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Afghan lies mirror deception of Vietnam War

By GWYNNE DYER
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In the midst of the Taliban attacks in central Kabul on Sunday, a journalist called the British embassy for a comment. "I really don't know why they are doing this," said the exasperated diplomat who answered the phone. "We'll be out of here in two years' time. All they have to do is wait."

The official line is that by two years from now, when U.S. and NATO forces leave Afghanistan, the regime they installed will be able to stay in power without foreign support. The British diplomat clearly didn't believe that, and neither do most other foreign observers.

However, Gen. John Allen, commander of the International Security Assistance Force, predictably said that he was "enormously proud" of the response of the Afghan security forces, and various other senior commanders said that it showed that all the foreign training was paying off. You have to admire their cheek: Simultaneous attacks in Kabul and three other cities prove that the Western strategy is working.

The Taliban's attacks in the Afghan capital on Sunday targeted the national parliament, NATO's headquarters, and the German, British, Japanese and Russian embassies. About a hundred people were killed or wounded, and the fighting lasted for 18 hours. There was a similar attack in the center of the Afghan capital only last September. If this were the Vietnam War, we would now have reached about 1971.

The U.S. government has already declared its intention to withdraw from Afghanistan in two years' time, just as it did in Vietnam in 1971. Richard Nixon wanted his second-term presidential election out of the way before he pulled the plug, just as President Barack Obama does now.

The Taliban is obviously winning the war in Afghanistan now, just as North Vietnam was winning in South Vietnam then. The American strategy at that time was satirized as "declare a victory and leave," and it hasn't changed one whit in 40 years. Neither have the lies that cover it up.

The U.S. puppet government in South Vietnam only survived for two years after U.S. forces left in 1973. The puppet government in Kabul may not even last that long after the last American troops leave Afghanistan in 2014. But no Western general will admit that the war is lost, even though their denial means that more of their soldiers must die pointlessly.

"It's like I see in slow motion men dying for nothing and I can't stop it," said U.S. Army officer Lt. Col. Daniel Davis, who spent two tours in Afghanistan. He is consumed by outrage at the yawning gulf between the promises of success routinely issued by U.S. senior commanders and the real situation on the ground.

To be fair, none of those generals was asked whether invading Afghanistan was a good idea. That was decided 10 years ago, when most of them were just colonels. But if they read the intelligence reports, they know that they cannot win this war. If they go on making upbeat predictions anyway, they are responsible for the lives that are wasted.

Davis wrote two reports on the situation in Afghanistan, one classified and one for public consumption. The unclassified one began: "Senior ranking U.S. military leaders have so distorted the truth when communicating with the U.S. Congress and the American people as regards to conditions on the ground in Afghanistan that the truth has become unrecognizable."

Davis gave his first interview to the New York Times in early February, and sent copies of the classified version to selected senators and representatives in Congress. But no member of Congress is going to touch the issue in an election year, for fear of being labeled "unpatriotic".

So, U.S., British and other Western soldiers will continue to die, as will thousands of Afghans, to postpone the inevitable outcome for a few more years.

It's not necessarily even an outcome that threatens American security, for there was always a big difference between the Taliban and their ungrateful guests, al-Qaida. The Taliban were and are big local players in the Afghan political game, but they never showed any interest in attacking the United States. Al-Qaida were pan-Islamist revolutionaries, mostly Arabs and Pakistanis, who abused their hosts' hospitality by doing exactly that.

It was never necessary to invade Afghanistan at all. Senior Taliban commanders were furious that al-Qaida's 9/11 attacks had exposed them to the threat of invasion, and came close to evicting Osama bin Laden at the Kandahar *jirga* (tribal parliament) in October 2001. Wait a little

longer, spread a few million dollars around in bribes, and the U.S. could probably have had a victory over al-Qaida without a war in Afghanistan.

It's much too late for that now, but al-Qaida survives more as an ideology than as an organization, and most Afghans (including the Taliban) remain profoundly uninterested in affairs beyond their own borders. Whatever political system emerges in Afghanistan after the foreigners go home, it is unlikely to want to attack the U.S. Pity about all the people who will be killed between now and then.