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## Robert Fisk's World: Everyone seems to be agreeing with Bin Laden these days

Only Obama, it seems, fails to get the message that we're losing Afghanistan

**Robert Fisk**

**9/19/2009**

Obama and Osama are at last participating in the same narrative. For the US president's critics – indeed, for many critics of the West's military occupation of Afghanistan – are beginning to speak in the same language as Obama's (and their) greatest enemy.

There is a growing suspicion in America that Obama has been socked into the heart of the Afghan darkness by ex-Bushie Robert Gates – once more the Secretary of Defence – and by journalist-adored General David Petraeus whose military "surges" appear to be as successful as the Battle of the Bulge in stemming the insurgent tide in Afghanistan as well as in Iraq.

No wonder Osama bin Laden decided to address "the American people" this week. "You are waging a hopeless and losing war," he said in his 9/11 eighth anniversary audiotape. "The time has come to liberate yourselves from fear and the ideological terrorism of neoconservatives and the Israeli lobby." There was no more talk of Obama as a "house Negro" although it was his "weakness", bin Laden contended, that prevented him from closing down the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In any event, Muslim fighters would wear down the US-led coalition in Afghanistan "like we exhausted the Soviet Union for 10 years until it collapsed". Funny, that. It's exactly what bin Laden told me personally in Afghanistan – four years before 9/11 and the start of America's 2001 adventure south of the Amu Darya river.

Almost on cue this week came those in North America who agree with Obama – albeit they would never associate themselves with the Evil One, let alone dare question Israel's cheerleading for the Iraqi war. "I do not believe we can build a democratic state in Afghanistan," announces Dianne Feinstein, the California Democrat who chairs the senate

intelligence committee. "I believe it will remain a tribal entity." And Nancy Pelosi, the House Speaker, does not believe "there is a great deal of support for sending more troops to Afghanistan".

Colin Kenny, chair of Canada's senate committee on national security and defence, said this week that "what we hoped to accomplish in Afghanistan has proved to be impossible. We are hurtling towards a Vietnam ending".

Close your eyes and pretend those last words came from the al-Qa'ida cave. Not difficult to believe, is it? Only Obama, it seems, fails to get the message. Afghanistan remains for him the "war of necessity". Send yet more troops, his generals plead. And we are supposed to follow the logic of this nonsense. The Taliban lost in 2001. Then they started winning again. Then we had to preserve Afghan democracy. Then our soldiers had to protect – and die – for a second round of democratic elections. Then they protected – and died – for fraudulent elections. Afghanistan is not Vietnam, Obama assures us. And then the good old German army calls up an air strike – and zaps yet more Afghan civilians.

It is instructive to turn at this moment to the Canadian army, which has in Afghanistan fewer troops than the Brits but who have suffered just as ferociously; their 130th soldier was killed near Kandahar this week. Every three months, the Canadian authorities publish a scorecard on their military "progress" in Afghanistan – a document that is infinitely more honest and detailed than anything put out by the Pentagon or the Ministry of Defence – which proves beyond peradventure (as Enoch Powell would have said) that this is Mission Impossible or, as Toronto's National Post put it in an admirable headline three days' ago, "Operation Sleepwalk". The latest report, revealed this week, proves that Kandahar province is becoming more violent, less stable and less secure – and attacks across the country more frequent – than at any time since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. There was an "exceptionally high" frequency of attacks this spring compared with 2008.

There was a 108 per cent increase in roadside bombs. Afghans are reporting that they are less satisfied with education and employment levels, primarily because of poor or non-existent security. Canada is now concentrating only on the security of Kandahar city, abandoning any real attempt to control the province.

Canada's army will be leaving Afghanistan in 2011, but so far only five of the 50 schools in its school-building project have been completed. Just 28 more are "under construction". But of Kandahar province's existing 364 schools, 180 have been forced to close. Of progress in "democratic governance" in Kandahar, the Canadian report states that the capacity of the Afghan government is "chronically weak and undermined by widespread corruption". Of "reconciliation" – whatever that means these days – "the onset of the summer fighting season and the concentration of politicians and activists for the August elections discouraged expectations of noteworthy initiatives...".

Even the primary aim of polio eradication – Ottawa's most favoured civilian project in Afghanistan – has defeated the Canadian International Development Agency, although this admission is cloaked in truly Blair-like (or Brown-like) mendacity. As the Toronto Star revealed in a serious bit of investigative journalism this week, the aim to "eradicate" polio with the help of UN and World Health Organisation money has been quietly changed to the "prevention of transmission" of polio. Instead of measuring the number of children "immunised" against polio, the target was altered to refer only to the number of children

"vaccinated". But of course, children have to be vaccinated several times before they are actually immune.

And what do America's Republican hawks – the subject of bin Laden's latest sermon – now say about the Afghan catastrophe? "More troops will not guarantee success in Afghanistan," failed Republican contender and ex-Vietnam vet John McCain told us this week. "But a failure to send them will be a guarantee of failure." How Osama must have chuckled as this preposterous announcement echoed around al-Qa'ida's dark cave.