

Obama the Dunce and the Afghan 'Train Wreck'

by Conn Hallinan via stele - The Edge *Wednesday, Apr 18 2012, 11:08pm*
international / imperialism / other press

Everyone is pulling out except the Incompetent, Delusional, USA

AGAIN, the MYTH of 'superpower' has been shattered but this time by a rag tag group of dedicated fighters with minimal arms and technology. Regardless of all the zillions of dollars and high tech weaponry of the invaders, Afghanistan is an utter FAILURE, as was Vietnam! PROVING that a population that opposes and RESISTS invaders ALWAYS prevails. Are you reading this you gutless Iraqi Arabs and tragic, once fighting, Serbs -- take back YOUR nations?

The recent decision by the Taliban and one of its allies to withdraw from peace talks with Washington underlines the train wreck the U.S. is headed for in Afghanistan. ***Indeed, for an administration touted as sophisticated and intelligent, virtually every decision the White House has made vis-à-vis Afghanistan has been a disaster.***

On Mar. 15 the Taliban ended preliminary talks with Washington, because, according to a spokesman for the organization, the Americans were being "shaky, erratic and vague." The smaller Hizb-i-Islami group followed two weeks later.

That both groups are refusing to talk now should hardly come as a surprise. In spite of the Obama administration's talk about wanting a "political settlement" to the war, the White House's strategy makes that goal little more than a mirage.

The current U.S. negotiating position is that the Taliban must cut all ties with the terrorist group al-Qaeda, recognize the Afghan constitution, lay down their arms, and accede to a substantial U.S. military presence until at least 2024. The U.S. has 100,000 troops in Afghanistan, its allies another 40,000. The current plan calls for a withdrawal of most of those troops by the end of 2014.

What is hard to figure out is why the White House thinks any of its demands-with the exception of the al-Qaeda proviso-have even a remote possibility of being achieved? Or exactly who the Americans think they are going to be "negotiating" with Mullah Omar of the Taliban, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar of Hezb-i-Islami, or Sirajuddin Haqqani of the Haqqani Group?

The Obama administration's initial mistake was to surge some 33,000 troops into Afghanistan with the aim of beating up on the resistance and forcing it to negotiate from a position of weakness. That plan was always an illusion, particularly given the ability of the insurgents to fall back into Pakistan to regroup, rearm, and recruit. In any case, the idea that 140,000 foreign troops-the 330,000 member Afghan National Army (ANA) is incapable of even defending itself-could defeat a force of some 25,000 guerrilla fighters in a country as vast or geographically formidable as Afghanistan is laughable.

As a series of recent attacks demonstrate, the surge failed to secure Kandahar and Helmand Province, two of its major targets. While NATO claims that insurgent attacks have fallen as a result of the U.S. offensive, independent data collected by the United Nations shows the opposite.

In short, after a decade of war and the expenditure of over \$450 billion, Afghanistan is a less secure today than it was after the 2001 invasion. All that the surge accomplished was to more deeply entrench the Taliban and elevate the casualty rate on all sides.

The second U.S. error was to estrange Pakistan by wooing India in order to rope New Delhi into Washington's campaign to challenge China in Asia. First, Obama ditched his campaign pledge to address the volatile issue of Kashmir, the flashpoint for three wars between Indian and Pakistan. Second, the White House ignored India's violation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and allowed it to buy uranium on the world market-the so-called 1-2-3 Agreement-while refusing that same waiver to Pakistan. Add the American drone war and last November's deadly attack on Pakistani border troops, and most Pakistanis are thoroughly alienated from the U.S. And yet a political solution to the Afghan war without Islamabad is simply impossible.

The U.S. demand to keep Special Forces troops in Afghanistan in order to continue its war on "terrorism" is not only a non-starter for the insurgents-the Taliban are, after all, the target of thousands of deadly "night raids" carried out by these same Special Forces-it is opposed by every country in the region save India. How the White House thinks it can bring the Taliban and its allies to the table while still trying to kill and capture them, or maintain a military presence in the face of almost total regional opposition, is hard to figure.

The more than 2,000 (per year) night raids have eliminated many of the senior and mid-level Taliban leaders and atomized the organization. When it comes time to negotiate, NATO may find it has literally hundreds of leaders with whom it will have to cut a deal, not all of whom are on the same page.

That the insurgency would lay down its arms has a quality of magical thinking to it. Not only is the insurgency undefeated, but according to a leaked NATO report, the Taliban think they are winning. The report-based on 27,000 interrogations-also found that "Afghan civilians frequently prefer Taliban governance over GIROA [Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan], usually as a result of government corruption, ethnic bias and lack of connection with local religious and tribal leaders."

There is no popular support for the war, either in Afghanistan, the U.S., or among its allies [that are pulling out in droves]. The most recent ABC Poll found that 69 percent of Americans want the war to end, and according to a poll in the Financial Times, 54 percent of the British want to withdraw immediately.

As for supporting the Afghan constitution, why would an undefeated insurgency that sees its enemies in disarray and looking at a 2014 U.S.-NATO withdrawal date, agree to a document they had no part in drafting?

None of this had to happen. Back in late 2007, Saudi Arabia carried a peace offer from the Taliban in which they agreed to cut ties to al-Qaeda-a pledge they reiterated in 2008-and accept a time table for foreign troop withdrawals. In return, a national unity government would replace the Karzai regime until elections could be held, and the constitution would be re-written.

Both the Bush and Obama administrations ignored the offer, apparently because they thought they could bring the Taliban to heel. It was thinking that verged on the hallucinatory.

The trump card holders these days are holed up in the high peaks or hiding in plain sight. Opium is booming in Helmand Province because the Taliban are protecting farmers from drug eradication

teams, even blowing up tractors that are used to plow the crop under.

As the 2014 withdrawal date looms, the White House's options are rapidly narrowing. If it holds to its plans to quarter troops in Afghanistan, the insurgency will fight on, and Washington's only regional ally will be India, a country that can deliver virtually nothing toward a peace agreement. If it insists the insurgency recognize the Karzai regime and the constitution, it will be defending a deeply corrupt and unpopular government and a document that excluded the participation of country's largest ethnic group, the Pashtun. Pushtuns make up the core of the Taliban.

How the U.S. managed to get itself into this mess needs to be closely examined. The State Department under Hillary Clinton has become little more than an arm of the Pentagon, and the White House has shown an unsettling penchant for resorting to violence. In the meantime Afghanistan is headed for a terrible smashup.

The World Bank estimates that 97 percent of Afghanistan's economy is military related. The war is drawing to a finish, and there is no evidence that the U.S. or NATO has any intention or ability to keep the aid spigots wide open. Europe is in the middle of an economic meltdown and the U.S. economy is struggling.

NATO provides about \$11 billion a year to support the Afghan army, a figure that will probably drop to about \$4 to \$5 billion after 2014. There is already talk of reducing the 335,000-man Afghan army to a more manageable and less expensive force of 230,000.

There is a window of opportunity, but only if the Obama administration takes advantage of it. A strategy that might work-when it comes to Afghanistan there are no guarantees-would include:

- A ceasefire and stand down of all offensive operations, including the highly unpopular "night raids."
- Shelving any long-term plans to keep combat troops or Special Forces in the country, and shutting down the drone war in Pakistan.
- Urging the formation of a national unity government and calling for a constitutional convention.
- Sponsoring a regional conference aimed at keeping Afghanistan neutral and non-aligned.
- Insuring aid continues to flow into Afghanistan, particularly aimed at upgrading infrastructure, improving agriculture, and expanding education.

At home, the Congress should convene hearings aimed at examining how the U.S. got into Afghanistan, who made the key decisions concerning the war and regional strategy, and how the country can avoid such disasters in the future.

It may be too late and, in the end, NATO may tuck its tail between its legs and slink out of Afghanistan. But the deep divisions the war has created will continue, and civil war is a real possibility. The goal should be to prevent that, not to pursue an illusory dream of controlling the crossroads to Asia, a chimera that has drawn would be conquerors to that poor, ravaged land for a millennium.

Copyright applies.

<http://dispatchesfromtheedgeblog.wordpress.com/2012/04/16/the-u-s-the-afghan-train-wreck/>

Cleaves Alternative News. <http://cleaves.lingama.net/news/story-3162.html>