

WHEN WILL THEY EVER LEARN?

By former U.S. Sen. Ernest F. "Fritz" Hollings (D-S.C.)

SEPT. 17, 2009 -- During the war in Vietnam, Peter, Paul and Mary sang a song that asked the question: "When will they ever learn?" Going to Vietnam in 1966, I was briefed by Cy Vance, Deputy Secretary of Defense. Vance cautioned that General Westmoreland would be asking for more troops. We were trying to secure Vietnam, a country of 16 million, with 535,000 troops and, sure enough, the first thing General Westmoreland asked for was 35,000 more troops. With 35,000 more troops, said Westmoreland, we'll have "Operation Meatgrinder" and bring this war to an end.

The strategy in Vietnam was to build and destroy -- never securing the country. And the measure of success was body count. Westmoreland was proud that we were killing 10 to 1 -- ten Vietnamese killed to one GI lost. We ended up with about 600,000 troops in Vietnam. Now in Afghanistan, we're trying to secure a country of 31 million with 64,500 troops -- and think that 20,000 more will do the job. It's the same strategy of build and destroy and body count, with GIs expendable. After eight years, we're now going to be more careful to kill less civilians. In short, GIs are expendable so long as we kill less civilians.

When will we ever learn that a majority of a country will sacrifice for a government other than democracy. Take a trip to Hanoi. The people are happy. You can walk around the streets at night with no concern for safety -- something you can't do in Washington, D.C. And when will we ever learn that you can't build and destroy at the same time. It's a flawed strategy. You must totally secure the

place -- "own it" as we said in World War II -- before you do anything; or today hold elections. After eight years the Afghan election is a fraud.

The Wall Street Journal headlines a: "Call for an Afghan surge." We paid 104,000 Sunnis \$150 a month to stop killing the Shiites in Iraq, calling them "The Awakening." It was more a surge of money than troops that helped in Iraq. We can't borrow enough money to make warlords like democracy and grow wheat instead of poppies. When will we ever learn that in the Muslim world, more important than freedom and democracy is tribe and religion.

In *Newsweek*, Jon Meacham states on Afghanistan: "But we are at war there because the aid and comfort Afghanistan gave Al Qaeda made the attacks of September 11 ... possible" The State Department showed that on 9/11, Al Qaeda was in forty-five countries around the world -- in the U. S., but not in Iraq. Those that ran the planes into the World Trade Towers and Pentagon trained in Phoenix, Florida, and Conway, South Carolina. They got more aid and comfort in the United States. Then Meacham writes: "The question is how we fight and whether we are willing to invest -- in time, treasure, and blood -- what it will take to reduce the likelihood that Afghanistan will again threaten our national security."

Afghanistan has never threatened the security of the United States. In fact, Afghanistan and the United States were allies in *Charlie Wilson's War* when we ousted the Russians. The Taliban that we are now trying to kill in Afghanistan were our friends. Meacham gets it right when

he states: “The logic: if the U. S. weren’t there, the Taliban wouldn’t be attacking.” Right! The Taliban are trying to rid their country of foreigners. Instead of eliminating terrorism in Afghanistan, we are creating terrorism. And asking GIs to die for it. When will we ever learn?

We’d better get out of the Afghan War and get into the trade war that this week’s *Business Week* reports “is chewing us alive.”

Globalization is nothing more than a trade war with production looking for a cheaper country to produce. After World War II Japan started this trade war by closing its domestic market, subsidizing its manufacture, and selling its subsidized export at cost making up the profit in its closed market. The trade war is primarily for market share not for profit. But Corporate America operating for profit is facing defeat. While GM goes bankrupt, Toyota is No. 1.

The lead article in this week’s *Time* finds that skills in the United States “are geared to a dying auto industry” and what we need to do is focus “on mastery of skills instead of simple button-pushing.” Nonsense! BMW has gone from 2,000 employees in South Carolina to 5,000, and the auto industry is busting out all over the South. We have skills. We need jobs. The desperate need is to have Congress do its job of regulating commerce as provided under Article I, Section 8, of the Constitution. But Congress has engaged in a quiet conspiracy with the financial interests. As long as we stay AWOL in the trade war, Wall Street, the big banks, the Business Roundtable, the National Retail Federation, and the United States Chamber of Commerce, will furnish the contributions for the campaigns for Congress.

The Paulson and Obama stimuluses were for the bonuses, bailouts and survival of the stock market – not the economy. The Dow is back to 10,000, and Bernanke announces the end of the recession and a jobless recovery. Job loss from the recession was minimal compared to job loss from the trade war. Long before the economic downturn, South Carolina had lost its textile industry, North Carolina its furniture industry and Michigan its automobile industry. You can produce for a profit in the United States, but not for long if you have competition from Chinese production. The CEO of Corporate America, working with Wall Street, has three years to get his stock up for his bonus and golden parachute. And Wall Street could care less about the United States economy. It thrives from profits – and most profits are to be made in the trade war off-shore.

So Wall Street calls for free trade and against protectionism so off-shored production can be dumped back into the United States and profits will flow to Wall Street. The Baucus plan on health care, with its taxes, savings from Medicare, and making insurance more expensive, could easily be foregone by eliminating the corporate income tax and replacing it with a 3% VAT to replace the revenues from corporate tax, 1% more to pay for health care, and an additional percent for a total 5% VAT to replace the corporate taxes, pay for health care, provide essentials for exemptions and paying down the debt. Then we could begin to fight in the trade war.

This simple substitute for the cost of health care reform wrangle in the Congress goes unmentioned – not suggested by a Congressman or Senator. They know where their bread is buttered. It’s the campaign, stupid – not the country. And as long as Congress calls

for “free trade,” “stay out of the trade war,” the contributions will continue, more jobs will be lost than could be

provided by any stimulus, and the economy be damned! When will they ever learn?

Senator Hollings of South Carolina served 38 years in the United States Senate, and for many years was Chairman of the Commerce, Space, Science & Transportation Committee. He is the author of the recently published book, [Making Government Work](#) (University of South Carolina Press, 2008).

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