

Out Now

by Shoshana Bryen

The aftermath of the American disposal of Korans mutilated by Afghan Muslims requires revisiting our position in Afghanistan. Not because Americans were killed by their Afghan "partners." Not because dozens of Afghans have died in rioting as well, or because the UN evacuated its northern offices. Not even because Hamid Karzai called for "[punishment and an investigation](#)" in that order.

U.S. policy in the Middle East/South Asia region revolves around certain fixed principles. Not democracy, free enterprise and civic tolerance, but aid – economic assistance plus military aid and training, and/or military intervention. It is the entire American enterprise that requires review.

We've trained Egyptians, Yemenis, Jordanians, Saudis, Kuwaitis, Bahrainis, Palestinians, Iraqis and Afghans. We've given security assistance to Yemen, Lebanon, Jordan, the Palestinians, Egypt, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq. (Yemen violates the Child Soldiers Prevention Act, which should make it ineligible, but the Obama administration requested a waiver.) We've spent untold billions on military training for people who already know how to kill, apparently thinking we can get them to kill the people we want dead.

We trained Palestinian security forces so they would kill Hamas and other "terrorists" to make it safe for Israel to cede territory. Lebanese security forces are supposed to kill Hezbollah; Iraqi security forces are supposed to protect the state, but the government has a fluid enemies list; Pakistanis are supposed to kill Taliban, Haqqani network and al-Qaeda; Afghan forces were supposed to kill Taliban, but now that we're talking to the Taliban, perhaps we'd better re-program them to kill someone else.

Rarely do we ask, "What if they'd rather kill somebody else?"

Palestinian security forces used our training and equipment against Israel. The so-called "second intifada," actually started with the murder of an Israeli soldier by his Palestinian security force "partner." The last time the Lebanese Armed Forces fired a bullet in Southern Lebanon it wasn't at Hezbollah, it was across the border into Israel, killing one IDF officer and wounding another. Who is killing Sunnis in Iraq? In Pakistan this week, [four buses](#) were stopped by men in army uniforms who took the Shiite men off and killed 18 of them. The four American soldiers killed by Afghans were not the first killed by those with whom they are supposed to partner.

Druze living on Israel's Golan Heights protest Israeli authority when they believe there is a chance that Israel might cede the Golan to Syria and their loyalties under "occupation" will be questioned. A little rioting here and there burnishes their pro-Syrian *bona fides*. The U.S. has entered negotiations with the Taliban and the Afghan army understands that their enemy – who used to be our enemy as well – is being invited into an arrangement with the Karzai government that will last no longer than the American mission in their country. It isn't hard to imagine soldiers believing they had better burnish their anti-American *bona fides*.

Economic assistance in many cases is tied to behaviors and policies we would like others to adopt. The U.S. is planning to throw \$513 million dollars at the Palestinian Authority (PA) this year, plus \$113 million for security assistance, hoping it will make peace with Israel. Removing parts of the economic embargo against Syria in 2009/10 was supposed to encourage Bashar al-Asad's reformist

tendencies. Libya came off the terrorism-support list in 2006. Pakistan and Afghanistan have swallowed billions since September 11th with not much to show for it.

Egypt and Jordan have received more billions over the years to maintain a peace treaty with Israel that is entirely in their interest to maintain with or without our money. Jordan is shaky, and our 40-year relationship with Egypt's military is disintegrating. Money that was once a "thank you" for signing the peace treaty is now demanded as extortion to keep it. Perhaps the Egyptian military is burnishing its anti-American *bona fides* in the face of a newly elected Muslim Brotherhood and Salafist-dominated parliament.

When we can't get others to do what we want or kill whom we want killed, the U.S. has to decide whether/when/how to use American military force.

The president said he wasn't going to wait for mass graves in oil-rich and pro-Western Libya as he deployed our military to support an unknown gaggle of revolutionaries, including some with al-Qaeda credentials. The mission had the consent of the UN and the Arab League, but not the U.S. Congress. With 7,500 deaths in oil-poor, Russian-allied Syria, the U.S. is adamant that our troops won't help and worries that the Syrian National Council isn't democratic and inclusive.

Slightly farther south, in Africa, our trainers are in Uganda and are going to be deployed to the Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic and South Sudan. Democratic Republic of Congo violates the Child Soldiers Prevention Act, as does Sudan. Are these people whose values and interests are coincident with ours? Can we win their war?

These, in the end, are the questions in Afghanistan.

Between the September 11th attacks and 30 August 2011, more than 2.3 million American military personnel were deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan or both. Hundreds of thousands more served rotations in support countries that are not always friendly. If America's regional posture – training, arms, money and troops – is not making our citizens and our allies safe, it is time to bring the troops home.

It is surely time to bring the troops home from Afghanistan and build a policy for the Middle East/South Asia that does not rely on the fantasy of people with entirely different interests, values and priorities doing what we would have them do. We cannot win their wars, and they certainly don't seem inclined to fight ours.