« The Inconvenient Truth | Main | War Drums »

September 15, 2009

Realists Warn Obama On Af/Pak Mission Creep, Over-Reach

By Steve Hynd

<u>Via Steve Clemons</u>, who is a signatory along with folk like Robert Jervis, Christopher Preble, Andrew Bacevich, Michael Cohen, Bernard Finel, Ted Galen Carpenter and Col Douglas Macgregor who have been warning of a disasterous course towards escalation for some time now, here is a letter sent today by many realist foreign policy experts and scholars to President Obama. I'd like to be on record as agreeing with every word.

The Honorable Barack Obama President of the United States The White House Washington, DC

Dear Mr. President:

During your campaign for the Presidency, Americans around the country appreciated your skepticism of the rationales for the Iraq war. In 2002, you had warned that such an endeavor would yield "a U.S. occupation of undetermined length, at undetermined cost, and with unintended consequences." You pointed out the dangers of fighting such a war "without a clear rationale and without strong international support." As scholars of international relations and U.S. foreign policy, many of us issued similar warnings before the war, unfortunately to little avail.

Today, we are concerned that the war in Afghanistan is growing increasingly detached from considerations of length, cost, and consequences. Its rationale is becoming murkier and both domestic and international support for it is waning. Respectfully, we urge you to focus U.S. strategy more clearly on al Qaeda instead of expanding the mission into an ambitious experiment in state building.

First, our objectives in that country have grown overly ambitious. The current strategy centers on assembling a viable, compliant, modern state in Afghanistan--something that has never before existed. The history of U.S. state-building endeavors is not encouraging, and Afghanistan poses particular challenges. Engaging in competitive governance with the Taliban is a counterproductive strategy, pushing the Taliban and al Qaeda together instead of driving them apart. If we cannot leave Afghanistan until we have created an effective central government, we are likely to be there for decades, with no guarantee of success.

Second, the rationale of expanding the mission in order to prevent "safe havens" for al Qaeda from emerging is appealing but flawed. Afghanistan, even excluding the non-Pashto areas, is a large, geographically imposing country where it is probably impossible to ensure that no safe havens could exist. Searching for certainty that there are not and will not be safe havens in Afghanistan is quixotic and likely to be extremely costly. Even if some massive effort in that country were somehow able to prevent a safe haven there, dozens of other countries could easily serve the same purpose. Even well-governed modern democracies like Germany have inadvertently provided staging grounds for terrorists. A better strategy would focus on negotiations with moderate Taliban elements, regional diplomacy, and disrupting any large-scale al Qaeda operations that may emerge. Those are achievable goals.

Third, an expanded mission fails a simple cost/benefit test. In order to markedly improve our chances of victory--which Ambassador Richard Holbrooke can only promise "we'll know it when we see it"--we would need to make a decades-long commitment to creating a state in Afghanistan, and even in that case, success would be far from certain. As with all foreign policies, this enormous effort must be weighed against the opportunity costs. Money, troops, and other resources would be poured into Afghanistan at the



hoveott Ap

unassociatedpress.net
THE NON-ESSENTIAL GLOBAL NETWORK
"Whoever can speak, speaking ሐናም የፍትሬ የመስታት መስም is serious disagreement among scholars and policy
nation, betରମାଣର ଜନ୍ମୋନକ୍ରେମ୍ବ forward in Afghanistan. Many of those urging you to branch protection the same people who promised
inalienab அழைகுப்பிதாகல் and the second solution in Iraq and that that war would solve our making, நிதித்துகள் the Middle East, neither of which proved to be the case. We urge
authority. XPHratersinistration to refocus on al Qaeda and avoid an open-ended state-
rank he hayildinarniseinDeg Alphanistan.
or garni tures. The requisite টোমিএ টিংটেনিপিঠিওিউধি দিগীeased by the <u>Coalition for a Realistic Foreign Policy</u> , which describes
tesereaswaighoupers sell diates, policy makers and concerned citizens united by our opposition to
វ េតវង្សត្<i>ខ</i>ាន់an<u>athing</u>arence is requisite. The nation is
Posted at 03:15:PM in AF/PAK Afghanistan, Foreign Policy & Affairs, Obama Administration, 90%FISDIT Parkstan, The Urge to Surge, Things That Are Bad for America, War on Terror tongue in the nation:
Democracy is virtually there." -Add to del.icio.us • Email this • Technorati Links • Twit This!
The second secon
BLOG ADS
TrackBack URL for this entry:
http://www.turopoid.com/services/trackback/6a00d8345/80b469e20120a571b961970b
ADVERTISE LIBERALLY s to weblogs that reference Realists Warn Obama On At/Pak Mission
Reach our audience Comments
BLOGADS NETWORK r TypePad account, please Sign In Over 100 million
impressions a month
ent.)
EnvirusCerci FARMIOF LICO About Exchange ARMINIOF LICO They want to ND NOWINOT []
Eva with math. How the states interior is a communication of the states carbon is a communication of the states
Alternoon Open Turant Eox News Accuse BLACK NOW Grane OF Party to the Parce
Care
Advertise here to reach a growing audience
Newshoggers' Classified Ads -
Read supplement reviews on Nutrisyleading and the second s
Get great <u>insurance</u> quotes for your home, auto, health and <u>term life</u> needs.
Sexy Lingerie & Underwear
SHOP WIKIO
News Shopping Mobile Phone MP3 Player
<u>DVD Player</u>

Media Mexico Moron Right Wing Bloggers Obama Administration Oversight Pakistan Personal **Pictures** Policy Politics Religion Religious Right Republicans Rule of Law <u>Russia</u> Sadrists Sarah Palin Scandals Schradenfreude Science <u>Shills</u> Snark speculation Stuff we felt like writing about <u>Taxes</u> Technology Television Terrorism The Democrats' Urge to Cave The Urge to Surge Things That Are Bad for America <u>Torture</u> Travel urban affairs War Hype War on (some) Drug Stat Counter BLOGROLL Gun Toting Liberal Think Progress Outside The Beltway The Gilttering Eve The Moderate Voice The Moderate Voice The Moderate Voice The Jeff Coaster Comments From Leff Field ProseBeforeHos Day By Day - conservative Cartoon (Chris Muir) Sideshow Vet Voice The Seminal ThePoliticalCat WWIV4 PSOTD Panglossian Notes Anonymous Liberal Kevin Drum Jon Swift (safky conservative) ZenPundit Cursor.org If L Ran The Zoo Wonk Room Shadow of the Hegemon Coffee House Studio No More Mister Nice Blog The Republic Of T. Firedogalae Frog Bus Brasse Blog Raw Story Brilliant A Breakfast Scholas And Rogues Hesdlenose Make Them Accountable Flagrancy To Reason

Crazies Current Affairs Democrats Divisive Issue du Jou douchebaggery <u>Econ</u> Energy Foreign Policy & Affairs Gay Rights Geopolitics Good People Health Care High Wingnuttery Hillary Clinton Instahoglets Iran Iraq <u>Islam</u> Israel John McCain Liberals Local

Travel Nursing