



“Fuller Strategy” Needed to “Explain” Afghan War

Back in the 1950s there was a TV commercial designed to induce headaches in viewers in order to increase demand for the product the commercial was hawking — a pill to cure headaches, of course. The same strategy is often practiced in politics. A story in this morning’s New York Times about California Congressman Darrell Issa (“Obama’s Annoyer-in-Chief”) mentioned that the Republican gadfly “was charged with two long-ago auto thefts before eventually making a fortune selling car alarms....”



Several paragraphs later the reader learns that the charges against Issa were dropped for lack of evidence. But the thought of a politician contributing to a problem in order that he may sell you the cure for it is not new. The late neoconservative William F. Buckley, Jr., used to say that liberals profited from the failure of their own prescriptions. Whether in agriculture, housing, education or welfare, federal programs liberals championed generally made worse the very problems they were supposed to solve. And the worse things get, the more liberals prescribe investing greater sums in the same programs or, better yet, come up with still bigger, more expensive schemes that make things still worse. That’s not a complete description of how to create a stagnant economy and a \$13 trillion debt, but it’s a start.

And it is not just liberals who seem to believe that more of whatever has caused or exacerbated the problem the problem is precisely what is needed for its cure. Our war on terrorism is a good example. While politicians and necon pundits tell us that Arab extremists attack us because they hate our liberties or are jealous of our prosperity, the terrorists themselves have told us often enough it is because of our military actions in Arab lands. We Americans tend to forget that by the time of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 we had troops stationed in Saudi Arabia and had been bombing targets in Iraq for more than a decade. We had also been leading a UN embargo against Iraq that was hurting the civilian population more than the military regime that kept the tyrannical Saddam Hussein in power. In 1999, a United Nations Children Fund study claimed that more than 500,000 children under the age of five had died as the result of the embargo. It is worth recalling that when Lesley Stahl of CBS News asked then-Secretary of State Madeleine Albright about that, Madame Secretary did not dispute the finding.

Stahl: We have heard that a half million children have died. I mean, that’s more children than died in Hiroshima. And, you know, is the price worth it?

Albright: I think this is a very hard choice, but the price—we think the price is worth it.

That was, not surprisingly, widely quoted in the Arab press and with predictable results. A few years later we invaded and liberated Iraq, overthrowing the Saddam regime and setting up a new government. We killed a whole lot of “terrorists” and “insurrectionists” and others who had taken up arms against the invaders. We arrested many others, including some who may actually have committed



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on July 7, 2010

crimes. Soon news of prisoner abuse dominated the newspapers and airwaves. And still there were millions of Iraqis and other Arabs who had a hard time understanding that we meant them no harm. As columnist Joseph Sobran observed when the scandal of inmate abuse at Abu Ghraib broke out: "There goes all the good will we built up through years of bombing Arab cities and starving Arab children."

And as American military action has created more fertile ground for Arab extremism and acts of terrorism, we have responded with more military action, with the violence escalating in a classic vicious cycle. In the early stages of our war in Iraq, even Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld wondered if we weren't creating more terrorists than we were killing in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

We went into Afghanistan because al-Qaeda had attacked us on 9/11 and Afghanistan was a bastion of al-Qaeda bases and training camps. Now, however, CIA Director Leon Panetta has estimated there are no more than 50 to 100 al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. So where have all the al-Qaeda who were in Afghanistan gone, assuming we haven't killed all but those 50 or 100? No doubt many fled to neighboring Pakistan. But in an interview now on the *Newsweek* website, Michael Leiter, director of the National Counterterrorism Center was asked how many al-Qaeda are now in Pakistan. "Upwards — more than 300 I would say," he replied.

So it appears we are hundreds of billions in maintaining a force of 100,000 troops, plus tanks, guns, and aircraft, including Predator drones, killing perhaps as many or more innocent civilians as terrorist combatants, all to battle "upwards" of 300 or 400 al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan combined. This looks like the military equivalent of fighting mosquitoes with elephant guns.

Surely other anti-American zealots, including the Taliban, are also in on the fighting. But that has been more a reaction to than the cause for America's military presence there. In the *Newsweek* interview, Michael Isikoff asked the following of Leiter:

Isn't it true that in almost every one of the big cases where there's been attempted attacks on the U.S., the individuals involved — Faisal Shahzad, Najibullah Zazi — have said they were motivated to go abroad to learn how to attack the United States by the [military] actions we are taking now in Afghanistan and in Pakistan to try to defeat Al Qaeda there?

To which our director of the National Counterterrorism Center replied:

Well I certainly will not try to argue that some of our actions have not led to some people being radicalized. I think that's a given.... That doesn't mean you don't do it. That means you craft a fuller strategy to explain why you're doing that and try to minimize the likelihood that individuals are going to be radicalized.

In other words, what it is really making the insurgents or terrorists "radicalized" to the point of killing Americans is not that we are killing people in their lands. It's because we haven't done a good enough job of *explaining* why we're over there killing them. After nearly nine years of shooting, shelling, bombing, and strafing, we still need to "craft a fuller strategy to explain" why we're doing that. Once we do, the good folks in Afghanistan and Pakistan will probably be okay with that. That will "minimize the likelihood that individuals are going to be radicalized."

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