

Afghanistan Bananistan*

It's getting hotter for everybody in Afghanistan, regardless of the weather. And the global rhetoric about the conduct of the war is reaching white heat, especially in D.C. Will ISAF forces begin withdrawing come July, 2011; or will they stay? How about doing both?

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War is serious stuff; so also business. **Putting the two together** – as we must – often results in the prostitution of one to promote the interests of the other; and vice-versa.

The above news report, and others, shows that business, not the military, is winning the battle of Afghanistan because success against the Taliban remains a chimera. In the words of **Mr Richard Holbrooke** – President Obama's special envoy to Iraq and Afghanistan – success is something that “we'll know when we see it.” One can admire the chutzpah, maybe, but not the words.

If I could interview Mr Holbrooke today, I feel sure he would regret those ill-chosen and ill-defined words. Because, in view of the recent **White House Report** about the state of the war, and the war within State, it's quite obvious that all thought of any categorical ‘success’ over the Taliban has been discarded. And rightly so.

So what's left?

Well, if you ask the top brass at The Pentagon, no doubt you'll get a tiresome tirade about **The Long War**, aka The War on Terror or The War on Terrorism. Essentially, as we all now know, this simply means The Never-Ending War by The Powers of Good against the Powers of Evil (or Darkness, if you will). So, to that extent, the military establishment has locked in a mission that will go A Long, Long Way in a Country Far, Far Away to ensure copious funding for itself to the end of this century, perhaps.

And, not to be outdone, no doubt Hollywood and other production facilities will be able to replicate their **many film successes soon after World War Two**. Shoot – **a very fine film about the war in Iraq** won a number of Oscars earlier this year. Hence, I'd certainly look forward to a great many more wonderful and heroic moments about The Long War at your local cinemas – and for the foreseeable future. And, don't forget about the DVD releases later on, at your local video store.

Bring it *on*, as Gdubya said, a few years back, remember?

Ask the politicians, though, and what you'll get is much puffing up of the chest, much rehearsed rhetoric, many vain uses of the words ‘National Security’ and/or ‘National Interest’, many references to ‘Sacrifice’ and even a few too many words about ‘Safety’. Do an Internet search, using each of those words separately +Afghanistan; you'll see what I mean.

All of which means that The War in Afghanistan is a real growth industry: for business, for entertainment, for the military, and for politicians who don't know how to fix, can't fix or won't fix the state of the nation that matters most to Main Street: the United States – or, considering the current furor in DC and the coming November elections – the Not-So-United States.

How will it all end?

This much we know: in 1989, when the mighty Soviet army scuttled back to the US, back to the US, back to the USSR ... well, that's when the Taliban moved in and set up the biggest heroin operation in the world, enough to satisfy most of the world's demand, particularly that from customers in the U.S.A. In a short time, Afghanistan became a one-product state: **a banana republic**, in effect, and an extreme, Islamic fundamentalist one as well.

Nothing much has changed since the Taliban were driven out of Afghanistan in 2001/2002: poppies are still grown and heroin is still a major product, despite the best efforts of U.S. and NATO forces to wean the Afghan population off the juice and the outrageously seductive profits. Is either of those outcomes likely? Well, now, then, there: there is an apparently serious proposal from The Afghanistan Study Group to buy up all the poppy production by the Afghans so as to provide them with legitimate seed capital to start other businesses more in keeping with the needs of a developing democracy. See **4) Promote Economic Development**, where it explicitly suggests:

“Considering the purchase of Afghanistan's poppy crop, to give Afghan farmers immediate economic gains, reduce Taliban revenues, and reduce the flow of illicit narcotics to the West.”

What is not stated, however, is the final disposition of the poppy crop: what will happen to it? Who will dispose of it, and how? If you know **Catch-22**, then you'd know that the possibilities are practically endless, given the endemic corruption that exists at all levels within the Afghan government, the Afghan military and ... others. Any real-life version of **Milo Minderbinder** would be in there like a shot (no pun intended); and with the correct code word, for sure.

For some critical, truthful and recent perspective on the preceding issue of corruption, the release of **The Afghanistan Papers** in 2019 now provide fresh insight into the state of the unending war in this country. Too bad it's taken so long to reveal the sham and the shame of the entire imbroglio.

So, does the state of Afghanistan truly exist? Well, the voters have spoken a number of times; there is a government of sorts and President Karzai is known, pejoratively, as the 'Mayor of Kabul' – much like Karzai's predecessor under the Soviets in the 1980s. Or has the country, in a sense, been stolen by the latest group of invaders and simply used as a deadly playground by unscrupulous political and business profiteers of all the major players? From the perspective of a long history of invasion, the country has changed hands so many times, it's almost farcical.

What's *not* farcical, of course, is the fate of the native inhabitants of Afghanistan, where it's definitely no barrel of fun – just the barrel of a gun like Dirty Harry's, always pointing at them. Maybe many Afghans are now wishing they'd been lucky enough to have been born some place else. Maybe those damned Rooskies were the lucky ones, after all? Now, *there's* a thought.

Here's another: whose author will be first to publish the definitive, prize-winning novel about The Agony of Afghanistan – America's or Russia's?

(*The code word used by the inept thieves trying to steal **The Hot Rock**)

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