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Obama's Vietnam

Bruce Fein
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President Barack Obama's Afghanistan policy is unschooled and carefree with lives and money. The president and senior staff sally forth with claims of progress in an attempt to conceal a defeat reminiscent of presidents Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard M. Nixon in the Vietnam War. Senator George Aiken's sage advice of 1966 went unheeded: declare victory in Vietnam and leave. Instead, President Obama, like his predecessor, mulishly insisted on putting tens of thousands of American soldiers in harm's way. He should have remembered that last episode, when his predecessors squandered over \$750 billion fighting an enemy we are now defending against China over the South China Sea.

North Vietnam's defeat of South Vietnam in 1975 left the national security of the United States unimpaired. Dominoes did not fall. The United States was not attacked. In fact, trade ensued. And the United States is redressing the environmental damage inflicted by Agent Orange in Vietnam and the illnesses and ailments of our own Vietnam veterans caused by exposure to the toxin. On August 9, 2012, U.S. ambassador to Vietnam David B. Shear declared: "This morning we celebrate a milestone in our bilateral relationship. We're cleaning up this mess."

Like a recidivist, President Obama is repeating the Vietnam War crime of monumental stupidity in Afghanistan. And Afghan commander John R. Allen's recent Pollyannaish [assessment of the Afghan War](#) [3] in the *Washington Post* echoes General William Westmoreland's 1967 illusion of "light at the end of the tunnel" in the Vietnam War.

The professed objective in the Afghan War is the summoning into being of a national government sufficiently strong and legitimate to thwart the Taliban's ambition to regain power.

The objective itself is utopian. Afghanistan has defied national unity from time immemorial. It is fragmented along tribal, ethnic and religious lines. Local warlords flourish, subsidized by our taxpayer dollars. Ask yourself, would you bet a peppercorn on the Afghan government's survival if the United States departs?

Even if achieving this objective were conceivable, by every yardstick President Obama has spectacularly failed. President Hamid Karzai's election was fraudulent. He is little more than the mayor of Kabul. Corruption is rife, exemplified by the Kabul bank scandal. Transparency International ranks Afghanistan at the apex of its corruption index. The Afghan government budget is dependent on massive foreign aid. The rule of law is a hoax, which paralyzes investment and fuels massive capital flight. The Afghan economy predictably stagnates. Opium production is soaring. The Taliban infiltrates the Afghan police and military, which facilitates the killings of both Afghan security personnel and American soldiers. Religious, tribal, ethnic and gender discrimination is rampant. The sole assurance against the return to power of the Taliban in Afghanistan is for the United States military to remain indefinitely and for the United States taxpayers to subsidize perpetually a corrupt and popularly despised Afghan government. That is why our NATO allies are withdrawing or slashing their troop contributions.

President Obama's fool's errand in Afghanistan circumvents the U.S. effort to cripple Iran over its nuclear ambitions. U.S. dollars showered on the Afghan government and economy are regularly exchanged with Iranians bearing depreciated rials. That smacks of a Peter Sellers comedy, not coherent national security policy—even assuming the Iranian economy should be strangled.

President Obama, parroting his predecessor, repeatedly and heatedly sermonizes that Afghanistan is not a second Vietnam. To borrow from Hamlet, "The [president] doth protest too much, methinks."