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Stars and Garters and Afghanistan

By Jeff Huber

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Oh my stars and garters, I agree with Tom Friedman of the *New York Times* about something — sort of. In an Oct. 13 opinion piece titled "[Not Good Enough](#)," Friedman argues that, "when you are mounting a counterinsurgency campaign, the local government is the critical bridge between your troops and your goals. If that government is rotten, your whole enterprise is doomed."

He is correct. We can't do counterinsurgency by propping up Hamid Karzai's regime. Where Friedman's thinking turns sour is when he says "we have to visibly display to the Afghan people that we expect a different kind of governance from Karzai, or whoever rules, and refuse to proceed without it." Put down the psychedelic Popsicle, Tom.

We are dealing with a society that, as pundit [Steve Hynd](#) puts it, "would make a Chicago politician blush." Taliban, warlords, Islamo-gangstas whose names we'll never learn to spell: we'll never sort out that mess. Afghans themselves don't even care if there is a vote recount for the last election. What's the point? As one Afghan told Terri Judd of [The Independent](#), "There are no roads, no bridges, not enough water. If you ask people, they will say our government is corrupt: they save money for themselves. They only want to make their lives better. They don't think about the poor people."

Ask yourself what an Afghan's idea of "poor people" is. Afghanistan's per capita income is [\\$700](#). No, that's not a typo.

Afghanistan is not a society that we can turbo-charge into the 21st century through military force or the ill-conceived "[civilian surge](#)" that Gen. Stanley McChrystal and his allies want and is [the dumbest idea on the planet](#).

Pouring civilians into Afghanistan will just make more targets for the so-called insurgents. We're the insurgents in Afghanistan. We're the ones who put the malignant Karzai government in power. We're the invaders.

The kind of counterinsurgency we try to conduct now, as established by Gen. David Petraeus in Iraq, involves bribing everybody not to use the guns we handed to them. Slogging arms and bribes into a violent, corrupt society doesn't fix it. It makes the society more violent and corrupt.

We need to extract ourselves from this bog.

Our national mindset has warped since 9/11. We've allowed ourselves to become transfixed around the axle over nothing. The gomers who attacked the trade towers and the Pentagon didn't come from Afghanistan. They wouldn't have been able to pull off those attacks at all if the goobers who were supposed keep things like that from happening (CIA, FBI, NORAD, etc.) hadn't been snoring with their feet on the gas pedal. To imagine that we need to gush more blood and money into Afghanistan to keep ourselves safe is more foolish than an Adam Sandler movie.

Insisting our president needs to cave in to Gen. Stanley McChrystal's demands is even more foolish. The insentient right has been insisting that Obama needs to give McChrystal whatever he asks for. That's a recipe for disaster, and I hope Obama doesn't pursue it. It's time for American presidents, feeling vulnerable to pressure from the military-industrial-congressional complex, to stop pouring American kids who think they're defending their country into crock-of-spit wars. We'd be better off by magnitudes putting those kids to work rebuilding our highways and bridges and dams.

I have some hope that we can put our eyes back on the prize: that we can become a shining city on the hill, a kinder gentler nation that can lead the rest of the world to a neo-renaissance.

We'll have to shed our neoconservative strain, though, and that will take some doing. I remember thinking, as the 2000 election approached, that the neocons and their talk of American empire were nutty, but assumed that our inherent system of checks and balances would keep them from getting their way. Even the neocons recognized they would need "a new Pearl Harbor" to get the American public to accept with their mad philosophy, which essentially called for the U.S. to [invade and occupy every corner of the globe](#) except Antarctica.

The [American warlords](#) got their catalytic event in Sept. 2001, and the rest of us fell in line with them from fear, which is how despots immemorial have suckered rubes into going along with delusional, militaristic grandeur. The Iraq catastrophe should have taught us to ignore the neocons. Unfortunately their [unwarranted influence](#) persists, even though [most Americans](#) understand that the Afghanistan conflict is not a "war of necessity."

Candidate Obama's promise to "[finish the job](#)" in Afghanistan was his tragic error. He can't turn back. It seems the entire world cowers in fear of criticism of the Rush Limbaughs, Bill Kristols and Glen Becks of this world, who have managed to turn George Orwell's [Two-Minute Hate](#) into a 24/7 phenomenon.

It looks now like Obama will cave in to the demands of his petulant general, Stanley McChrystal. A weasel-worded Oct. 14 article in the UK [Telegraph](#) reports that "President Barack Obama's administration *is understood* to have told the British government that it *could announce*, as early as next week, the substantial increase to its 65,000 troops already serving there." (My italics.)

"The US is expected to announce a significant surge of up to 45,000 extra troops for Afghanistan" the *Telegraph* story says, "after Gordon Brown said that 500 more British troops would be sent to the country.

Is that how it works? 500 Brits jump off a roof so we have to throw 45,000 American kids over a cliff?

I hope this story is a pile of yesterday's dog breakfast. The foreign press is worse than ours when it comes to pushing sensationalism, but the *Telegraph* story at least names some of its sanction leakers, which is more than you can say for the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.

"Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup, the Chief of the Defence Staff, said: 'I don't want to put words in the mouths of the Americans but I am fairly confident of the way it is going to come out,'" the *Telegraph* reported.

Sir Jock (some name) is an English Lord and an air force type, so he may not be the most reliable source. Nonetheless, we need to brace ourselves for the possibility that Obama will go slutty for McChrystal and the rest of the long war crowd.

That will be a shame.