

The NATO summit in Lisbon has concluded and the date has been set – the Afghan war will be won and troops will come home in 2014 or 2015 or beyond, depending on the spin.

As wars go, Afghanistan is a particular conundrum; even before it became an insurgency it was entangled in ethnic, religious and regional strife. When the U.S. lifted the bounds of the rule of law and accepted more expedient measures of torture, extrajudicial executions, and extraordinary rendition, it ceded the moral balance to the insurgents. This shucking-off of moral and ethical restrictions served Al-Qaeda and the Taliban well in recruiting men and women willing to die for their cause.

“I warrant you, you shall find the ceremonies of the wars, and the cares of it, and the forms of it, and the sobriety of it, and the modesty of it, to be otherwise” (Captain Fluellen in Henry V). Great men who send ordinary men to war cannot know this; generals and statesmen cannot know this; only soldiers and innocent civilians can know this. The evidence of this – the legacy of carnage – lies in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan, etc. today.

As I write the George Washington battle group is sailing to the Yellow Sea as a warning to Pyongyang in the latest game of chicken in the sixty-year war across the 38th parallel. When we did this in 1964 in the Gulf of Tonkin, with the USS Maddox, we became entangled in Vietnam and lost 60,000 Americans.

This brings us back to the Afghan war termination date. It is inculcated in the psyche of American general officers that given enough money, soldiers, and time, any war can be won. While the U.S. is subsidizing the defense of Europe, Republic of Korea (ROK), Japan, etc., those countries are investing in infrastructure, science and technology. As we escalate the Afghan war, China – its neighbor to the east – is out-producing the U.S. in cars and supercomputers.

While investing in arms and building bases in the ROK – 28,000 U.S. troops at 16 bases – the ROK surpassed us in academic achievement. They now rank 2nd in math, 7th in Science, & 1st in Reading. The U.S. ranks 27th, 22nd, & 33rd respectively. If that were not painful enough, in the past decade the ROK’s main financial index (KOSPI) gained 50% while the main U.S. index (DJI) gained 1.5%.

When this “war on terror” started, my oldest son was seven. Today he turns 17 and eligible to enlist in the military with his choice of wars - his father’s (Iraq & Afghanistan) or his grandfather’s (ROK).

We are fools for engaging in religious civil wars against an enemy beyond western comprehension, where the only winners are weapons dealers, Karzai, and his corrupt ministers. Regardless of the termination date, it’s certain that the generals running the war today will have retired. Rather than debating a termination date that is predicated on victory, let’s accept the inevitable defeat and expedite the conclusion.

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