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OPINION | OUR VIEW

Is The End Nearing In Afghanistan?

Is the end near for U.S. involvement in Afghanistan? That question, which might have seemed more like a dream just a few years ago, may be nearer to reality now than at any point since the U.S. first sent troops into that country in late 2001.

On Monday, the New York Times reported that the United States is pondering a speed-up of its withdrawal of troops on the ground in Afghanistan. There has long been a timetable for removing the bulk of the troops by the end of 2014, although with the possibility being discussed to leave a residual force behind to bolster the Kabul government.

But that perception may be changing — in large part because the muddled, knotty, distrustful political atmosphere that exists in this long-running conflict.

And ultimately, it may serve as a means to an overdue end — as in an end to our war in Afghanistan.

According to the Times, this possible shift in course is due to continually deteriorating relations between Washington and Kabul. President Obama has grown “increasingly frustrated,” as Reuters reported, with Afghan President Hamid Karzai, who has a history of alternately praising and condemning America’s presence in his country when the mood and/or the need suit him.

But the video conference collapse, U.S. officials have reportedly elevated the so-called “zero option” — that is, leaving zero troops in Afghanistan after 2014 — from highly unlikely to at least somewhat possible.

This prospect is a significant change from the rhetoric of a few years ago, when some analysts were predicting that America would likely have a presence in Afghanistan for decades.

Currently, the U.S. is on track to draw down its troop levels from 63,000 to 34,000 by next February, and then wind down from there.

If the U.S. does opt to completely pull out of Afghanistan next year, we wouldn’t shed tears over it.

The question of why we are still in that nation — more than two years after the death of Osama bin Laden and almost 13 years after we went into that nation following 9/11 — nags at us more and more. Our presence there has become increasingly more difficult to justify. We are surrounded there by allies that cannot be trusted, by a populace that is reportedly growing more resentful of our being there (the drone program has fueled this), and we are left to pursue an objective that can never truly be achieved for the long term.

It’s time to leave Afghanistan. It’s time to let the Afghans and the neighboring Pakistanis deal with their own troubles on their own terms.

This clearly wasn’t the way we envisioned the end of the Afghanistan war, but perhaps it’s an opportunity. The frustrations felt in Washington may well be a message that should be heeded.

After all these years, all the casualties, all the political variables and all the frustration, the “zero option” deserves genuine consideration. It’s time to find the end of the tunnel. Let’s hope this is the beginning of that end.

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ON THIS DATE

By The Associated Press
Today is Wednesday, July 10, the 191st day of 2013. There are 174 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On July 10, 1913, the highest recorded shade temperature was measured in Death Valley, Calif., at 134 degrees Fahrenheit (56.7 degrees Celsius). (Previously, the highest recorded shade temperature in the world, 136.4 degrees Fahrenheit, 58 Celsius, was said to have occurred in 1922 in present-day Libya, but the accuracy of that reading was disputed in 2012 by the World Meteorological Organization.)

On this date: In 1509, theologian John Calvin, a key figure of the Protestant Reformation, was born in Noyon, Picardy, France.

In 1890, Wyoming became the 44th state.

In 1919, President Woodrow Wilson personally delivered the Treaty of Versailles to the Senate, and urged its ratification. (However, the Senate rejected it.)

In 1925, jury selection took place in Dayton, Tenn., in the trial of John T. Scopes, charged with violating the law by teaching Darwin’s Theory of Evolution. (Scopes was convicted and fined, but the verdict was overturned on a technicality.)

In 1929, American paper currency was reduced in size as the government began issuing bills that were approximately 25 percent smaller.

In 1940, during World War II, the Battle of Britain began as Nazi forces began attacking southern England by air. (The Royal Air Force was ultimately victorious.)

In 1951, armistice talks aimed at ending the Korean War began at Kaesong.

In 1962, AT&T’s Telstar 1 communications satellite, capable of relaying television signals and telephone calls, was launched by NASA from Cape Canaveral.

In 1973, the Bahamas became fully independent after three centuries of British colonial rule. John Paul Getty III, the teenage grandson of the oil tycoon, was abducted in Rome by kidnapers who cut off his ear when his family was slow to meet their ransom demands; young Getty was finally released in December 1973 in exchange for nearly \$3 million.

In 1978, ABC-TV launched its reformatted evening newscast, “World News Tonight,” with anchors Frank Reynolds, Peter Jennings and Max Robinson.

In 1985, the Greenpeace protest ship Rainbow Warrior was sunk with explosives in Auckland, New Zealand by French intelligence agents; one activist was killed. Bowing to pressure from irate customers, the Coca-Cola Co. said it would resume selling old-formula Coke, while continuing to sell New Coke.

In 1991, Boris N. Yeltsin took the oath of office as the first elected president of the Russian republic. President George H.W. Bush lifted economic sanctions against South Africa.

Ten years ago: During a visit to Botswana, President George W. Bush pledged to the nation with what was

then the world’s highest AIDS infection rate that it would have a strong partner in his administration in fighting the disease. Spain opened its first mosque in 500 years. Astronomers announced they had found the oldest and most distant planet yet, a huge, gaseous sphere 13 billion years old and 5,600 light years away. Lord Shawcross, Britain’s chief prosecutor at the Nazi war crimes trials in Nuremberg, died in Cowbeech, England, at age 101.

Five years ago: President George W. Bush signed a bill overhauling rules about government eavesdropping and granting immunity to telecommunications companies that helped the U.S. spy on Americans in suspected terrorism cases. The Senate handily confirmed Gen. David Petraeus as the top commander in the Middle East. Former White House adviser Karl Rove defied a congressional subpoena, refusing to testify about allegations of political pressure at the Justice Department.

One year ago: Clashing over the economy, President Barack Obama challenged Mitt Romney to join him in allowing tax hikes for rich Americans like them; Romney dismissed the idea and redirected charges that he had sent jobs overseas when he worked in private equity, calling Obama the real “outsourcer-in-chief.” An Israeli court cleared former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of the central charges in a multi-case corruption trial that forced him from power, but convicted him of a lesser charge of breach of trust, for which Olmert received a suspended one-year jail sentence. The National League romped to an 8-0 victory over the American League in the All-Star game.

Today's Birthdays: Former boxer Jake LaMotta is 92. Writer-producer Earl Hamner Jr. is 90. Former New York City Mayor David N. Dinkins is 86. Actor William Smithers is 86. Broadway composer Jerry Herman is 82. Director Ivan Passer is 80. Actor Lawrence Pressman is 74. Singer Mavis Staples is 74. Actor Mills Watson is 73. Actor Robert Pine is 72. Rock musician Jerry Miller (Moby Grape) is 70. International Tennis Hall of Famer Virginia Wade is 68. Actor Ron Glass is 68. Actress Sue Lyon is 67. Folk singer Arlo Guthrie is 66. Rock musician Dave Smallley is 64. Country-folk singer-songwriter Cheryl Wheeler is 62. Rock singer Neil Tennant (Pet Shop Boys) is 59. Banjo player Bela Fleck is 55. Country musician Shaw Wilson (BR549) is 53. Country singer-songwriter Ken Mellons is 48. Rock musician Peter Dinklage (Porno for Pyros) is 48. Actor Gale Harold is 44. Country singer Gary LeVox (Rascal Flatts) is 43. Actor Aaron D. Spears is 42. Actress Sofia Vergara is 41. Rockabilly singer Imelda May is 39. Actor Adrian Grenier is 37. Actress Gwendoline Yeo is 36. Actor Thomas Ian Nicholas is 33. Singer-actress Jessica Simpson is 33. Rock musician John Spiker is 32. Actress Heather Hemmens is 29.

Thought for Today: "When I feel the heat, I see the light." — Everett Dirksen, American politician (1896-1969).

FROM THE BIBLE

Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Revelation 2:10. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis



To Serve Society

BY ROBERT B. REICH
Tribune Media Services

The 19 firefighters who died battling a huge wildfire near Prescott, Ariz., presumably were motivated by something other than rational self-interest. Like the first responders to 9/11 and other emergencies, and members of the armed forces, those firefighters put themselves in harm’s way (or chose a job that did so) because they wanted to serve.



Robert REICH

Economics, and much of public policy and political strategy, assume that people are motivated by self-interest, that the definition of acting rationally is to maximize what you want for yourself, and that other values — service, duty, allegiance to others, morality and shared ideals — are either irrelevant or negligible.

Ayn Rand, the philosophical guru of modern conservatism, popularized this view of human nature. In her world, selfishness is the only honest and justifiable motive. By looking out for Number One, we accomplish everything that’s necessary. Economist Milton Friedman extended the logic: The magic of the marketplace can be relied on to allocate resources to their highest and best uses. Anything “public” is suspect.

The titans of Wall Street and the CEOs of our major corporations have put this narrow principle into everyday practice. In their view, the aggregation of great wealth and maximization of profit is the only justifiable motive. Greed is good. Eight-figure compensation packages are their due. People are paid according to their economic worth.

This cramped perspective misses what’s most important. Shared values are the essence of a society. They fuel not only acts of valor, such as those of these 19 young firefighters, but also motivate people to become teachers and social workers, police officers and soldiers, librarians and city councilors.

And they generate social movements — abolition, women’s suffrage, civil rights, environmental protection.

Shared values even determine how the economic game itself is played. We decide through our elected representa-

tives and the courts what can or cannot be owned (not the human genome or slaves, for example), what should or should not be bought and sold (not votes or heroin), and what should be freely accessible to everyone (schools, clean air).

Empirical evidence shows that most people sacrifice their own comfort or convenience for what they consider to be shared values. They’re motivated by compassion, empathy, loyalty and duty. They offer their seat on a crowded bus to an elderly person or a pregnant woman. They volunteer their time and money to a charity. They help someone in distress. They take an active role in their community.

And contrary to much conventional political wisdom, most people don’t vote according to their narrow self-interests. They vote according to their values — what they believe is good, right and fair. Wealthy urban voters are more likely to support strong safety nets, for example, than middle-class rural voters. Most Americans, of whatever class or political persuasion, believe that everyone should have a chance to make the most of themselves, and that someone who works full time should be paid enough to lift herself and her children out of poverty.

What, after all, is patriotism other than a willingness to sacrifice for the common good? The first word in the Constitution of the United States isn’t “I.” It’s “We.” “We the People of the United States” join together.

When arguing against paying their fair share of taxes, some wealthy Americans claim “it’s my money.” They forget it’s their nation, too. And unless they pay their fair share of taxes, America can’t meet the basic needs of our people. True patriotism means paying for America.

Most human beings want to be part of something larger than themselves. They crave moral purpose and social solidarity.

If we overlook this, we fail to understand the means and meaning of social progress.

Robert Reich, former U.S. Secretary of Labor, is professor of public policy at the University of California at Berkeley and the author of “Beyond Outrage,” now available in paperback. He blogs at www.robertreich.org.

If It Please The Public

BY KATHLEEN PARKER

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WASHINGTON — As a courtroom junkie since my early reporting days, it is at great personal sacrifice that I suggest the following: It may be time to get television cameras out of the courtroom.

Or at least, judges might be encouraged to exclude electronic media from high-profile trials.

The excessive coverage and commentary we’ve watched in recent years may be good theater but bad for justice. Most recently, we’ve been witness to the carnival trial of George Zimmerman, charged in the fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin. We’ve seen the families; we’ve met neighbors and friends; and we’ve heard the screaming on the recorded 911 call.



Kathleen PARKER

I have written about all of the above, true. But here’s the difference. If I were sitting in the courtroom with pad and pen, no one would notice or care. The pen may be mightier than the sword — and a picture may be worth a thousand words — but video cameras alter reality. By their very presence, they change the people and events they seek to capture. And, just to keep those cliches rolling, though seeing is believing, what we project for others to see is influenced and reality, therefore, is altered by the fact that a camera is recording that projection.

We’ve always known this on some abstract level, but our curiosity — and, ostensibly, our mighty respect for the public’s right to know — has clouded our judgment. There may be no way to quantitatively prove that cameras influence courtroom behavior and, possibly, a trial’s outcome. But anyone who has ever sat in front of a camera knows that it is so.

Meanwhile, the notion of the public’s right to know every detail of what is essentially a show trial suffers a paucity of veracity. If our concern were truly to better understand the machinations of the judicial system, as some have argued, we would record and broadcast all trial proceedings rather than only the ones that involve key elements of modern tabloid storytelling, namely sex, drugs, rock ‘n’ roll — and race.

The Zimmerman trial is riveting not because two men got in a scuffle and one of them died. It isn’t even that one was a teenager and the other an adult armed with a gun. It is that one was black, the supposed victim of a profiling vigilante, and the other white.

Voila: We have a potboiler.

YOUR LETTERS

Points Of View

Tim Hovden, Yankton

This letter is in response to a supposedly educated journalist, Kelly Hertz. Your opinion in “A Downtown Sound” (Press & Dakotan, July 5) really baffles me. In a land of freedoms, one such freedom being free speech, you say you “don’t understand” how anyone cannot be in tune with your opinion. Really?

To me, and this is in your own words, it is “a

quandary” seeing as how everyone has a right to their own opinion, and their own thoughts in this free country.

What bothers me the most is the fact that this is the state of journalism in this country. Either agree with me or there is something wrong with you.

Mr. Hertz, your opinion is not the only one there is to be heard. A supposedly educated journalist such as yourself should not be surprised by this fact. Why are you?

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