

## Roundup: Media's Take

# Ted Galen Carpenter: Hamid Karzai and America's Vietnam Mistake

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Amid growing debate about whether the United States should stay in Afghanistan, one issue of agreement is that Afghanistan's president, Hamid Karzai, is both the central figure in the war and its weakest link.

Recent embarrassing controversies between Karzai and Washington — including a move this month by the Afghan leader to hinder U.S.-backed anti-corruption investigations in Kabul — reveal a troubling pattern in U.S. foreign policy. U.S. leaders have a tendency to hail flawed foreign leaders as the saviors of their countries, only to publicly disparage them later for not meeting America's lofty expectations.

In dealing with the erratic and unreliable Karzai, Washington is replicating the pattern of exaltation and subsequent blame-shifting it followed five decades ago with South Vietnamese leader Ngo Dinh Diem. That episode produced famously disastrous results.

In October 1954, President Eisenhower wrote a letter to Diem stressing the goal of "developing and maintaining a strong, viable state, capable of resisting attempted subversion or aggression." To leaders in Washington, backing South Vietnam was deemed critical to preventing the expansion of communism. And in Diem, they thought they had the man to do the job.

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