

Title:

Why We're Not Winning The "War Against Terror"

Word Count:

846

Summary:

Few people understand why it is inevitable that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan will not end in victory for the United States of America and Britain.

I'm not a journalist, but I did fight as a soldier in one war against insurgents; and - in another civil war - my business suffered devastating losses when caught-up between the two factions. In both these wars, I witnessed the suffering of neutral civilians. Because I was intimately and personally involved in these two wars...

Keywords:

war,terrorism,Zimbabwe,Rhodesia,Iraq,Afghanistan

Article Body:

Few people understand why it is inevitable that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan will not end in victory for the United States of America and Britain.

I'm not a journalist, but I did fight as a soldier in one war against insurgents; and - in another civil war - my business suffered devastating losses when caught-up between the two factions. In both these wars, I witnessed the suffering of neutral civilians. Because I was intimately and personally involved in these two wars - not just as an observer - I believe I am especially qualified to explain in down-to-earth terms what is going wrong with the Afghanistan and Iraq wars today.

Both these past wars were lost to the 'terrorists', and I see chilling similarities in what happened back then to what is happening in Afghanistan and Iraq today. When you're out there; patrolling, and winning scrappy, bloody little battles on the ground, or managing the war politically or militarily - you just don't appreciate why the war isn't coming to an end. Casting my mind back, and comparing what happened then to what's happening today, why it's all going wrong becomes clear.

AFGHANISTAN

Throughout the war on terror I fought in - more than thirty years ago - we

soldiers never lost a fight against the insurgents. It was mainly a rural war, similar to the one in Afghanistan; we soldiers patrolled the countryside, visiting villages and small towns. We sought to provide the country-folk with protection from terrorists; often sharing food and drink while we spoke with the village elders. "Hearts and minds" work; sometimes providing agricultural advice and medical assistance.

But after these friendly exchanges, our patrols had to move on - we couldn't be everywhere, all the time. We based up nearby for the night, or returned by helicopter or truck to our secure main camp. When our tour of duty in the operational area ended, we'd journey home for 'R&R'; rest, recreation and retraining. We knew we had the measure of them, and thought we were winning...

But the villagers we'd exchanged those greetings with; advised and helped when we were visiting, were left alone to face the consequences of their friendliness towards us - the enemy of the insurgents. Village elders would be accused and found guilty of being "sellouts" (I don't know what the term is in Afghanistan). They'd be tortured and/or killed, sometimes in the presence of the village population. Even if the terrorists didn't come round to the village for weeks or months after we soldiers had visited, there might be some disaffected villager who denounced the sellouts when the terrorists eventually turned up. This war went on for fifteen long years.

How can we expect to hold the "hearts and minds" of these people? We arrive, we're friendly and helpful... and then we go back to the safety of our camps or bases while they're left to suffer the fallout. It didn't work back then in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and it isn't working now in Afghanistan.

IRAQ

I witnessed another - this time urban - battle for hearts and minds. Because it seems to me that it's largely an urban fight, the Iraq war makes me think of this other 'struggle' that occurred over twenty years ago. It was lost comparatively quickly - just a matter of a few years - and the authorities; soldiers, policemen and politicians never got properly to grips with it... They couldn't face the media and the political consequences of an all-out battle with the insurgents and their supporters.

The insurgents quickly took control of the urban areas where their supporters lived - reducing the police and soldiers who were loyal to the legitimate government to token armed patrols through the streets; sometimes never even leaving the safety of their armoured vehicles, except for raids on suspected terrorist bases. The terrorists soon established themselves as the 'authority'

and the legitimate policemen became, in the eyes of the population, the insurgents! For example, terrorists destroyed all previous road signs and replaced them with their own makeshift ones. The new 'authorities' established their own "tax" systems. Shopkeepers who were seen to have been loyal to the old authorities or system had their businesses destroyed and were often beaten up or killed by the new 'authorities' after being tried by a 'people's court'.

The legitimate authorities were rendered useless after they were unable to protect the people in their homes. Why? - Because they were not a part of the population they were trying to protect. They patrolled the streets and then went back to the security of their bases and homes - away from the population they were meant to protect.

I repeat. How can we expect to win and retain the "hearts and minds" of these people? We arrive, we're friendly and helpful... and then we go back to the safety of our camps or bases while they're left to suffer the fallout. It didn't work then and it isn't working now.