

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نیاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/cloread/2013/03/welcome-to-kabul-secretary-hagel.html?printable=true¤tPage=all>

Welcome to Kabul, Secretary Hagel

by Amy Davidson

March 11, 2013

Chuck Hagel, now that he's Secretary of Defense, flew to Afghanistan to get a look at what we are defending. Perhaps if his confirmation hearings hadn't been so drawn out, his visit wouldn't have coincided with one of President Hamid Karzai's fits of public anger. But then those can be hard to predict, just as they are hard to define. What do you call it when Karzai says, as he did on Sunday, that two bombing attacks for which the Taliban claimed responsibility "were in service to America.... It was in the service of foreigners not withdrawing from Afghanistan"? Is it a tantrum, a delusion, a freak-out, a move in a deep game—or just a cynical play for popular support, by which he gets Afghans to like him by telling them that he hates us?

General Joseph Dunford suggested that the last one might be the case. "He's a head of state that has both an internal and external audience," Dunford said, according to the *Washington Post*. "He knows far better than I do how to manage internal and external audiences." So Karzai says one thing to them and another to us. That is as un reassuring as being told that a given construction project in Kandahar is sure to be finished because Karzai's relatives are counting on the graft—and about as unsustainable.

It's possible, though, that Karzai's disturbance of the mind only camouflages our own. One wonders if our position is any better moored to reality. The plan on this trip had been for Hagel to witness the transfer of the Bagram prison to Afghan authority. That was delayed (which may

have been what set Karzai off). According to the *Times*, we wanted reassurances that the Afghans would hold certain prisoners indefinitely, “even if they cannot be prosecuted in court for specific offenses.” That is an odd condition to impose if we think, by remaining in Afghanistan, that we are making a point about democracy; have we come to not only tolerate indefinite detention, as practiced at Guantánamo, but become evangelists for it? We’d also like something close to an American veto on those prisoners’ release. At the same time, we want to have access to the prisons because we’re worried that the Afghans will abuse the prisoners we’ve just insisted they keep locked up with no due process.

You don’t prevent torture, in the long run, with occasional check-ins by compromised babysitters. (The United States has its own bad record at Bagram, about which there are still unanswered questions.) You certainly don’t avoid it by keeping people out of court. What if an indefinitely detained Afghan were an anti-corruption activist who’d been looking into what happened to American money there? It’s not enough to just say that the Taliban is worse when we’ve been there for more than a decade. Karzai has a point about sovereignty; we have a point about what a mess Karzai is. As has happened so many times, we try to square our schemes for how Afghanistan fits into counterinsurgency and counterterrorism theories with a basic distrust of the Karzai regime. We end up in a muddle; and we end up dirty, too.

“We have fought too hard over the past twelve years, we have shed too much blood over the past twelve years, we have done too much to help the Afghan security forces grow over the past twelve years to ever think that violence or instability would be to our advantage,” Dunford said. That is true, but the message of the trip as a whole might be that we ourselves can be as irrational as Karzai seems.

Karzai and Hagel were supposed to hold a press conference together on Sunday. It was cancelled after Karzai’s speech; there was a reference to “security concerns.” That may have been an excuse, but then Hagel had been near enough to an explosion that killed nine civilians to hear the bomb go off. So he and Karzai had dinner. “I thought it was a pretty clear, direct conversation,” Hagel told reporters. He’d met Karzai before, in 2001 and 2008; he thought that helped. He added, “When you spend forty-eight hours in Afghanistan or any part of the world, it’s still dangerous. You, again, recognize the complications that exist every day in these parts of the world. They are imperfect solutions. We should always be mindful of the higher purpose of what we’re—what we’re doing and—and why.” Welcome to Afghanistan, Secretary Hagel. Now can we go home?