



Written by on July 28, 2009

Poll: Britons Turn Against Afghan War

A poll carried out by ComRes for the British tabloid newspaper *The Independent* on July 28 has found that 58 percent of Britons say the war in Afghanistan is "unwinnable," with only 31 percent believing that victory can be achieved. Fifty-two percent of those polled answered that all British forces should be withdrawn from Afghanistan immediately, while 43 percent want them to remain.

The pollsters surveyed 1,008 people.

The Independent also reported two more British combat deaths, as the results of the poll were released, bringing the number of deaths in Afghanistan so far this month to 22. Britain has suffered 191 deaths in Afghanistan since Operation Enduring Freedom began in 2001, second only to the United States with 755 deaths.



AFP reported that the recent surge in troop deaths — associated with Operation Panther's Claw — has created a political dispute over resources for troops in Afghanistan. Prime Minister Gordon Brown was forced to defend Britain's strategy after complaints were voiced calling for more equipment (particularly helicopters) and increased troop numbers.

The British military on July 27 called the first phase of Panther's Claw a success, with 3,000 British-led troops inflicting heavy losses on the Taliban in the Helmand River Valley, where British forces have joined nearly 4,000 U.S. Marines and 650 Afghan troops in a large-scale offensive operation.

Back on July 8, Britain's Secretary of State for Defence Bob Ainsworth said in a speech before the internationalist Royal Institute for International Affairs: "The situation in Afghanistan is serious, and it is not yet decided. The way forward is hard and dangerous. More lives will be lost and our resolve is going to be tested."

Repeating a mantra often heard in the United States, Ainsworth said in a BBC interview: "For Britain to be secure, Afghanistan needs to be secure."

CBS News reported that several of Prime Minister Gordon Brown's cabinet members have supported a plan to talk to and try to win over more moderate members of the extremist Islamic militias in Afghanistan.

Speaking at a NATO summit in Brussels on Monday, British Foreign Secretary David Miliband said Afghan leaders needed "grassroots initiatives" to provide former Taliban militants a way "to return to their villages and go back to farming the land or a role for some of them within the legitimate Afghan security forces."

When CNN/Opinion Research Corp. poll surveyed 1,046 adult Americans by telephone on February 18-19, 47 percent were in favor of continuing the war in Afghanistan and 51 percent were opposed.



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Curiously, as the United States started to pull troops out of Iraq and build up troops levels in Afghanistan, the poll indicated that only 31 percent of Americans believe the United States is winning the war in Afghanistan, while 50 percent believe the United States is winning in Iraq. CNN observed: "Last month, when President Obama said he would send 17,000 more U.S. troops to Afghanistan, the public was willing to give him the benefit of the doubt."

The poll also indicated that "Democrats were willing to go along with the president [with the troop build-up], but they were less enthusiastic than Republicans."

Dr. Stephen Biddle, a senior fellow at the internationalist Council on Foreign Relations, writing in "[Is It Worth It? The Difficult Case for War in Afghanistan](#)" in *The American Interest* online for July/August 2009 cited more recent polling results:

The American public, which has focused mostly on Iraq for the past six years, has begun to rediscover Afghanistan — and it is uncomfortable with what it sees. A March 17, 2009 *USA Today*/Gallup poll, for example, found that 42 percent of those polled believed it was a mistake for the United States to send troops to Afghanistan, up from 30 percent in February and just 6 percent in January 2002. The percentage of those saying the war is going well dropped to 38 percent in March from 44 percent just two months earlier.

Theorizing about the prospects for the Obama administration's successful waging of the war, particularly if events do not progress as smoothly as might be hoped, Biddle notes:

The political problems the new antiwar movement will pose for Obama could actually be harder to overcome than those the Iraq opposition posed for Bush. After all, Bush was able to circle the wagons, rally his base, and push an unpopular position through Congress by holding the Republican Party together, thereby forcing congressional Democrats to either unite behind a different approach to Iraq or acquiesce in Republican policies. Democrats chose the latter, giving President Bush the freedom to conduct the war as he wished.

Biddle also raises the prospects of a curious development:

Republicans have shown little willingness to cooperate on anything else, and the Administration's new ownership of the Afghanistan war gives the GOP another opportunity to retreat into opposition as the news from the front gets worse. Obama could face a situation in which a bipartisan antiwar coalition threatens the majority he will need to maintain funding for an increasingly unpopular war.

Dr. Biddle's comments reveal an aspect of recent U.S. wars generally ignored by less astute observers, namely that support for (and conversely, opposition to) U.S. foreign wars is not necessarily a party-line phenomenon. One cannot even label pro-war or anti-war sentiment "liberal" or "conservative." As to whether Biddle subscribes completely to the internationalist policies promoted by the CFR from its inception, he would certainly be aware of the organization's influence in formulating U.S. foreign policy since the Roosevelt administration.

History shows that the dominant movements supporting or opposing the many wars we have been enmeshed in have been controlled not by philosophical bent (e.g., "left" or "right") but by pragmatic utilitarianism that supports whichever strategic objectives the internationalist power brokers favor. Perhaps the most striking example of the prevalence of utilitarianism over political philosophy occurred in the early years of World War II. So long as Hitler was allied with Stalin, there was a strong antiwar movement in the United States that opposed intervention in the war, even as the Germans and Soviets



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conquered and raped Poland.

However, soon after Hitler betrayed Stalin and invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, the most influential doves morphed into hawks. The work of well-known communist folk singer and political activist Pete Seeger and his influential folk group The Almanac Singers is reflective of that major sea change. In the spring of 1941, Seeger and the Almanac Singers (which included the well-known folk-activist Woody Guthrie) recorded "Songs for John Doe," that contained lyrics that were highly critical of Roosevelt's unprecedented peacetime draft, enacted in September 1940. Shortly after Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union, the Almanac Singers joined those agitating in favor of U.S. intervention in Europe, and quickly pulled "Songs for John Doe" from distribution.

The following year the Almanacs issued *Dear Mr. President*, an album that supported the war effort. The title song, sung by Seeger, was a complete repudiation of the group's previous pacifist stance. Sample lyrics included:

Now, Mr. President, / We haven't always agreed in the past, I know, / But that ain't at all important now. / What is important is what we got to do, / We got to lick Mr. Hitler, and until we do, / Other things can wait....

So, Mr. President, / We got this one big job to do / That's lick Mr. Hitler and when we're through, / Let no one else ever take his place / To trample down the human race. / *So what I want is you to give me a gun* / So we can hurry up and get the job done. [Emphasis added.]

The U.S. political parties like to herd their constituents into convenient "liberal" and "conservative" pens for the sake of convenience, but undeclared foreign wars are neither "conservative" nor "liberal." Neither is opposition to them. Those who respect the Constitution and/or who are intelligent enough to figure out the political establishment's use of such wars to advance an agenda of big government and internationalism, will eventually see such conflicts for what they are.

However, the sooner most Americans arrive at the truth, the better it will be for our nation.



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