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Why Are We "Surging" into Afghanistan?

By Jim Hightower

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Excuse me for being impolitic, but why the -- is America "surging" so unquestioningly into Afghanistan?

Not for nothing is that country called "the burial ground of empires," "a guerilla's paradise" and "the theme park of problems." Yet, President Obama insists that America must act now to "stabilize" Afghanistan and its dizzyingly disparate, ethnically fractious, heavily armed tribal factions.

Actually, our military has already been trying to do this for more than seven years. Despite having 36,000 U.S. troops on the ground and spending \$2 billion a month, the current situation there is described by our intelligence agencies as in a "downward spiral."

Instead of a whole new approach, however, the president's advisors are giving him the only answer ever offered by the war machine: more. They intend to double the number of soldiers in what now will become Obama's war. Why? As one advice-giver put it: What we need are more troops in Afghanistan because we need security, and eventually we will get a strategy."

Eventually??? That pretty well defines "bassackwards," doesn't it?

In fairness, I should note that the CIA did develop an innovative strategy last year for winning the hearts and minds of some Afghan tribal leaders. An agent in the country's southern region was seeking the help of a 60-something-year-old chieftain, but no go -- until he learned that the man, who has four younger wives, was having performance problems. "Take one of these," said the agent, discreetly offering Viagra pills.

Days later, the agent returned to the village to find the old man wreathed in a glowing grin that only sex can induce. "You are a great man," exuded the happy chieftain, who subsequently became a useful source for the agency. It gives new meaning to the old bumper-sticker, "Make love, not war."

Why are we letting Obama and Co. plunge our troops, our treasury and our nation's good name -- as well as Obama's otherwise promising presidency -- into what will certainly be a horrific war? As Sen. Russ Feingold so sensibly puts it: "We need to ask tough questions before deploying our brave service members -- and we need to be suspicious of Washington 'group think.' Otherwise, we are setting ourselves up for failure."

Among the questions that need asking are these: Why is it our mission to remake Afghanistan? What is our national interest, our plan, our "victory," our exit point?

Instead of addressing these basics (and, indeed, instead of consulting the American people at all), however, Obama and team are simply telling us that the surge is on. How's that different from the way Bush-Cheney treated us?

Once again, we're getting a rush job, and it would serve us well to ponder a few realities. First, it will be a nightmare of futility to try stabilizing Afghanistan by force. Ask the Brits and the old Soviets -- both countries tried mightily to do it and failed spectacularly. Independent analysts estimate that it would take hundreds of thousands of troops and up to 30 years to subjugate the country.

Second, Afghan stability has to be a diplomatic task undertaken by a regional coalition that should include Iran, China, Russia, India and Pakistan. Even this effort will be iffy, but it'll be doomed if it has American fingerprints on it. This is because we are widely perceived as the enemy by Afghans. From the corrupt and despised puppet government imposed on them by the Bushites to our endless killings of civilians (including up to 500 a month -- mostly children -- murdered by our cluster bombs), the United States is hardly seen as a stabilizing force. More American troops mean more civilian deaths -- and more resistance.

Third, Afghanistan's remote mountainous regions are not the place where terrorists train for sophisticated attacks on urban America (the 9-11 extremists, for example, were not Afghans, and they trained mostly in Germany and Florida). Also, our military action in Afghanistan has merely pushed the extremists into neighboring Pakistan, where they are now destabilizing that fragile, nuclear-armed government -- a huge problem that will worsen with Obama's escalation.

Just because Obama's team is drumming up a war doesn't mean we should go along. For more information and action suggestions, contact Win Without War, a broad coalition of grassroots groups opposing escalation in Afghanistan