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Get out of Afghanistan now

By prolonging the war, Afghanistan will turn into Vietnam

By Keith Olbermann

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Mr. President, it now falls to you to be both former Republican Senator George Aiken and the man to whom he spoke, Lyndon Johnson. You must declare victory, and get out.

You should survey the dismal array of options in front of you — even the orders given out last night — sort them into the unacceptable, the unsuccessful, and the merely un-palatable, and then put your arm down on the table and wipe the entire assortment of them off your desk — off this nation's desk — and into the scrap heap of history.

Unless you are utterly convinced — willing to bet American lives on it — that the military understands the clock is running, and that the check is not blank, and that the Pentagon will go to sleep when you tell it to, even though the Pentagon is a bunch of perpetually 12-year old boys desperate to stay up as late as possible by any means necessary — get out now.

We are, at present, fighting, in no particular order, the Taliban; a series of sleazy political-slash-military adventurers, not the least of whom is this mountebank election-fixer Karzai, and what National Security Advisor Jones estimated in October was around eight dozen al-Qaida in the neighborhood.

But poll after poll, and anecdote after anecdote, of the reality of public opinion inside Afghanistan is that its residents believe we are fighting Afghanistan. That we, Sir, have become an occupying force. Yes: if we leave, Afghanistan certainly will have an occupying force, whether it's from Pakistan, or consisting of foreign fighters who will try to ally themselves with the Taliban.

Can you prevent that? Can you convince the Afghans that you can prevent that? Can you convince Americans that it is the only way to un-do Bush and Cheney policy catastrophes dating back to Cheney's days as Secretary of Defense in the '90s? If not, Mr. President, this way lies Vietnam. If you liked Iraq, you'll love Afghanistan with 35,000 more troops, complete with the new wrinkle, straight from the minder-binder lingo of Joseph Heller's

"Catch-22."

President Obama will be presenting an exit strategy for Afghanistan. The exit strategy that begins by entering still further. Lose to win, sink to swim, escalate to disengage. And even this disconnect of fundamental logic is predicated on the assumption that once the extra troops go in, when the President says "okay, time for adult swim, Generals, time to get out of the pool and bring the troops with you," that the Pentagon is just going to say "Yeppers."

The Pentagon, often to our eternal relief, but just as often to our eternal regret is in the War business. You were right, Mr. President, to slow the process down, once a series of exit strategies was offered to you by men whose power and in some case livelihoods are predicated on making sure all exit strategies, everywhere, forever, don't really result in any service-man or woman actually exiting.

These men are still in the belly of what President Eisenhower so rightly, so prophetically, christened the military-industrial complex. Now and later as the civilian gray eminences with "retired" next to their names, formally lobbying the House and Senate and informally lobbying the nation through television and the printed word, to "engage" here, or "serve" there, or "invest" everywhere, they are, in many cases, just glorified hardware salesmen.

It was political and operational brilliance, Sir, to retain Mr. Bush's last Secretary of Defense Mr. Gates. It was transitional and bipartisan insight, Sir, to maintain General Stanley McChrystal as a key leader in the field.

And it was a subtle but powerful reminder to the authoritarian minded War-hawks like John McCain, and the blithering idiots like former Governor Palin, of the Civilian authority of the Constitution it was a picture drawn in crayon for ease of digestion by the Right, to tell our employees at the Pentagon, to take their loaded options and go away and come back with some real ones.

You reminded them, Mr. President, that Mr. Gates works for the people of the United States of America, not the other way around. You reminded them, Mr. President, that General McChrystal is our employee, not our dictator. You've reminded them Mr. President. Now, tonight, remind yourself. Stanley McChrystal.

General McChrystal has doubtless served his country bravely and honorably and at great risk, but to date his lasting legacy will be as the great facilitator of the obscenity that was transmuting the greatest symbol of this nation's true patriotism, of its actual willingness to sacrifice, into a distorted circus fun-house mirror version of such selflessness.

Friendly fire killed Pat Tillman. Mr. McChrystal killed the truth about Pat Tillman. And that willingness to stand truth on its head on behalf of "selling" a war or the generic idea of America being at war to turn a dead hero into a meaningless recruiting poster, should ring essentially relevant right now.

From the very center of a part of our nation that could lie to the public, could lie to his mother, about what really happened to Pat Tillman, from the very man who was at the operational center of that plan, comes the entire series of plans to help us supposedly find the way out of Afghanistan? We are supposed to believe General McChrystal isn't lying about Afghanistan?

Didn't he blow his credibility by lying, so obviously and so painfully, about Pat Tillman? Why are we believing the McChrystals? Their reasons might sound better than the ones they

helped George Bush and Dick Cheney fabricate for Iraq, but surely they are just as transparently oblivious of the forest.

Half of them insist we must stay in Afghanistan out of fear of not repeating Iraq, while the other half, believing Bush failed in Iraq by having too few troops, insist we must stay in Afghanistan out of fear of repeating Iraq. And they are suddenly sounding frighteningly similar to what the Soviet Generals were telling the Soviet Politicos in the 1980s about Afghanistan.

Sure it's not going well, sure we need to get out, we all see that. But first let's make sure it's stabilized and then we get out. The Afghans will be impressed by our commitment and will then take over the cost of policing themselves, even though the cost would be several times their gross national product. Just send in those extra troops, just for awhile. Just 350,000.

I'm sorry, did I say 350,000? I meant 35,000. Must be a coffee stain on the paper. Mr. President, last fall, you were elected. Not General McChrystal, not Secretary Gates, not another Bushian Drone of a politician. You. On the Change Ticket. On the pitch that all politicians are not created equal.

And upon arrival you were greeted by a Three Mile Island of an economy, so bad that in the most paranoid recesses of the mind one could wonder if the Republicans didn't plan it that way, to leave you in the position of having to prove the ultimate negative, that you staved off worldwide financial collapse, that if you had not done what you so swiftly did, that this "economic cloudy day" would have otherwise been the "biblical flood of finance."

So, much of the change for which you were elected, Sir, has thus far been understandably, if begrudgingly, tabled, delayed, made more open-ended. But patience ebbs, Mr. President. And while the first one thousand key decisions of your presidency were already made about the economy, the first public, easy-to-discern, mouse-or-elephant kind of decision comes tomorrow night at West Point at eight o'clock.

You know this, Mr. President: we cannot afford this war. Nothing makes less sense to our economy than the cost of supply for 35,000 new troops. Nothing will do more to slow economic recovery. You might as well shoot the revived auto industry or embrace John Boehner Health Care Reform and Spray-Tan Reimbursement.

You know this, Mr. President: we cannot afford this war. Nothing makes less sense to our status in the world than for us to re-up as occupiers of Afghanistan and for you to look like you were unable to extricate yourself from a Military Chinese Finger Puzzle left for you by Bush and Cheney and the rest of Halliburton's hench-men.

And most of all, and those of us who have watched these first nine months trust both your judgment and the fact you know this, Mr. President: unless you are exactly right, we cannot afford this war. For if all else is even, and everything from the opinion of the generals to the opinion of the public is even, we cannot afford to send these troops back into that quagmire for second tours, or thirds, or fourths, or fifths.

We cannot afford this ethically, Sir. The country has, for eight shameful years, forgotten its moral compass and its world purpose. And here is your chance to reassert that there is, in fact, American Exceptionalism. We are better. We know when to stop making our troops suffer, in order to make our generals happy.

You, Sir, called for change, for the better way, for the safety of our citizens including the citizens being wasted in war-for-the-sake-of-war, for a reasserting of our moral force. And we listened. And now you must listen. You must listen to yourself.