Afghan people to determine their own future.

Finally, as a believer in Jesus Christ as my Savior, I must accept I do not know His ways. In this world, I cannot understand a great many things, but I trust in a God who loves me. It may seem simple to many who read this, but let me summarize my final thoughts as I prepared to come home fourteen years ago, when I wrote:



*... I am so thankful to be home in safety, good health, and soon to be with my family. I am grateful to the Lord for His protection over me and my comrades as well as my family.*

*It is hard to summarize my feelings and experiences over this time, but suffice it to say, I am glad and proud to have served both our great country as well as the people of Afghanistan. It is truly an honor.*

*What a great greeting and welcome as well, we all received ... there were about fifty people - high school students and their parents, as well as Veterans from WWII, Korea, and Vietnam there cheering us on, shaking our hands, and greeting us to say thank you. What a different welcome we received than some of those same Veterans coming home from Vietnam. I am thankful for the resolve of the American people and their continued support of us.*