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Saving Face in Afghanistan?.



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Over at the [Cato Institute](#), [Justin Logan](#) offered some unique [insights](#) into Defense Secretary Robert Gates' latest rationale for escalation in Afghanistan. Gates,

representative of those who favor a second

troop surge, nation building, and long-term deployment, made the case for further escalation by appealing to one of the most common emotional arguments. If we withdraw, Al-Qaeda declares victory and initiates a massive propaganda campaign.

Hawkish supporters of open-ended commitment often use a similar line of reasoning. We can't withdraw or alter strategy because America will appear as the "loser" just like in Vietnam, or we will have "fought in vain", or will have "cut and run" like cowards, etc, etc. Al-Qaeda will reap an enormous propaganda boost, draw a barrage of fresh recruits, and redevelop into a worldwide terrorist powerhouse.

In other words, to save face at any cost, America must commit itself to a protracted strategy without any consideration of current debt levels, a crippled Dollar, or the PTSD epidemic and record suicide rates in the military. Supporters counter that the price paid will prove a worthwhile investment to prevent the future cost of another 9/11 or worse. But, this is mere speculation that no one is ever able to quantify.

Logan draws from historical precedent in the Israel/Hamas conflict to dispel this line of reasoning as well. After almost 40 years of

occupation, Israeli war hero and Prime Minister, the late Ariel Sharon, unilaterally withdrew from the Gaza Strip. Many of Israel's hawks viewed the withdrawal as a blatant sign of weakness. Hamas filled the void, declared victory, ramped up the propaganda, and promised the end of Israel's regime.

Four years later, Israel is still the unequivocal powerhouse in the Middle East. It is still highly successful in deterring major terrorist attacks, protecting its citizens, and flexing its muscle when necessary. After four years, Israel still dictates the pace of Middle East geopolitics despite its withdrawal from Gaza.

Logan concludes by stating that no matter when we decide to withdraw from Afghanistan, Al-Qaeda and the Islamic extremists will declare victory. Of course, this is speculation too, but it is certainly plausible. Therefore, we should focus on defining our interests, establishing specific goals, and achieving our precisely delineated objectives regardless of what PR tack Al-Qaeda may or may not pursue.

Let me be clear. As I've written in previous blogs, I do not personally endorse a full-scale withdrawal. I am in favor of a much more limited and focused mission like that advocated by conservative columnist, George Will, and conservative Ret. Lieutenant Colonel, Ralph Peters. Though they may be imperfect, I believe their proposals possess the highest probability of success for the cheapest price, lowest casualty counts, and minimal exacerbation of the psychological problems facing our men and women in the military.

That being said, I concur with Justin Logan's assessment. Fighting a long-term, extremely costly, and open-ended war in a third world country is not some public relations game. Our men and women are not pawns on a chess board. These are real men and women, with hearts, souls, and families. To continue pursuing a strategy that places them in the worst possible situation in order to "save face" does these brave men, women, and families a terrible disservice.

And for those who advocate a ramping up of operations, please consider America's current financial predicament as well. Just like original estimates in Iraq and Afghanistan, yet another surge in Afghanistan will cost a lot more money than expected for years to come. This added burden will place further strain on a \$1.6 trillion budget deficit, \$11.5 trillion debt, and a Dollar that has lost more than 33% of its value since 2002. Wars add more debt. Wars devalue a nation's currency. Can we really afford such an outcome at this point in time?

Some may protest, "But Obama and Congress should just cut spending in other areas of the budget to make up for the shortfall." But, as we all know, the current Administration and Congress are

committed to more spending in an attempt to stimulate a battered economy. In addition, think back to the previous Republican administration and its Republican-led Congress. The party of "fiscal conservatism" didn't cut back on other areas of the budget while boosting spending in Iraq and Afghanistan. No, it kept on spending, adding trillions to the national debt and devaluing the Dollar.

In conclusion, fighting to prevent a propaganda victory for Al-Qaeda should not be a valid justification for adopting a potentially unwise strategy. It is one based on pure emotion , which is the perfect recipe for a war that will never end.