

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نېاشد تن من مېباد بدين بوم وېر زنده يک تن مېباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهيم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهيم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<http://original.antiwar.com/eland/2015/10/26/endless-war-makes-us-less-safe/print/>

Endless War Makes Us Less Safe

By Ivan Eland
October 26, 2015

Obama's recent decision to leave American troops in perpetuity in the Afghanistan War, despite a fourteen-year failed attempt to remodel the country, is as unsurprising as it is appalling. Applicable is what Secretary of State John Kerry famously said, as a decorated Vietnam War veteran, about that conflict as it futilely stretched on: "How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?" That war was lost in 1968, but Richard Nixon allowed tens of thousands of Americans, and probably hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese, to die before he withdrew American forces in 1973 and the South Vietnamese regime collapsed in 1975. Although the numbers are not nearly as great, Obama's decision to keep American forces in perpetuity in Afghanistan will condemn more U.S. service personnel to die for an already lost cost. Why do politicians do such dreadful things?

Because they don't want to be blamed for losing a foreign war on their watch. In Vietnam, Richard Nixon vainly sought "peace with honor," only to see U.S. prestige precipitously decline with each passing year that American troops stayed in the war.

In Obama's case, his Republican opposition has created the false narrative that his failure to get Iraq's Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki to allow American forces to remain in Iraq led to the current civil war there. No matter that George W. Bush hadn't been able to do so either, and Obama merely implemented Bush's schedule for U.S. troop withdrawals. The Iraqis, after eight-long years of U.S. military occupation, were sick of it and just wanted the United States out, no

matter what happened. In reality, when popping the dictatorial top off artificial countries, in the long term, the absence of the iron hand eventually leads to civil war or chaos (as Obama's own foible in overthrowing Muammar Gaddafi in Libya has shown). Thus, once George W. Bush invaded Iraq and deposed the only force holding the country together – Saddam Hussein – centrifugal ethno-sectarian social forces much stronger than a few thousand remaining U.S. troops were bound to partition the country, likely by force. Yet because his Republican opponents have been so effective in blaming the likely inevitable violence in Iraq on a full U.S. withdrawal, Obama does not want to face similar criticism for completely withdrawing U.S. forces from Afghanistan. So unfortunately, more Americans and Afghans will die for a lost cause.

In my book, *The Failure of Counterinsurgency*, I explore many historical examples of the difficulties great powers have had fighting guerrillas and "terrorists," who hide amongst the population and launch hit and run attacks on isolated elements of the stronger force. For the United States, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan are stark illustrations. In all of these cases, the most powerful military in the world, over many years, tried to train local forces to fight insurgents, only to fail. In Iraq, U.S.-trained Iraqi security forces fled in the face of ISIS and turned over their sophisticated weapons to the brutal group, making the situation even worse. In Afghanistan, a few hundred Taliban recently scored their greatest victory in the war by defeating thousands of U.S. trained Afghan security forces, taking over the northern city of Kunduz. Even when backed by U.S. air power, those security forces had trouble retaking the city. And this abysmal result occurred after the United States had trained Afghan forces for 14 years. so will keeping a smaller number of U.S. forces in Afghanistan even longer suddenly transform Afghan forces into an effective fighting machine, even with continued supporting U.S. air strikes? Unlikely. Thus, Obama, who previously pledged to end American military quagmires overseas, is happy to pass this tar baby on to his successor to avoid blame for "losing Afghanistan."

Similarly, Obama will continue his failed "secret" drone wars in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and perhaps other unknown countries. George W. Bush started such assassinations of terrorists from the air and Obama accelerated it. And a similar phenomenon may be occurring as in Afghanistan. Obama seems to have had some misgivings about such drone strikes. A while back, he pledged to be more restrained in their use. Now leaked government documents from a whistleblower may indicate why. Although the public has been dazzled with high tech drones firing "precision" missiles at "bad guys," the government's own documents show that 86 percent of those killed were not the targets. The problem is that strikes using such advanced technology are only as good as the intelligence about the targets. Although monitoring potential terrorists' overseas communications can be helpful, even U.S. officials, in these leaked documents, admitted that it's insufficient. Unfortunately, historically, the United States hasn't had very good human intelligence in the Middle East, which is often what is needed to solidly identify bad guys.

Some neo-conservatives and muscular liberals, however, would argue that such "collateral damage" is unfortunate but necessary in order to kill terrorists. However, as I note in my book, even the accidental killing of innocents instantly leads to more indigenous hostility and that breeds more guerrillas and terrorists; the foreign attacker rarely gets the benefit of the doubt. That reality is one of the reasons why most experts are skeptical that you can kill your way out of

an insurgency. As Bush-era Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld asked after 9/11, "Are we creating more terrorists than we're killing?" The answer to that question was politically incorrect then and even now.

The more military intervention that the United States conducts in Islamic countries, the more pushback it gets from guerrilla forces, such as the Taliban and ISIS, and terrorist groups, such as al Qaeda. After 9/11, few analysts dared to ask why, in the face of the war on terror by Bush and Obama (Obama doesn't like to call it that), the bad guys seemed to be proliferating and getting more heinous.

Although no lover of Donald Trump (on a TV show we were on together, he said that I had "zero credibility"), he has done the country a service by pierced the taboo of speaking about what happened before 9/11 and also the Bush line that George W. Bush "kept us safe." Now that Trump has opened the door (I have long been through the door), let's go farther.

Although Bush did little against al Qaeda before the 9/11 attacks, despite increasingly urgent warnings from U.S. intelligence and his own chief counterterrorism adviser about a possible major attack, that is not the real skeleton in the closet. Bill Clinton could have also done more about the group, but neither realized that al Qaeda could take terrorism to the next level of destruction. The real dirty little secret is that Osama bin Laden long complained, long before 9/11, about U.S. military intervention in Muslim lands. Muslims, because of Western colonialism and subsequent profligate U.S. meddling in Islamic nations, are sensitive to non-Muslim intervention in Muslim lands. Among many other examples, the phenomenon holds in Chechnya, Palestine, Somalia, and Afghanistan during the Soviet period. The U.S. government and former colonial powers have killed many more Muslims than all of the people who were killed when bin Laden turned the tables and intervened on U.S. soil on 9/11, which Americans rightfully didn't like very much.

The problem is that even after 9/11, America was not honest with itself about why the attacks occurred and so doubled down on interventions in Islamic countries, attacking or invading at least seven Muslim nations. The vast majority of these interventions have been unnecessary to American security and instead have been done in the post-World War II self-styled role of U.S. global cop. More important, they have made the problem of violent radical Islam worse.

The president is paid to lead and take any criticism for doing so. Instead of trying to shield himself from Republican criticism, he should withdraw from Iraq and Afghanistan, as originally promised, and end his illegal drone wars – all of which are counterproductive to enhancing U.S. security.