



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on September 6, 2011

## Crocker: Afghan War Is “Ultimate Guarantee” Against Another 9/11

"It is going to require more resources, its going to require time," said Crocker, a career diplomat who also served as Ambassador to Iraq. "I hope we can bring all those to bear, because as hard, painful, as expensive as this has been in blood and treasure, it has cost a lot less than 9/11 did."

More than 1,600 U.S. soldiers have died in Afghanistan, and the war has cost nearly \$450 billion, according to the Congressional Research Service. Civilian casualties are also at the highest level since the war began, Reuters reported, and after nearly a decade of fighting, the Taliban have a greater reach in Afghanistan than at any time since they were driven from power in 2001. In an interview at the Ambassador's residence in Kabul, Crocker acknowledged that Americans are "war-weary" and conceded that errors in planning and coordinating the military and economic aid have hindered the effort to defeat the Taliban and build a secure Afghanistan. A report issued last week by the U.S. Commission on Wartime Contracting found \$30 billion had been wasted in Iraq and Afghanistan over the past decade. "At least that much could again turn into waste if the host governments are unable or unwilling to sustain US-funded projects after our involvement ends," the report's authors warned.



"I think we all made mistakes, the international community, in the way we put resources into this country, often without due consultation with Afghan partners, without Afghan buy-in, without appropriate oversight," Crocker said. "I think we are on the right path now."

But the cost of maintaining both its growing army and the arsenal being supplied by the United States and its NATO allies could overwhelm the Afghan government. "An iron mountain of military hardware destined for Afghanistan may be mothballed on arrival because Kabul cannot afford to maintain it," the Sydney newspaper, the *Australian* reported Tuesday in an [article](#) titled, "Armed to the tusks: NATO gives Afghans \$2.5 billion white elephant." Shipments of 22,000 U.S. vehicles, 20 Russian helicopters and transport planes from Italy, costing a total of \$2.5 billion in U.S. dollars, will arrive in Afghanistan



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over the next six months, the report said. By 2014, the year the United States plans to have its combat units out of the country, yet Afghanistan is on track to receive \$10 billion in military hardware and \$11 billion in security infrastructure. NATO estimates the maintenance and deployment of all that equipment will cost the Kabul government \$6 billion a year — more than three times its annual income.

The U.S.-led coalition has not supplied the tanks and jets the Afghan government has repeatedly requested, nor the Black Hawk helicopters Kabul wanted, choosing instead to buy Russian Mi-17s, which perform better at higher altitudes and are cheaper to maintain than the American-made Black Hawks, Major General Peter Fuller, deputy commander of NATO's training mission, said. C-27 transport planes were bought second-hand from the Italian air force and 120 mm artillery guns were bought in Bosnia, Slovakia, and Lithuania and refurbished. How much good the materiel will do the Afghan government in its fight against the Taliban is an open question. A study by NATO analysts of what might happen when foreign aid is turned off suggests Afghanistan may have to reduce the size of its army and stop using expensive equipment, the *Australian* reported.

Crocker insists that defeating the Taliban is vital to American security. "These are tough, determined guys," he told Reuters, "and we have got to stay in the fight, because if we decide we are done, without completing the mission along the lines I laid out earlier, well the Taliban is going to be back." Though Director of Central Intelligence [Leon Panetta estimated](#) a year ago that only 50 to 100 al-Qaeda fighters were still in Afghanistan, that will change if the Taliban get back in power, Crocker said.

"With the Taliban will come al Qaeda, and we will have the same situation that we had pre-9/11, and that to me is an utterly unacceptable outcome," he said. "That is a risk of our national security that I think no sane person would willingly take."

Crocker recalled that he had landed at JFK Airport in New York and was driving into Manhattan when the hijacked planes flew into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in an attack that took the lives of an estimated 3,000 people. He still carries the boarding pass from that flight with him.

"And not that I need a reminder, but this is just a small memento of why we are in this fight and why we need to stay in it," he said. The ambassador did not rule out negotiations with the Taliban for an end to the fighting, but said they must accept changes in Afghanistan, including recognition of women's rights. "The Taliban needs to be further weakened to the point where they will come to the table prepared to accept the conditions we have set jointly with the Afghans," he said. "That's not the Taliban I think we are engaged with today."

Critics of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have long argued that military efforts to force societal change on the Arab world have produced an increase of radical Islamic hatred for America and the West. In his 2004 book *Imperial Hubris* former CIA senior analyst Michael Scheurer argued:

U.S. forces and policies are completing the radicalization of the Islamic world, something Osama bin Laden has been trying to do with substantial but incomplete success since the early 1990s. As a result, I think it is fair to conclude that the United States of America remains bin Laden's only indispensable ally.

Bin Laden is now dead, but his game plan for defeating the United States is still being played out, [wrote](#) Eric Margolis in the *American Conservative*, noting that the al-Qaeda leader "repeatedly asserted that the only way to drive the U.S. from the Muslim world and defeat its satraps was by drawing Americans into a series of small but expensive wars that would ultimately bankrupt them."

As the U.S. Congress and President continue to deliberate and debate over \$1 trillion-plus annual



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deficits and a \$14 trillion national debt, the realization may eventually set in that the Afghans aren't the only ones who can't afford all the military hardware we are sending them.

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