

# COMMAND GUIDANCE

By Paul Avalone

## Wasting Money In Afghanistan?

"What good is America doing here?" I'd often ask myself during my Special Forces A-Team's recent extended deployment in Afghanistan. My team's mission was uncomplicated: to prevent the Taliban and al-Qaeda from re-establishing themselves in the country. It was America's overall goals and



the possibility of achieving them that I questioned. Just how willing should we American taxpayers be to spend countless billions of our dollars on a changeless, hopeless country that we never gave much of a hoot about before 9-11?

There is no question that we had the right and imperative to attack Afghanistan in October 2001 when the Taliban leadership refused to turn over Osama and his buddies. Lickety-split, we occupied the country, with remnants of the defeated terrorists finding safe haven in Pakistan.

The thrashing was two years ago, and we still have 8,000-plus troops in Afghanistan (and 2,000 more in support in Uzbekistan) at an occupation cost of nearly a *billion dollars* a month. Nation-building, we are told, is the justification, thus creating a stable, free society in which terrorists would not be welcomed or sponsored.

First, it might be just a bit presump-

tuous of us to believe that we can build a nation where, instead of there being a tight weave of a united populace, there has always been a loose scattering of feudal warlord-ruled tribes whom we clump together as a country more for geography and culture than for nationalism.

Second, it might be even more presumptuous of us to assume that we can make democratic freedom flower where for two thousand years the people have never shown an inclination themselves to plow that ground and sow those seeds.

It makes me wonder if the academic and bureaucratic hacks who sold our political and military leaders on this pipe-dream concept of nation-building and freedom-farming weren't packing their pipes with hallucinogenic Afghani hashish. What they've left out of the equation is the concept's fatal flaw: the Afghan culture itself.

I cannot imagine how we can build a nation in a culture of disparate tribes who disdain one another and unite only to expel pesky invaders, like the British and Russians. American troops and money (millions in bribes to the war-

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lords) may get the tribes to sit down together today and share *chy* (tea), but don't bet on the warlords holding hands and singing "We Are The World." Rest assured, when the troops leave and the money dries up, the tribes will be sharing hot lead and exploding RPGs, not chy.

As for our peddling freedom, that's going to be a tough sell in a culture in which the male adheres strictly to his perceived Koran-dictated two-females-equals-one-male subjugation of women. Women in Afghanistan share none of the physical or social liberties of men. They participate in daily life as family members only, and then only as the bearers. They bear the children, bear the firewood, bear the water and bear the entire physical burden of the household. They are but blue-burka-clad forms who cast no shadows while passing. One does not talk to them. One does not even acknowledge their existence with a glance. Forget the hyped-up media tales of the rare Kabul women allowed to speak in public and wear Western clothes; the majority of Afghan

women have less freedom and less dignity today than a black slave in 1800s' America. A teammate of mine summed it up perfectly when he noted that he "would rather be a dog in America than a woman in Afghanistan."

As ugly as that sounds, it is something we should not ignore, as our leaders, having established a hands-off policy toward all things religious in Afghanistan, do not demand cultural change of the Afghans. Do we really want to continue pouring billions of dollars into a culture that sanctions and promotes such an abhorrent treatment of women?

Perhaps none of it matters, not the nation-building nor the freedom-farming. Some of my teammates used to speculate that America is in Afghanistan only to secure the territory for an eventual pipeline from oil-rich Kazakhstan to the Indian Ocean. That hardly seems cost-effective.

More likely, our prolonged occupation and extravagant spending is nothing more than was my team's mission: to prevent the terrorists from returning.

In that case, there's even more reason we should pull out. Right now, the Taliban and al-Qaeda, covertly protected by our supposed allies in Pakistan,

are effectively out of our reach there. Let them mistakenly return to an American-free Afghanistan, and we can cruise-missile them to smithereens, backed up with quick-insertion, lethal Special Forces teams. A day, two days, a week, and we're done. Every year or so, as needed, repeat the instant cleansing.

That may not be the feel-good, nice-guy way of international relations, but it sure would be a lot cheaper. Why dump billions of dollars attempting to create a free nation in a culture that is neither inclined nor open to one? Should we do the same for the dozens of other countries which could rightfully demand equal attention? At what cost?

Better that we should judge the Afghans for who they are and relinquish the nice-guy posturing, folding-up our tents and giving the Afghans the freedom to make of their country what they will, with the not-very-nice-guy warning: We'll pop in with force as we see fit. After all, no matter how naïve, forgiving and generous we Americans are, by nature and practice, few around the world think we're nice guys anyway.

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