

America As Self-Appointed Avenging Angel: A Self-Made Illusion

A self-made illusion

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Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

Global Research, September 19, 2012

[The News International \(Pakistan} and Stop NATO](#)

Democracy in Afghanistan is a self-made illusion. It is a Western-imposed farce that will be swept away if America and its allies stop propping it up with their bayonets.

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John Quincy Adams's caution to America not to go abroad to slay dragons they do not understand in the name of spreading democracy or securing American interests has been thrown to the winds. Neither Washington, nor Madison nor Jefferson saw America as the world's avenging angel.

Today the United States is once again in an expansionist mood. Iraq was but a "breakfast". Afghanistan is "picnic lunch". Where will Americans dine? The United States has strong teeth but a weak stomach.

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Alexis De Tocqueville once said: "I know of no country in which there is so little independence of mind and real freedom of discussion as in America". Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney, in his acceptance speech, did not say a word about the war in Afghanistan, as if it were a non-event, although the US still has about 90,000 troops in that country and over 2,000 Americans have died fighting a totally unjustified war.

There is clearly a conspiracy of silence about this totally unnecessary and unwinnable war. That neither Republicans nor Democrats see the war in Afghanistan as a fit subject for debate, is salt in the wound. Both seem to have adopted a collective amnesia about the war and the untold misery and havoc it has wrought.

Robert McNamara, the brilliant secretary of defence for Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, helped lead America into Vietnam. McNamara believed that the fight against communism in Asia was worth sacrificing American lives, and yet he eventually came to believe that America had stumbled into a war - in which it had lost over 58,000 men and women - that was, in fact, unnecessary and unwinnable. The lessons of Vietnam were forgotten.

Iraq, a secular, socialist state, was not involved in 9/11, had no links with the Al-Qaeda.

Baghdad presented no clear and present danger to its neighbours, and none to the US or Britain. The truth is that what was at stake was not an imminent military or terrorist threat but the economic imperatives of US growth. Iraq has 112 billion barrels of proven resources, or roughly 11 percent of the world's proven supply. That is more oil than the resources of Europe and South America put together, and more than Africa and the Asia-Pacific region combined. That oil has global strategic, political and economic significance. The temptation to grab it must have been irresistible.

North Korea has admitted it has nuclear capability but it is not invaded as Iraq was. If Saddam didn't have oil, he could torture his citizens to his heart's content. Other leaders in the Islamic world do it everyday with the blessings of the United States. Opposition to the war in the US is growing, although the primary cause for this opposition is that the cost of the war is too great and unacceptable to the American people. It is deplorable, but nonetheless, true, that what has changed public opinion in the US and its domestic political picture, is not the efforts of its intellectuals but rather the Afghans resistance which simply will not yield to American force.

The rationale for Obama's war in Afghanistan is phony. American soldiers fighting in Afghanistan know it. No wonder army morale is dropping. How long is it going to take for America to recognise that the war in Afghanistan is a fiasco – tragic, deeply dehumanising and ultimately unwinnable? One thing is clear, peace and stability will never resume as long as aggression continues and American soldiers remain on Afghan soil. Instead of enacting a charade, America should turn Afghanistan over to a genuine international coalition headed by the UN and get out. America has dug itself into a deep, deep hole. Playing the world's policeman is not the answer to the catastrophe in New York. Playing the world's policeman is what led to it.

Anti-American sentiment, now at its highest, has metastasised into violent demonstrations all over the Islamic world against a sacrilegious film. The US government has warned its citizens against travelling to Afghanistan because of the fear of being kidnapped or killed. Democracy in Afghanistan is a self-made illusion. It is a Western-imposed farce that will be swept away if America and its allies stop propping it up with their bayonets.

The Islamic world contains the world's greatest concentration of un-elected monarchs, military dictators, and usurpers, all supported by America. None would survive without American help. Where, then, is the symbol of hope in a Muslim world ruled by US-protected and coddled, corrupt despots? We in Pakistan have suffered four military coups, all supported by the US. The result is what we have now: moving from misery to poverty and a corrupt president sitting on top of a sham democracy.

Obama has placed America on the wrong side of history. Today US foreign policy finds itself at the bottom of a slippery slope. It has assumed many of the very features of the 'rogue nations' against which it has rhetorically and sometimes literally done battle over the years. The legitimacy of US action in Afghanistan has vanished. Its war on terrorism has no support in the Islamic world and is fast becoming unpopular in the rest of the world. There is an old Russian saying: Once you let your feet get caught in a quagmire, your whole body will be sucked in. Today the United States seems trapped in a bad story, with no way to change the script.

Today the United States is at war in Afghanistan and our tribal area. However you title or

define it, it is war, a war it cannot win. Today nationalism is among the most potent phenomena of political life in this part of the world. In the past, nationalism had succeeded in disrupting the British, French, Dutch, Portuguese, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires. If the United States persists in waging this totally unnecessary and unjustified war, it would suffer a similar fate. If America wants to make headway against Muslim rage, it will have to relieve the suffering of the Palestinian people. It will have to vacate its aggression in Afghanistan and withdraw its support of tyrannies in the Muslim world.

John Quincy Adams's caution to America not to go abroad to slay dragons they do not understand in the name of spreading democracy or securing American interests has been thrown to the winds. Neither Washington, nor Madison nor Jefferson saw America as the world's avenging angel. The lesson of history is that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat the same mistakes.

In a memorandum addressed to the Chairman Science Board, Paul Wolfowitz, then deputy secretary of defense, wrote: "Our military expedition to Afghanistan and Iraq are unlikely to be the last such excursion in the global war on terrorism. We may need to support an ally under attack by terrorists determined to replace the legitimate government; we may need to effect change in the governance of a country that is blatantly sustaining support for terrorism; or we may need to assist an ally who is unable to govern areas of his own country – where terrorists may recruit, train and plan without interference by the legitimate government"! It is scary.

Today the United States is once again in an expansionist mood. Iraq was but a "breakfast". Afghanistan is "picnic lunch". Where will Americans dine? The United States has strong teeth but a weak stomach. No wonder, it has digestive problems with Afghanistan. Be that as it may, America seems intent on using the September 11 attacks to impose what is called a 'civilisation of fear'. Both Iran and Pakistan are now in gun sights. Obama has made it abundantly clear that American special forces in Afghanistan will strike into Pakistan, if Pakistan fell into the "wrong hands". America is already at war with Pakistan in Waziristan. American drone attacks are a clear violation of Pakistan's sovereignty and are perceived quite literally as an act of war.

"The single greatest threat to (Pakistan)", Obama said recently, "comes from Al-Qaeda and their extremist allies". This is not true. All our major problems stem from the American occupation of Afghanistan and its frequent intrusions into our tribal territory. It has turned our tribal area into a protracted ulcer, a quagmire – a place where Pakistan is spending blood and treasure to protect American interests.

The writer is a former federal secretary. Edited by Rick Rozoff, Stop NATO

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