

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<http://www.truthdig.com>

War Without Purpose

By Chris Hedges

7/20/2009

Al-Qaida could not care less what we do in Afghanistan. We can bomb Afghan villages, hunt the Taliban in Helmand province, build a 100,000-strong client Afghan army, stand by passively as Afghan warlords execute hundreds, maybe thousands, of Taliban prisoners, build huge, elaborate military bases and send drones to drop bombs on Pakistan. It will make no difference. The war will not halt the attacks of Islamic radicals. Terrorist and insurgent groups are not conventional forces. They do not play by the rules of warfare our commanders have drilled into them in war colleges and service academies. And these underground groups are protean, changing shape and color as they drift from one failed state to the next, plan a terrorist attack and then fade back into the shadows. We are fighting with the wrong tools. We are fighting the wrong people. We are on the wrong side of history. And we will be defeated in Afghanistan as we will be in Iraq.

The cost of the Afghanistan war is rising. Tens of thousands of Afghan civilians have been killed or wounded. July has been the deadliest month in the war for NATO combatants, with at least 50 troops, including 26 Americans, killed. Roadside bomb attacks on coalition forces are swelling the number of wounded and killed. In June, the tally of incidents involving roadside bombs, also called improvised explosive devices (IEDs), [hit 736](#), a record for the fourth straight month; the number had risen from 361 in March to 407 in April and to 465 in May. The decision by President Barack Obama to send 21,000 additional U.S. troops to Afghanistan has increased our presence to 57,000 American troops. The total is expected to rise to at least 68,000 by the end of 2009. It will only mean more death, expanded fighting and greater futility.

We have stumbled into a confusing mix of armed groups that include criminal gangs, drug traffickers, Pashtun and Tajik militias, kidnapping rings, death squads and mercenaries. We are embroiled in a civil war. The [Pashtuns](#), who make up most of the Taliban and are the

traditional rulers of Afghanistan, are battling the [Tajiks](#) and [Uzbeks](#), who make up the Northern Alliance, which, with foreign help, won the civil war in 2001. The old Northern Alliance now dominates the corrupt and incompetent government. It is deeply hated. And it will fall with us.

We are losing the war in Afghanistan. When we invaded the country eight years ago the Taliban controlled about 75 percent of Afghanistan. Today its reach has crept back to about half the country. The Taliban runs the poppy trade, which brings in an annual income of about \$300 million a year. It brazenly carries out attacks in Kabul, the capital, and foreigners, fearing kidnapping, rarely walk the streets of most Afghan cities. It is life-threatening to go into the countryside, where 80 percent of all Afghans live, unless escorted by NATO troops. And intrepid reporters can interview Taliban officials in downtown coffee shops in Kabul. Osama bin Laden has, to the amusement of much of the rest of the world, become the Where's Waldo of the Middle East. Take away the bullets and the bombs and you have a Gilbert and Sullivan farce.

No one seems to be able to articulate why we are in Afghanistan. Is it to hunt down bin Laden and al-Qaida? Is it to consolidate progress? Have we declared war on the Taliban? Are we building democracy? Are we fighting terrorists there so we do not have to fight them here? Are we "liberating" the women of Afghanistan? The absurdity of the questions, used as thought-terminating clichés, exposes the absurdity of the war. The confusion of purpose mirrors the confusion on the ground. We don't know what we are doing.

Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the new commander of U.S. and NATO-led troops in Afghanistan, [announced recently](#) that coalition forces must make a "cultural shift" in Afghanistan. He said they should move away from their normal combat orientation and toward protecting civilians. He understands that airstrikes, which have killed hundreds of civilians, are a potent recruiting tool for the Taliban. The goal is lofty but the reality of war defies its implementation. NATO forces will always call in close air support when they are under attack. This is what troops under fire do. They do not have the luxury of canvassing the local population first. They ask questions later. The May 4 aerial attack on Farah province, which killed dozens of civilians, [violated standing orders](#) about airstrikes. So did the [air assault in Kandahar](#) province last week in which four civilians were killed and 13 were wounded. The NATO strike targeted a village in the Shawalikot district. Wounded villagers at a hospital in the provincial capital told AP that attack helicopters started bombarding their homes at about 10:30 p.m. Wednesday. One man said his 3-year-old granddaughter was killed. Combat creates its own rules, and civilians are almost always the losers.

The offensive by NATO forces in Helmand province will follow the usual scenario laid out by military commanders, who know much about weapons systems and conventional armies and little about the nuances of irregular warfare. The Taliban will withdraw, probably to sanctuaries in Pakistan. We will declare the operation a success. Our force presence will be reduced. And the Taliban will creep back into the zones we will have "cleansed." The roadside bombs will continue to exact their deadly toll. Soldiers and Marines, frustrated at trying to fight an elusive and often invisible enemy, will lash out with greater fury at phantoms and continue to increase the numbers of civilian dead. It is a game as old as

insurgency itself, and yet each generation of warriors thinks it has finally found the magic key to victory.

We have ensured that Iraq and Afghanistan are failed states. Next on our list appears to be Pakistan. Pakistan, like Iraq and Afghanistan, is also a bizarre construct of Western powers that drew arbitrary and artificial borders, ones the clans and ethnic groups divided by these lines ignore. As Pakistan has unraveled, its army has sought legitimacy in militant Islam. It was the Pakistani military that created the Taliban. The Pakistanis determined how the billions in U.S. aid to the resistance during the war against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was allocated. And nearly all of it went to the most extremist wings of the Afghan resistance movement. The Taliban, in Pakistan's eyes, is not only an effective weapon to defeat foreign invaders, whether Russian or American, but is a bulwark against India. Muslim radicals in Kabul are never going to build an alliance with India against Pakistan. And India, not Afghanistan, is Pakistan's primary concern. Pakistan, no matter how many billions we give to it, will always nurture and protect the Taliban, which it knows is going to inherit Afghanistan. And the government's [well-publicized battle](#) with the Taliban in the Swat Valley of Pakistan, rather than a new beginning, is part of a choreographed charade that does nothing to break the unholy alliance.

The only way to defeat terrorist groups is to isolate them within their own societies. This requires wooing the population away from radicals. It is a political, economic and cultural war. The terrible algebra of military occupation and violence is always counterproductive to this kind of battle. It always creates more insurgents than it kills. It always legitimizes terrorism. And while we squander resources and lives, the real enemy, al-Qaida, has moved on to build networks in Indonesia, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan and Morocco and depressed Muslim communities such as those in France's Lyon and London's Brixton area. There is no shortage of backwaters and broken patches of the Earth where al-Qaida can hide and operate. It does not need Afghanistan, and neither do we.