

Afghanistan: Destroying their property and insulting their intelligence

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The trip taken by the U.S. delegation to the NATO Summit in Lisbon was an expensive one indeed. The decision made there to extend our military occupation of Afghanistan into 2014 (and possibly beyond) will exact untold, unsustainable, unacceptable costs.

A war that has tragically already cost us 1,400 American lives will now take many hundreds more. A war that has already drained the treasury of \$370 billion will drive us further into debt and stall our economic recovery. And a war that has undermined our national security goals will continue to make us less safe. Here we are patting down holiday travelers at the airport while we escalate a war that is fomenting rather than fighting terrorism. That's the current state of our national security policy — talk about missing the forest for the trees.

This decision to stay the disastrous course in Afghanistan represents a broken promise plain and simple — to begin ending this war in July of next year. Meanwhile, as the timetable extends, the tactics seem to grow more violent. Remember shock and awe in Iraq? Well, we're now engaged in what one American officer called "awe, shock and firepower", in the form of enormous tanks now rolling into Afghanistan for the first time during this war.

As if Afghans needed another reminder of the 1980s Soviet invasion, which was heavy on tank artillery and left an indelible mark on the national consciousness. The optics here are very bad, and the rhetoric is disturbing as well, with one official boasting to the Washington Post that "we've taken the gloves off" and another saying that counterinsurgency "doesn't mean you don't blow up stuff or kill people who need to be killed."

Of course, the problem is that we're killing a lot of people who don't need to be killed, innocent civilians caught in the crossfire. How exactly are we supposed to win people's hearts and minds when we're destroying their homes and exterminating their families? When will we understand that this kind of warfare - this entire war - is the best propaganda tool the Taliban could ask for?

And besides, tank deployment flies directly in the face of the COIN doctrine that is supposed to be guiding our Afghanistan strategy. We've all heard Gen. Petraeus wax philosophical about U.S. troops moving within communities, helping forge a bond between the people and their government. Except that tanks and night raids are about just the opposite — removing our troops from Afghan communities in favor of launching deadly explosives from a safe distance.

But apparently NATO officials have come up with a creative way out of that contradiction. The Post reports that an Afghan farmer asked a general at a public meeting: "Why do you

have to blow up so many of our fields and homes?" He was told that when villagers travel to town to submit a claim for property damage, it helps better connect them to their government.

I can't imagine a response more galling. Now we're not only destroying their property, we're insulting their intelligence too. This must end. It's time to bring our troops home.

Lynn Woolsey is president of Americans for Democratic Action.

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