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Saving Face and Losing Lives

Rep. Ron Paul

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This past week there has been a lot of discussion and debate on the continuing war in Afghanistan. Lasting twice as long as World War II and with no end in sight, the war in Afghanistan has been one of the longest conflicts in which our country has ever been involved. The situation has only gotten worse with recent escalations.

The current debate is focused entirely on the question of troop levels. How many more troops should be sent over in order to pursue the war? The administration has already approved an additional 21,000 American service men and women to be deployed by November, which will increase our troop levels to 68,000. Will another 40,000 do the job? Or should we eventually build up the levels to 100,000 in addition to that? Why not 500,000 – just to be "safe"? And how will the public be brought back around to supporting this war again when 58 percent are now against it?

I get quite annoyed at this very narrow line of questioning. I have other questions. We overthrew the Taliban government in 2001 with less than 10,000 American troops. Why does it now seem that the more troops we send, the worse things get? If the Soviets bankrupted themselves in Afghanistan with troop levels of 100,000 and were eventually forced to leave in humiliating defeat, why are we determined to follow their example? Most importantly, what is there to be gained from all this? We've invested billions of dollars and thousands of precious lives – for what?

The truth is it is no coincidence that the more troops we send the worse things get. Things are getting worse precisely because we are sending more troops and escalating the violence. We are hoping that good leadership wins out in Afghanistan, but the pool of potential honest leaders from which to draw has been fleeing the violence, leaving a tremendous power

vacuum behind. War does not quell bad leaders. It creates them. And the more war we visit on this country, the more bad leaders we will inadvertently create.

Another thing that war does is create anger with its indiscriminate violence and injustice. How many innocent civilians have been harmed from clumsy bombings and mistakes that end up costing lives? People die from simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time in a war zone, but the killers never face consequences. Imagine the resentment and anger survivors must feel when a family member is killed and nothing is done about it. When there are no other jobs available because all the businesses have fled, what else is there to do but join ranks with the resistance, where there is a paycheck and also an opportunity for revenge? This is no justification for our enemies over there, but we have to accept that when we push people, they will push back.

The real question is: why are we there at all? What do our efforts now have to do with the original authorization of the use of force? We are no longer dealing with anything or anyone involved in the attacks of 9/11. At this point we are only strengthening the resolve and the ranks of our enemies. We have nothing left to win. We are only there to save face, and in the end we will not even be able to do that.