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## Next New Plan for Bananastan

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We're going through Bananastan\* war strategies like they're Pez candies. As [Jason Ditz](#) of Antiwar.com has noted, General Stanley McChrystal's new report on Afghanistan "admitted that the current strategy, [which was itself a new strategy presented only five months ago](#) to replace the previous new strategy, isn't working and that yet another new strategy is needed." It seems certain that Stan the Man will ask for more troops, though, so we're at least being consistent in our policy of sending more American soldiers to war without knowing why.

When you slice out the wimp words and platitudes, the [current new strategy](#) is the same as the old new strategy: clear, hold and build. Any new strategy the war wonks come up with will look pretty much the same, and will require even further escalation in terms of troops and national treasure. Clear, hold and build hasn't worked in Afghanistan just as it didn't work in Iraq. It didn't work in Vietnam either, even though at one point we committed over a half-million troops there. It will never work.

Any cogent strategy must be built around realistic, achievable goals that involve U.S. national security. Our goals, as presently stated, involve turning Pakistan and Afghanistan into real countries with real security forces that civilian authorities are in control of and disrupting terrorist networks. We'll never achieve those things. The Bananastans will always be warlord-ruled thuggeries, and it is impossible to disrupt terrorist networks when the only "sanctuaries" those networks need in order to operate are pockets large enough to carry an iPod.

Our top military officer, Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Admiral Mike Mullen, still insists that [Afghan civilians](#) are the "center of gravity." Civilian populations are never a center of gravity. They may be a critical factor — a strength, weakness or critical vulnerability — but only to the extent that they affect political leadership, and that affect is almost always overstated. America supposedly has the most representative form of government of any modern nation, yet even though the population has voted against war in two straight national

elections, we're still embroiled in two wars. [Afghanistan's voting process](#) makes the electoral systems of Florida and Ohio look honest, and it's difficult to say where Afghan political leadership lies: with the official government or with the warlords or with whatever the loose collection of hooligans is that we refer to as the Taliban.

Power is so decentralized in Afghanistan at the strategic and tactical levels that there is no center of gravity that our military force can focus its efforts against. This is true in virtually any counterinsurgency scenario, and is why counterinsurgency is a self-defeating form of warfare. Our attempts at building infrastructure in Afghanistan have literally [backfired](#). New roads, schools and police stations merely provide fresh bombing targets. Our strategists will never come up with a plan that works, not because they're incompetent (though they are), but because the situation does not lend itself to successful strategizing.

The only strategy that seems to be working so far is the propaganda effort to convince the American public to go along with another asinine war. Mr. Obama has called the Bananastan conflict a "war of necessity" (it isn't). [Admiral Mullen](#) says we'll only have credibility with the Afghan people if we promise to stay there forever and then actually do it (we won't have credibility then, either, nor is there a burning national security requirement for us to have credibility with the Afghan people). [Max Boot](#) says Americans are only dissatisfied with the Afghanistan war "because they don't see enough signs of progress" (they don't see enough signs of progress because there is no progress).

Boot's fellow neocons [Bill Kristol and Fred Kagan](#) promote the notion that a surge in Afghanistan will produce the same results that the Iraq surge gave us. I'm inclined to agree with that. Two and a half years after the Iraq surge began, Iraq's [government and security forces](#) are corrupt and incompetent, Sunni reconciliation is sliding backwards and no progress has been made with the Kurdish situation. [General David Petraeus](#), having armed everyone in Iraq to the teeth, has made the country even more dangerous than it was under Saddam Hussein, but only more dangerous to itself; it's only a danger to us for as long as long as we leave troops there who can be attacked.

I caught Boot on NPR's Sept. 1 Diane Rehm show, talking gibberish and getting away with it. Kristol's citation of Kagan was in the Sept. 1 edition of the *Washington Post*. The likes of Boot and Kristol and Kagan, who brought us the Iraq fiasco, should have been laughed and feathered out of town years ago. That they can still command bandwidth in the so-called "liberal media" illustrates the extent to which the war-centric right has hogtied the information environment.

If we're serious about rehabilitating ourselves from dependence on foreign oil, the pipeline flowing through Afghanistan has no bearing on our national interest. The notion of evil ones getting their hands on Pakistan's "fissile material" gets one's attention at first blush, but on examination it suffers from what George Costanza called "[shrinkage](#)." The "[suitcase nuke](#)" is an urban myth from the Cold War. Terrorists will develop a suitcase nuke capable of destroying an American city about the time they invent time travel. The thing terrorists are most likely to do if they get their unholy mitts on Pakistan's nuclear warheads is die of radiation poisoning. If we really want to eliminate risks presented by Pakistan's nukes, we can have our worthless \$2 billion stealth B-2 bombers fly over there, evade Pakistan's non-existent air defenses, and blow them all up.

Let's just hope the B-2s don't blow a hundred Muslim wedding chapels to smithereens instead. What will that do to our credibility, Admiral Mullen?