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## America has been here before

**It's shades of Vietnam as U.S. commanders beg for more troops to fight in Afghanistan**

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We should hang a huge neon sign over Afghanistan: "CAUTION: DEJA VU."

Afghanistan's much ballyhooed recent election staged by its foreign occupiers turned out to be a fraud wrapped up in a farce -- as this column predicted a month ago. It was as phony and meaningless as U.S.-run elections in Vietnam in the 1970s.

[Canada played a shameful role in facilitating this obviously rigged vote.](#)

Meanwhile, American and NATO generals running the Afghan war amazingly warn they risk being beaten by Taliban tribesmen in spite of their 107,000 soldiers, B-1 heavy bombers, F-15s, F-16s, F-18s, Apache and AC-130 gunships, heavy artillery, tanks, radars, killer drones, cluster bombs, white phosphorus, rockets, and space surveillance.

Washington has spent some \$250 billion in Afghanistan since 2001. Canada won't even reveal how many billions it has spent. Each time the U.S. sent more troops and bombed more villages, Afghan resistance sharply intensified and Taliban expanded its control, today over 55% of the country.

Now, U.S. commanders are begging for at least 40,000 more U.S. troops -- after President Barack Obama just tripled the number of American soldiers there. Shades of Vietnam-style "mission creep." Ghost of Gen. William Westmoreland, rattle your chains.

The director of U.S. national intelligence just revealed Washington spent \$75 billion US last year on intelligence, employing 200,000 people. Embarrassingly, the U.S. still can't find Osama bin Laden or Mullah Omar after hunting them for eight years. Washington now fears Taliban will launch a Vietnam-style Tet offensive against major cities.

This week, in a wildly overdue observation, U.S. military chief Adm. Mike Mullen told Congress, we must rapidly build the Afghan army and police."

'Vietnamization'

But the U.S. record in foreign army-building is not encouraging. Remember "Vietnamization?" That was the Pentagon's effort to build a South Vietnamese army that could stand on its own, without U.S. air cover, supplies, and "advisers." In early 1975, it collapsed and ran.

Any student of Imperialism 101 knows that after invading a resource-rich or strategic nation you immediately put a local stooge in power, use disaffected minorities to run the government (divide and conquer), and build a native mercenary army. Such troops, commanded by white officers, were called "sepoys" in the British Indian Army and "askaris" in British East Africa.

America's attempts to build an Afghan sepoy army of 250,000 failed miserably. The 80,000 men raised to date are 95% illiterate and only on the job for money to feed their families. They have no loyalty to the corrupt western-installed government in Kabul. CIA's 74,000 "contractors" (read mercenaries) in Afghanistan are more reliable.

But the biggest problem in Afghanistan, as always, is tribalism. Many of the U.S.-raised Afghan army troops are minority Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazara who used to collaborate with the Soviets. They are scorned by the majority Pashtun tribes as enemies and foreign stooges. These U.S.-paid troops also know they will face death when the U.S. and its western allies eventually quit Afghanistan.

The Soviets had a much better understanding of Afghanistan than the American military, which one senior British general recently called, "culturally ignorant." Moscow built an Afghan government army of around 240,000 men. Many were loyal Communists. They sometimes fought well, as I experienced in combat against them near Jalalabad. But, in the end, they smelled defeat and crumbled. The Soviet-backed strongman, Mohammad Najibullah, was castrated and slowly hanged from a crane.

The American command, deprived of men and resources by the Bush administration, only managed to cobble together an armed rabble of 80,000 Afghans. The Afghan army, like the post-Saddam Iraqi army, is led by white officers -- in this case, Americans designated "trainers" or "advisers."

Afghanistan keeps giving me deja vu back to the old British Empire, and flashbacks to those wonderful epic films of the Raj, Drums, Lives of a Bengal Lancer, and Kim. The British imperialists did it much, much better, and with a lot more style. Many of their imperial subjects even admired and liked them.