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More Leftie Foolishness on Afghanistan

by Michael Sean Winters

Distinctly Catholic

Eugene Robinson of the *Washington Post* is not usually wrong, but when he is wrong, he is fabulously wrong. Writing about the release of documents related to the Afghan War, Robinson wrote, "We are wading deeper into a long-running conflict that has virtually no chance of ending well." The problem with this sentence is that it is factually correct while being morally insane.

I agree that ours is a "long-running conflict" but it did not begin when the 101st Airborne landed in northern Afghanistan to oust the Taliban. It began on an otherwise beautiful September morning when terrorists based in Afghanistan attacked lower Manhattan. We are not wading into this conflict; it was brought to us.

I agree that the war in Afghanistan "has virtually no chance of ending well." But, that has to do with the tenacity and brutality of the enemy, their connections to the Pakistani intelligence forces, and the historical, tribal realities of Afghan culture. It does not absolve us of the obligation to fight that enemy to whatever unsatisfying result might make it less likely that there will be a repeat of 9/11. We still keep 30,000 troops in South Korea to avoid a repeat of another war that ended in an unsatisfactory way. Indeed, how many troops are still in Western Europe because of the political and moral ambiguities that attended the end of World War II. WWII? Nothing morally ambiguous about that war, right? In order to defeat the greatest devil of the 20th century, we allied ourselves with and, per force, permitted the 2nd greatest devil of the 20th century to conquer half of Europe. I am not complaining about Yalta, I am pointing out that wars, even "successful wars," even just wars, do not necessarily end well. And, of course, the war in Vietnam, which also had no prospect of ending well, ended very badly as millions of Southeast Asians were killed by the murderous regimes in Cambodia and Vietnam.

Robinson's conclusion follows his lede: "The [Wikileaks] documents illustrate how futile " and tragically

wasteful ? it is to send more young men and women to fight and die in Afghanistan.? War is always wasteful and always tragic, but it is not always futile. If we keep the North Koreans within their borders, the time and treasure expended there today ? and in the early 1950s ? is not futile. Insofar as U.S. troops kept the Soviets from over-running Berlin or Austria or Italy, that was an effort that was not futile. If we keep the Taliban on the run in Afghanistan and so prevent them from planning another attack on the United States, the effort to keep them on the run will entail tragedy but it is not futile.

Statesmen are called upon to make such painful moral calculations when they decide that the safety of the nation requires that troops be sent into harm?s way. And, President Obama had the unenviable task of inheriting a necessary war that had been mismanaged by neglect for seven years because his predecessor pursued an unnecessary war in Iraq. But, Robinson seems to think there is some neat or at least un-futile way to conduct foreign affairs in a world where evil men wish to do us harm. Such thoughts are futile, not the effort to keep the terrorists who attacked America looking over their shoulders in distant mountains, far from our shores. As someone once said, ?Just because you left the movie, doesn?t mean the movie is over.? The struggle with evil thugs will not end just because we leave Afghanistan next year, or the year after.

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