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December a Chance to Get Afghanistan Policy Right. By Ted Ankrum

A lot is riding on President Obama's Afghanistan policy review in December. The current counter-insurgency campaign is not working. Ones that did work in the past include the Boer War, the Philippines insurgency in the early 20th Century, Malaya in the 50's, and Iraq in the last three years. The one that didn't work that I know best was my war, Vietnam. The difference is that a viable host government needs to exist, or be created. I think we need to ask the question, what is "winning" in Afghanistan? The surge advocated by General Petraeus was intended to give Afghanistan a chance to establish a viable host government. It hasn't worked, yet; and December is a good time to decide if it will in any time frame the American public is willing to contemplate.

What if it has no prospect of working in the next year? I believe that the only vital US National Interest in Afghanistan is preventing Al Qaeda from using it as a base to launch attacks against the US homeland. That's what I think "winning the war in Afghanistan" means. We don't need to have a dependent government there to accomplish that. I suggest that we foster a coalition government, including the Taliban (who will probably take over everywhere except in the North). Our Army leaders tell us that Al Qaeda is in Pakistan, and crosses over to Afghanistan to attack American troops. The Taliban are an Afghan faction engaged in a civil war to determine who rules Afghanistan. We don't seem to be having much success in teaching the Afghan Army to fight--in a country where every boy has been born a fighter since before the days of Alexander the Great. Why not? Because we are asking them to fight for American interests, not Afghan. As we leave, we could tell the Taliban that if they again host terrorist groups attacking America; we'll be back at an altitude of 30,000 ft, and not too worried about civilian casualties.

Why might the Taliban agree to this? First, our Counter-terrorism (as contrasted to our nation-building) efforts are working great in Afghanistan. These are the Special Forces like the Army's Delta Force, Navy Seals, and Predator aircraft that are doing targeted attacks against mid-level Taliban leaders. It's really working quite well, with the senior Taliban leadership hiding in Pakistan to avoid death or capture. Second, it's now known that

Afghanistan harbors great mineral wealth that's not going to be developed while the country is at war. In return for foreign troops leaving, I think that the Afghans might be quite happy tending to their own knitting and making Al Qaeda find other sanctuaries.

The alternative: another Vietnam where the Generals periodically ask for another increment of troops, promising the light at the end of the tunnel, while we continue to prop up a corrupt puppet government with no popular support. Afghanistan is a hole in the mountains where we keep pouring in American treasure and our precious troops lives. Let's nation-build in the good ole USA.

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