

Michael Goldfarb of the *Weekly Standard* writes of his experience shooting an apparently abortive Bloggingheads.tv segment with Malou Innocent of the Cato Institute, in which Goldfarb compared the War in Afghanistan in the naughts, with the War in the Pacific of the 1940s — in other words, [comparing the GWOT with WWII](#):

As soon as I started comparing the war in the Pacific with the war in Afghanistan, Innocent jumped all over me. “You’re not comparing Imperial Japan to al Qaeda?” she asked. “No, of course not,” I assured her. Respectable people can’t compare the wars America is fighting now with the Great and Good War America fought against Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan.

But, you know what? On second thought, Imperial Japan and al Qaeda have a lot in common — and so do the Second World War and the war in Afghanistan. The Japanese attacked us at Pearl Harbor, killing more Americans than any attack on U.S. soil until al Qaeda launched its own sneak attack on 9/11. The Japanese and al Qaeda also share the same fanatical devotion to their “cause.” The Japanese had kamikazes and al Qaeda has kamikazes — with hundreds of passengers on board. Our enemies in both wars shared a suicidal commitment to an impossible delusion of world domination. The war in the Pacific was a bloodbath as a result. Women and children threw themselves off of cliffs on Saipan rather than surrender to U.S. Marines. Only 1,000 Japanese surrendered on Iwo, the other 22,000 died fighting or were buried or burned alive in the island’s caves. On Okinawa the Japanese sacrificed 100,000 men in the service of a lost cause.

The American people braced for the invasion of Japan, but Truman wasn’t prepared to see a million Americans killed or wounded when there was a chance to end the war quickly with the Bomb. Truman would use nuclear weapons against civilian populations, so committed was his government to total victory and so costly would that victory have been if it was pursued by conventional means.

In Afghanistan today, against a fanatical enemy who attacked the United States and murdered 3,000 civilians, the president and his party seem to be looking for a way out. No more pay any price, bear any burden. They would have us surrender rather than spend another \$50 billion to provide McChrystal with the troops he needs. They would have us leave Kandahar and Kabul to the Taliban and their al Qaeda allies rather than lose hundreds, maybe thousands, more American soldiers in the mountains of Afghanistan.

Maybe the great mistake in Afghanistan was to treat it like it was a different kind of war than World War II. If there was a chance to get bin Laden in the caves of Tora Bora, we should have sent in the Marines with flame-throwers just like we did on Iwo. Now the President of the United States considers abandoning the fight against an enemy that attacked America and is determined to attack America again. We could leave and hope for the best, but Truman could have done the same in June of 1945. ‘We’ll contain them from Okinawa, Iwo Jima and the Philippines, we’ll use airpower to disrupt their operations, we’ll send the boys home and maintain a flexible, over-the-horizon strike force,’ Truman might have said — and that’s essentially what the Democrats are proposing, and Obama is now considering.

One big difference between the GWOT and WWII of course, was how the left responded. At the start of WWII, the American left, following Stalin’s orders, were effectively in agreement with the isolationist right that America should stay out of the war, though needless to say, for different reasons. It was only Hitler invading Russia that caused the American left — again, based on Stalin’s orders — to support the war, causing some amusing pivots along the way, perhaps most visibly by screenwriter/novelist [Dalton Trumbo](#) and proto-folkie [Pete Seeger](#).

In contrast, during the 1990s, in terms of Afghanistan, [American feminists](#) appeared to be united that something should be done about the perilous conditions of women living under the Taliban. And the American left and right were in agreement that in Iraq, Saddam Hussein should be isolated from the world stage and removed from it all possible — and indeed, [Al Gore](#), Bill Clinton and the rest of their administration sounded remarkably hawkish during that period:

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Of course, once somebody actually *did* do something about Saddam and the Taliban, support from the left began to evaporate, in contradistinction to their pivot in the 1940s:

“I’ll tell you my impression. We really in this last election, when I say we...the Democrats, I think pushed it as far as we can to the end of the fleet, didn’t say it, but we implied it. That if we won the Congressional elections, we could stop the war. Now anybody was a good student of Government would know that wasn’t true. But you know, the temptation to want to win back the Congress, [we sort of stretched the facts](#)...and people ate it up.”

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The Democrats backed themselves into defending the idea of Afghanistan being The Good War because they felt they needed to prove their macho bonafides they called for withdrawal from Iraq. Nobody asked too many questions sat the time, including me. But none of us should forget that [it was a political strategy, not a serious foreign policy](#).

There have been many campaign promises “adjusted” since the election. There is no reason that the administration should feel any more bound to what they said about this than all the other commitments [sic] it has blithely turned aside in the interest of “pragmatism.”

* * *

“I assumed that because we elected Obama to end the war in Iraq that it went without saying that the war in Afghanistan would be ended as well. [Apparently not so.](#)”

Well, to be fair, the jury’s still out on the second half of that last equation.