



Let's refocus on al-Qaida

[The Orange County Register](#)

2010-11-23 09:48:20

THE ORANGE COUNTY
REGISTER

President Barack Obama has been attending part of a NATO summit in Lisbon, Portugal, focusing on a new mission statement for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which outlived long ago whatever usefulness it may once have had, and on what the hapless alliance's future role in Afghanistan should be. One doesn't expect those who directly benefit from the sense of importance NATO provides to call for that organization's dissolution, nor do we expect the kind of fundamental questioning about the mission in Afghanistan that recent

events would seem to justify.

However, this meeting could mark the beginning of a process that results in a more realistic policy focused on degrading the capabilities of al-Qaida rather than nation-building in a country that has never wanted to be the kind of centralized nation Western leaders may foolishly believe they know how to build.

As Christopher Preble, director of foreign policy studies at the libertarian Cato Institute, told us, European public opinion is well ahead of opinion in the U.S. when it comes to questioning the duration and cost of the commitment in Afghanistan and demanding that their governments bring their troops back home.

Foreign policy is a voter afterthought

Polls do show that more Americans consider the war in Afghanistan not to be worth the money and lives than consider the war worth pursuing, but understandably enough Americans are more focused on the economy and unemployment than on Afghanistan. Foreign policy played almost no role in the midterm elections. As the costs become more painful and the muddled nature of U.S. objectives more obvious, however, support for winding down the war is likely to increase.

As we have stressed repeatedly, the only sensible justification for U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 was to degrade the capacity of al-Qaida, which attacked us on 9/11, to undertake future attacks. That objective was achieved in a matter of months (though al-Qaida has rebuilt, in Pakistan rather than Afghanistan).

The occupation of Afghanistan, however, has been subject to "mission creep," evolving into a nation-building effort rather than a counter-terrorism mission focused on al-Qaida. It is time to refocus on al-Qaida, recognize that the Afghani Taliban is an indigenous movement rather than an international threat, and reduce the U.S. military footprint in Afghanistan, eventually, to zero.

© Copyright 2010 Freedom Communications. All Rights Reserved.

[Privacy Policy](#) | [User Agreement](#) | [Site Map](#)