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Haven't We Had Enough of Afghanistan?

The forever war continues

Justin Raimando

6/2/2017

Will there ever be an end to the war in Afghanistan? Apparently not if our generals have anything to say about it – and they do. President Trump has turned over the prosecution of our perpetual “war on terrorism” to the Pentagon, claiming that they’ve been held back by previous administrations. The new policy is to turn them loose.

We saw what this means when the so-called “Mother of All Bombs” was dropped in a remote location where ISIS was said to be hiding: 92 “militants” were said to have been killed. Contrary to the triumphalist reports in US media, the biggest non-nuclear bomb ever deployed in combat had a minimal effect. And the cost, at \$16 million for a single MOAB, came to around \$174,000 per “militantanywhere from 1,000 to 3,000 ISIS fighters in Afghanistan, let’s take the median number of 2,000 and estimate that getting rid of all of them will cost around \$348 million, give or take \$10 million or so.

And you’ll note that we’re just talking about ISIS here. The Taliban is not only still in the mix, they’re actually in a better position than ever. In March, the Taliban claimed that 211 administrative districts of the country were either under their control or else contested: this isn’t far off the report of the Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, which put the number

at 171. The Taliban control more of Afghanistan than at any time since the war started, and they continue to make major gains, such as in Helmand province. The pace and severity of Taliban/ISIS attacks has recently escalated, with a suicide bombing in Kabul that killed 100 people, the culmination of 8 major attacks just in the month of May.

After 16 years of fighting, the US is no closer to defeating the radical Islamist insurgency than it was at the very beginning. The original rationale for the invasion – the presence of Osama bin Laden – is long since gone.

The justification for continuing the Afghan war, you'll recall, was that we couldn't allow any "safe havens" where the terrorists could plan and carry out attacks on the US and Western Europe. The logic of this is difficult to follow, however, since a "safe haven" can be defined as anywhere terrorists gather – which can occur just as easily in Hamburg, Germany, than in some mountain cave in Afghanistan. Furthermore, we are now told that the primary locus of terrorist activities is in territory controlled by ISIS, which has few strongholds and little support in Afghanistan.

The reality is that terrorist plots are more likely to be hatched in Western Europe and right here in the United States than in the Afghan wilds.

Yet that hasn't stopped our generals from requesting thousands more US troops to be sent to fight the longest war in our history: news reports tell us they want "a few thousand" more, but it's hard to imagine this will make much difference. It's also hard to imagine that the American people support this: while no recent polls have been taken — for some mysterious reason they stopped measuring support for the war in 2015 – the last time anyone looked opposition was over fifty percent.

Naturally, given the current atmosphere in Washington, there's an anti-Russian angle to all this: General John Nicholson recently testified before Congress that Moscow is pushing a "false narrative" that the Taliban is fighting ISIS while the Afghan government army is sitting on its haunches, collecting bribes and managing the drug harvest. Russia's goal, he said, is to "undermine the United States and NATO."

Yet the Taliban is not the same as ISIS, and the latter has largely alienated Afghan civilians, just as al-Qaeda did in Iraq: foreign fighters, no matter their religion, are not popular in Afghanistan. The Taliban, for all its theological pretensions, is essentially a nationalist movement fighting a foreign invader: ISIS, however, is quite a different story.

The Trump campaign told us that all foreign commitments were going to be judged by new criteria: *how does this serve American interests?* And the question of how continuing to fight this war serves our interests has yet to be answered by the Trump administration. They have simply taken the war as a given.

In a 2009 speech at Tennessee State University, I asked my audience to "remember the fate of the previous would-be conquerors of the proud Afghan people: the Russians, the British, the Golden Horde, and even Alexander the Great. They all failed, and the bones of their centurions

are dust beneath the feet of a warrior people. In that kind of terrain, against that kind of enemy, there is no such thing as victory – there is only a question of how long it will take for them to drive us out – or whether we go bankrupt before that happens.”

Even earlier, in 2001, I predicted that the Afghan war would be a quagmire, a mistake we would eventually come to regret – an opinion for which David Frum, then *National Review*'s neocon enforcer of ideological correctness, saw cause to label me “anti-American.”

When the truth is considered “anti-American,” then we know we’re in trouble. Indeed, we’ve been in some pretty serious trouble for the past 16 years. Now is the time to reverse course and make it right.

It’s time to acknowledge that truth. It’s time to get the hell out of Afghanistan – now.

An important note: Hardly a week goes by when a new “hot spot” fails to pop up on our radar: Korea, Kurdistan, Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Ukraine, the list goes on and on. These are regions where the prospects of a war involving the United States are either emerging or else increasing in intensity – and it’s getting worse.

That’s why we need to wrap up our fundraising drive pronto. Events are moving swiftly, and Antiwar.com needs to focus on the job we’ve been doing since 1995: giving you the best coverage of international affairs on the Internet while making the case for peace.

With a very small staff, we’ve nonetheless managed to provide our readers with original coverage of all these hot-spots, giving both the context and the daily updates that have made us a leader in the field. But we can’t continue to do this without your support – because we don’t rely on eccentric billionaires, big foundations, or corporate megaliths for the resources we need to keep going.

No, we rely on you, our readers and supporters, to support the kind of independent journalism that’s absolutely essential in this age of partisan craziness. Yes, we have a viewpoint – but we back it up with facts, not propaganda or speculation. And we’re accountable to no one but our readers, who have come to expect the highest standards of accuracy as a matter of course.

The news won’t wait for us to make our fundraising goal: the War Party is busy planning the next international disaster, of that you can be sure. So please – help put us over the top so we can get back to the job of doing what we do best: making the case for a noninterventionist foreign policy in this era of perpetual war.

Our matching funds have arrived: \$32,000 that we must match in order to receive the full amount. **Now is the time to make your tax-deductible donation** – because a world at peace is freedom’s best bet.