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Posted by bettenoir at 7:56 am

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Springtime For Karzai

Springtime for Karzai



Here in the Northeastern United States Spring has arrived, bringing with it the primal derangements and high spirits historically associated with the season – unmuffled motorcycles, chest-beating, spontaneous Tarzan cries and stuff like that there. Evidently, roughly the same phenom is occurring in far-off Afghanistan, as well; witness the recent admission, by Gen. McChrystal, to the murder of “way too many” innocent civilians and President Karzai’s recent rant about “meddling foreigners” (I’m expecting another Karzai-Ahmadinejad pow-wow any moment now).

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Karzai was most likely reacting to President Obama's unexpected drop-in last week. Obama was "special-opped" into Bagram, in the dead of night, ostensibly to rally the troops for more murder and mayhem in Kandahar but also, according to reports, to deliver a good old American ass-chewing to "our man in Kabul." Evidently, Obama is underwhelmed by Karzai's efforts to clean up his corner of the world in preparation for its long awaited democracy transplant. As all good Americans know, Democracy cannot flourish in a corrupt environment – right?

Rationally, that would put Karzai on the line for one of the most epic turnarounds in human history, to include the public execution of many of his relatives and members of parliament. Karzai is 50, so chances are slim he'll accomplish that mission in his lifetime; nevertheless, Obama would like to see him making more of an effort. For his part, I expect that Karzai's primary focus is on "stayin' alive." Since the beginning of his US sponsorship, Karzai has been the subject of five newsworthy assassination attempts and probably numerous less spectacular attempts. Those attempts were not your lone sniper events, either; most involved rocket attacks, grenades and various other measures designed to take out a city block.

Karzai has always been reluctant to fly solo in his current position. When Obama stated his desire to get out of Afghanistan by 2011, Karzai countered that Obama's timeline was off by about 15 years. Karzai knows better than anyone that if Coalition forces withdraw from Afghanistan, the Taliban will re-establish their government tout de suite. A year later (or closer to withdrawal, if you believe in that sort of thing), with that sword hanging over his head, Karzai has decided he better start talkin' some trash against the US or he's going to wind up the subject of some serious insurgent fatwa. To that end, Karzai took to the airwaves, this week, to express his concern over foreign meddling – a popular topic among Middle East purists, these days.

Karzai accused the West and the United Nations of wanting a "puppet government" and of seeking to make him "psychologically smaller and smaller."

"They want me to be an illegitimate president," he announced. "And they want the parliament to be illegitimate."

He also blamed others for election fraud that, by all accounts, was orchestrated by his regime: "No doubt there was massive fraud. That was not done by the Afghans. The foreigners did that."

In diplomatic circles this is known as 'playing both sides against the middle'. Whereas the US should know better, by now, about the various pitfalls of installing and propping up such worthless puppets, Karzai, himself, might do well to read up on what happens when the puppet-masters lose patience. Or, better yet, what the local population is capable of doing to rid themselves of such buffoons.

Of course, Robert Gibbs sallied forth to express the administration's "dismay" over Karzai's accusations, calling Karzai's words "genuinely troubling." In addition, Karl Eikenberry, the U.S. ambassador in Kabul, quickly met with Karzai "to clarify what he meant by these remarks." Could it be that the Obama Administration was caught off guard, here; and Obama, like Kennedy before him, is out of sync with national security state powers-that-be who are busily conducting their own "foreign policy"?

Right now, Karzai, (if he's smart) will figure out a way to make his personal US network ties indispensable to the Taliban which will surely take back the government in Kabul at their earliest convenience. Upon their return, however, they will now receive US backing in return for their promise to shun al Qaeda — which explains the burgeoning local interest in capturing ex-pat Taliban members to ensure a place at the settlement table – ala Pakistan's detention of Baradar and their refusal to extradite him to Afghanistan.

Stateside



Extending the Empire with machine-gun and rifles.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, Americans are swallowing their daily dose of foreign policy propaganda so that they don't lose patience, too soon, with our latest experiment in regime change. Most Americans have already bought into the notion that Afghan governmental stability = enhanced US National Security = victory over al Qaeda. As Malou Innocent, a foreign policy analyst at the [Cato Institute](#), so succinctly put it:

"The uncomfortable truth is that without indefinite foreign protection, the Government of Afghanistan would probably fall to the Afghan Taliban. But Americans should not equate the fall of that regime with "losing" to al Qaeda. Violent, Islamist extremist groups indigenous to this region threaten the Afghan government, not the American government. Because these radical groups lack the ambition — let alone the capacity — to threaten the sovereignty or physical security of the United States, they do not merit the strategic obsession that they currently receive.

Washington's continued fixation on groups that threaten Afghanistan, rather than America, presents a bigger threat to genuine American interests than those groups themselves can pose, especially since there is little assurance that 100,000 foreign troops can capture and kill more insurgents than their presence helps to recruit."

"Rather than propping up a failed state, U.S. leaders should focus on countering the al Qaeda threat still clinging to life in this region. Technological advances over the past decade allow us to monitor places without having 100,000 boots on the ground. Furthermore, the blueprint for an effective counterterrorism approach is the initial U.S.-led invasion in 2001, when small Special Forces teams, working in conjunction with local militias, assembled quickly and struck effectively and cheaply at "real" enemies."

"In short, Americans should reject the misguided belief that terrorists can only flourish in failed states like Afghanistan. After all, India, a major U.S. ally far more stable than Afghanistan, is fighting several internal insurgencies. Likewise, the very al Qaeda terrorists responsible for 9/11 not only found sanctuary in poverty-stricken Afghanistan, but also in politically free and economically prosperous countries like Germany, Spain, and the United States."

America has a long and tawdry history of justifying its foreign adventures with a full array of fairly irrational strategic, economic, and ideological considerations. Strategically, we must not allow geographically important regions from falling under the sway of regimes that are either anti-US, or simply entirely self-interested. Otherwise, a shift in the balance of global military power could jeopardize American security. Economically, the US likes to maintain access to vital supplies of raw materials and keep markets open for American products and investments – the Free Market demands it. Finally, the United States must thwart ~~communist~~ terrorist expansion in the ~~Third-World~~ Middle East to ensure that America and its democratic allies do not become islands in a global sea of hostile, ~~totalitarian~~ Islamist dictatorships.

These arguments can be (and have been) easily dressed up in American jingoism to rubber stamp some very dubious US foreign policy undertakings. Who hasn't heard a particular regime described as a "keystone" or "force for stability" or "key to vital US strategic interests" in the region: think Shah of Iran in the Persian Gulf, Mobutu Sese Seko in Central Africa, and any number of South American despots. Reading the history, one would have to surmise that, actually, the entire globe (and parts of the Solar System) are of vital US strategic interest.

In actual fact, US "strategic interests" usually zero in on good sites for bases or forward staging areas for the American military. For example, the Reagan

administration defended support of the Marcos dictatorship to protect its installations at Clark Field and Subic Bay, complicating the defense of other Far Eastern allies.

Do we *really* have strategic interests, vital or otherwise, in squalid little spots thousands of miles from the US? Does a firmly ensconced Karzai government in Kabul *really* somehow enhance our own security? How is it that we've come to believe that a handful of small, militarily insignificant nations – like Iraq and Afghanistan — governed by unpopular and unstable regimes, somehow keep Americans safe against the threat of terrorism. Actually, it is more rational to believe that such foreign adventures seriously compromise our national security by draining U.S. financial resources, stretching defense forces dangerously thin and psychologically boosting recruitment to the very terrorist groups that we are fighting. Whatever – our approach might stink as foreign policy but it keeps the military-industrial business booming.

As Noam Chomsky pointed out in his article "[Dictators R Us](#)," Thomas Jefferson was not fooled by Napoleon's antics:

“We believe no more in Bonaparte's fighting merely for the liberties of the seas than in Great Britain's fighting for the liberties of mankind. The object is the same, to draw to themselves the power, the wealth and the resources of other nations.”

Wonder what Jefferson would make of our current foreign policy . . . ?

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