



Dimensions

❖ JOYCE S. ANDERSON Special to the Jewish Times

The Afghanistan Dilemma: Part II

President Barack Obama responded to questions about troop levels in Afghanistan on September 16, “My determination is to get this right. There is no immediate decision pending on resources, because one of the things I’m absolutely clear about is you have to get the strategy right.” Despite pressure from different parts of the political spectrum, he is pursuing a deliberate process of careful analysis before making a decision on the role we will play in Afghanistan’s future. This may be the most important decision he will make in his young presidency.

The Afghanistan War, begun in October 2001 by George Bush, has become Obama’s War. The original mission was to capture Osama Bin-Laden, “dead or alive,” to destroy al-Qaeda, and to drive the Taliban out of the country. After eight years, Bin-Laden and al-Qaeda remain at large in the mountainous border areas of Pakistan. The Taliban, subdued initially, have returned with a vengeance in the

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southern and eastern regions of the country. In March, President Obama declared the Afghan war a “war of necessity” and sent 21,000 additional troops, raising the level to 68,000 troops. His rationale was to protect civilians and maintain a level of security and stability for the national

elections to take place on August 20. However, the re-election of President Hamid Karzai was marred by rampant charges of fraud leading to on-going investigations. The Karzai government is recognized as corrupt and ineffective in meeting the needs of the Afghan people. His re-election promises more of the same.

President Obama is wise in taking his time to make his second major decision on Afghanistan. The past two months have been the deadliest for our military since the war began. The Taliban are skillful and wily fighters, with roadside bombs taking a steady toll. Total casualties are over 756 dead and 2,379 wounded. On September 28, General Stanley McChrystal, commander in Afghanistan, submitted a troop request to the Pentagon that offered a range of options. These include: increasing troop levels by as many as 40,000; increases of lower numbers of troops, and a proposal to redeploy troops already there from the rural areas to the urban centers at Kabul and Kandahar.

McChrystal has challenged his commanders on the ground to measure the effectiveness of their troops in the anti-Taliban effort. Called “force optimization,” he charged them with finding 10 percent savings in troop numbers not organized as efficiently as possible. The purpose would be to reassign them to protect urban centers, train Afghan security forces and guard against roadside bombs. In his overall troop request, General McChrystal has presented different levels of troops with different goals and different risks over 12 to 18 months. Senior Pentagon officials said the troop efficiency study would provide guidance on redeploying or replacing forces while staying under the 68,000 level. One administration official described the 40,000 number as “we’re in this to win.”

Other advisers do not see the future in Afghanistan as “winning or losing.” They heard the message from the Taliban leader, Mullah Oman on September 20, who warned that the United States and NATO should study Afghanistan’s long history of war with foreign forces. He began with the Pashtun tribesmen stopping Alexander the Great and continued, “We would like to point out that we fought against the British invaders for 80 years from 1839 to 1919 and ultimately got independence. Today we have strong determination, military training and effective weapons. Still more we have preparedness for a long war and the regional situation is in our favor. Therefore, we will continue to wage jihad until we gain independence and force the invaders to pull out.”

As President Obama reevaluates the goals he set in March and weighs the options set forth by General McChrystal and other top generals in the military, he is also listening to opinions and advice from Vice President Joe Biden, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton,

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Jimmy Carter’s Price Tag

By Rabbi Shmuley Boteach
Special to the Jewish Times

You’ve got to hand it to Jimmy Carter. No matter how wrong he is, no matter how many times he is refuted, no matter how inane his ramblings, he just keeps on coming back. Forget that he was eviscerated in a landslide election. And forget that historians and the public rate him as the worst president of all time. Carter doesn’t seem to have gotten the message. We’re stuck with him forever.

Most recently Carter shared the penetrating insight that opposition to President Barack Obama is fueled by racism. Obama himself disagreed. More importantly, Obama’s biggest critics like him a lot more than the ex-president, even though Jimmy is a white man.

But leaving aside those inconvenient facts, it seems incredible that Carter would accuse Obama’s critics of racism when Carter is widely perceived to be an anti-Semite. His non-stop criticism of Israel as an apartheid state and his refusal to acknowledge Israel’s right to defend itself has confirmed in the minds of many that Carter has a bit of a problem with the Jewish state.

But I for one have never bought it.

Carter, I have argued, is not so much an anti-Semite as he is what Lenin famously called, ‘a useful idiot,’ his mistake being to always side with the weaker party, notwithstanding their immorality. Let us never forget that the Carter administration tried to view the Khmer Rouge as the rightful government of Cambodia even though they slaughtered one out of three Cambodians. For Carter, weakness is itself a sign of righteousness.

I GREW up in the United States during the 1970s when we danced to disco music, wore leisure suits, and watched The Brady Bunch. But as if that weren’t torture enough, we had Jimmy Carter as president. I can still recall how depressing it was to

watch him announcing one catastrophe after another, from the skyrocketing misery index to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, to the capture of our hostages in Iran, to the tragically botched rescue attempt to free them. Fortune did not smile on Jimmy Carter.

But Carter’s biggest failing is that he’s without a moral compass. To be sure, his heart wishes to do good. It’s just that his head is often confused as to what the good is. Throughout his career he invariably defended tyrants and dictators at the expense of their oppressed peoples, not because he was insensitive, but rather because he was confused.

Carter always subscribed to what my friend Michael Scroccaro calls “Underdogma” – a knee-jerk championing of the underdog, however immoral, as if poverty dictates virtue and weakness dictates righteousness. So, if the Israelis have jetfighters and the Palestinians only Kassams, that must mean the Israelis are the guilty party.

Carter’s underdog obsession is what motivated him to legitimize Fidel Castro and take his side in a bio-weapons dispute with the United States, and to praise North Korean dictator Kim Il Sung with the words: “I find him to be vigorous, intelligent,... and in charge of the decisions about this country.” Carter added absurdly: “I don’t see that they [the North Koreans] are an outlaw nation.” He also hailed Marshal Joseph Tito as “a man who believes in human rights,” and said of murderous Romanian dictator Nicolas Ceausescu, “Our goals are the same: to have a just system of economics and politics... We believe in enhancing human rights.”



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