

Lord God of My Salvation
Henry Francis Lyte (1793–1847)

Lord God of my salvation,
To Thee, to Thee, I cry;
Oh let my supplication
Arrest Thine ear on high.
Distresses round me thicken,
My life draws nigh the grave;
Descend, O Lord, to quicken,
Descend my soul to save.

Thy wrath lies hard upon me,
Thy billows o'er me roll,
My friends all seem to shun me,
And foes beset my soul.
Where'er on earth I turn me,
No comforter is near;
Wilt Thou too, Father, spurn me?
Wilt Thou refuse to hear?

No! banish'd and heart-broken
My soul still clings to Thee;
The promise Thou hast spoken
Shall still my refuge be.
So present ills and terrors
My future joy increase,
And scourge me from my errors
To duty, hope, and peace.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Was It Worth It?
Kevin T. Bauder

The world watches in fascinated horror as the United States abandons its ally of nearly two decades. Enemy fighters are sweeping in, atrocities are being committed, and confusion reigns. Afghan women, non-Muslims, and trapped Americans can expect nothing but terror. The American authorities will not lift a finger to help them.

This is what happens when America betrays its allies. This is a tiny glimpse of what will happen if the United States wavers in Israel, Korea, or Taiwan. Here is proof positive to all of America's allies that the United States cannot be trusted to keep its promises. It is also confirmation to America's enemies that our nation no longer possesses the will to persevere in a difficult task.

In terms of America's security, the clock has been turned back twenty years. Afghanistan is once again a rogue state. Within a short time it will again play host to terrorist organizations—perhaps not Al Qaeda, but to similar bodies bent on the destruction of America. Given a stable base for planning and logistics, these organizations will doubtless attempt further 9/11 style attacks on American interests and eventually on America itself.

There is blame enough to go around. George Bush, partly blocked by Pakistan, failed to crush the Taliban while he had the chance. Barack Obama hardly tried. And as for the Trump administration, let us never forget that Donald Trump was the one who negotiated directly with the Taliban, circumventing the government of Afghanistan. His idea of "winning" was an agreement to pull American troops out of that country.

We will never know whether President Trump could have achieved an orderly withdrawal. In any case, the Biden administration clearly has not. Where exactly the blame lies is not clear. At times the President has given the impression of being *non compos menta*. If this impression is correct, then the real fault rests with those who have propped him up and then failed to manage this crisis in the President's name. Whatever the situation, the botched withdrawal from Afghanistan constitutes the worst black mark against any administration since the Nixon presidency. Even Jimmy Carter's bungling of the Iran hostage crisis does not compare.



Some Americans—including the President—have been whining about Afghanistan being the longest war in American history, but it isn't. The Korean Conflict has been going on since 1950. The two Koreas are still at war, though they are not presently shooting at each other. The United States has kept troops in Korea through that entire conflict of more than seventy years. On the other hand, the American military in Afghanistan has not suffered a serious number of combat deaths since about 2014. The human cost of continuing involvement in Afghanistan was minimal.

Nevertheless, we have gone. According to some, our absence from Afghanistan comes none too soon. These individuals believe that we never had any business there, that the US presence in Afghanistan was an exercise in imperialism, and that our efforts in that country were a failure from the beginning. For years, they have argued that American involvement in Afghan affairs was not worth the cost.

No doubt a cost has been paid. I knew many people who served in Afghanistan and some who died there. Those who served sometimes returned to America with chronic health issues. Upwards of 2,300 Americans gave their lives in Afghanistan, almost 2,000 of whom were killed in action. Their sacrifice should not be dismissed. Was American involvement in Afghanistan worth this many lives and this much suffering?

To answer that question, we must decide what the American military actually accomplished in Afghanistan. Their first and most obvious accomplishment was to bring retribution upon those who planned, sponsored, and abetted the September 11 attacks. The execution of this sort of retribution is one of the God-ordained functions of civil government (Rom 13:4). When its shores were attacked and its citizens killed, the United States had a duty to bring the perpetrators and their enablers to justice. This result alone justifies the war in Afghanistan. If this result has not been accomplished fully and perfectly, it has at least been accomplished adequately.

Second, the American military presence in Afghanistan brought a rare (if temporary) breath of freedom and participatory government to the Afghan people. During the American presence, people moved about and pursued life with greater liberty than they had for years. Commerce and education flourished, at least by comparison. In particular, women enjoyed unprecedented freedom from oppression. While it will probably never be possible to erect a Western-style democracy in Afghanistan, the American presence allowed the Afghan people to approximate that ideal to a far greater degree than at any time in their nation's history.

Third, by taking the fight to the enemy, American troops in Afghanistan built a hedge of protection around the American homeland. In the two decades since September 11, 2001, no significant attack against the United States has succeeded. US armed forces in Afghanistan defeated a serious

enemy and kept that enemy at bay for twenty years. For that, all Americans owe them a debt of gratitude.

Fourth, the protection provided by American armed forces in Afghanistan has given Americans two decades to repent of their revolt against nature and nature's God. Granted, the United States has largely squandered that opportunity. Over the past twenty years, American defiance of both divine and natural law has taken on new vehemence. Nevertheless, God is a gracious God who gives people much opportunity to repent (2 Pet 3:9). By holding the enemy at bay, the American troops in Afghanistan were a providential instrument to provide that opportunity.

Other considerations could be mentioned, but I believe these are sufficient. Any one of these would be adequate justification for American military involvement in Afghanistan. I suggest that the presence of United States troops in Afghanistan was an unqualified success both during the hostilities and after the hostilities had ended. Our presence there was not the problem. Our betrayal of our ally (and even of our own citizens) is the problem. In a word: Yes, it was worth it.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
