These Colors Don't Run: Afghanistan Edition

It's sad when you already know what people are going to say when you tell them that [staying in Afghanistan today](#) is as stupid and pointless now as it was in 2003, or 2009, or 2011. They're going to say "but look what happened in Iraq," relying on their audience's lack of understanding of or interest in the two countries to allow that logic to stand as a reason why we should continue keeping boots on the ground. They're going to say "but what about the Taliban," as though a grassroots organization based in Pakistani territory — never reachable, wholly beyond our ability to control or solve — has anything to do with "Afghanistan's" problems. They're going to say "we can't let Afghanistan fall apart like Iraq," although our first move in Afghanistan was to install a truculent, overtly partisan Pashtun who did everything in his power to prevent regional Tajik and Uzbek warlords from getting wrapped into the official security apparatus.

When a region has a problem, and that problem is a longstanding crisis of confidence in a population's political leadership, owing to that leadership being perceived as a bunch of crooks who've sold out to various Western powers over the last century (Britain, America, France, Russia), the symptom is an outraged local movement focused inwardly, and interested primarily in isolating itself from foreign-minded politicians, as well as foreign countries' influence. In Afghanistan that was the Taliban. In Iraq and Syria, obviously, the "people" have flocked to extremist organizations like al Nusra, ISIS, the Mahdi militias, and similar outfits. In America, it's the libertarian party and the Tea Party — tired of America's continued hyper-involvement in other countries' domestic squabbles (the Western power to which we've sold out, according to party members, is ourselves — American politicians and big business, as represented by

Mitt Romney and Hillary Clinton).

Advocates of ongoing military intervention in Afghanistan, and expanded intervention in Iraq, and propping up regimes like Yemen's, and the type of meaningless, low-level provocation in Ukraine that will only encourage Putin to take more in the months and years to come, and selling out protests like the student demonstrations in Hong Kong — advocates of violence as a means of solving external local problems would have you believe that their method will resolve movements like the Taliban, and ISIS. That by killing over years and decades, we can kill enough of the people that oppose us that the opposition will simply vanish, and in its place will be compliant and responsible citizens who are friendly (or at least neutral) to our political system, to the West.

This way of thinking is naïve in the extreme. In no culture ever have people have been whipped or bullied into submission. It's never happened. There have been events where this type of behavior between cultures escalated to the point where one side essentially annihilated the other, or demonstrated its willingness to do so — but I don't think anyone's advocating that America or the West exterminate the populations of nations where significant portions of the population hate us, replacing those populations with American or European settlers. Even if this were practical or possible, the act itself would damn us more completely than our lazy and casual large-scale murder campaigns have over the last decade.

So why are we staying in Afghanistan? Only the most tortured, rhetorically disingenuous flip-flopper could contort our accomplishments in that war-torn land to the point where our continued presence makes any kind of sense for our strategic interests, or those of our European allies. Saying that "The Afghans" want us there is similarly misguided — the product of deeply blinkered reports from Kabul and Mazir-e-Sharif, or the product of those think-tank and consulting groups whose diseased minds were responsible for getting us into that mess

in the first place.

And if it feels like what we're doing in staying is "stabilizing" Afghanistan, take a look at SIGAR's website. If stability is demonstrating to the Afghan people and the rest of the world that we can't manage tens of billions of dollars on boondoggles and graft, then, yes, we've achieved a ton of stability in Afghanistan recently.

But if not — if we haven't actually stabilized the country — if what we've done instead is committed ourselves to a longer, more explosive slide into violence than anything we've seen in the Middle East so far — if staying in Afghanistan is just deferring the inevitable, as well as adding to an expense bill we can scarce afford at home — well, then why are we doing it? Is this actually the best idea we have, the status quo? Are we so bankrupt of creativity and intellectual power that we're just kind of riding it out, seeing what happens? This is the worst type of intellectual dishonesty, and Potemkin governance. But it's what we expect from ourselves —no surprise it's what we expect from others. If only the populations of these other countries would cooperate with us, instead of hating us.