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## Obama Haunted by Graveyard of Empires

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US President Barack Obama has little to cheer about during his annual Christmas vacation – just as America’s longest-ever overseas war – in Afghanistan – flares up with no end in sight, and possibly for even more years to come.

«*The war in Afghanistan follows Obama to his vacation in Hawaii*», was how the *Washington Post* described the despondent outlook for the US-backed regime in Kabul, increasingly assailed by Taliban militants. Fourteen years after going into Afghanistan to crush the radical Islamist Taliban and «install democracy», Washington’s «nation-building» project lies in abject ruins.

A year after the US-led NATO occupation of Afghanistan was officially wound down, it is reported that American and British Special Forces are being dispatched – again – to help prevent the Western-installed regime from falling to Taliban insurgents.

Six US soldiers were killed when a Taliban suicide bomber drove his motorcycle into their patrol near the giant military base at Bagram. The base at Bagram is the heart of US military operations in Afghanistan. In recent months even this supposedly secure zone has come under rocket attacks from the Taliban. The devastating blow to a US patrol outside the base only serves to underline how fragile the situation is for the entire country.



Poignantly, the US troop deaths come at a time that Obama had promised would mark the final drawdown of military operations in the country – more than 14 years after the US invaded Afghanistan back in October 2001.

Last December, Obama announced the official end of US combat operations in Afghanistan, along with supporting British and other NATO forces. This month was supposed to see a large cohort of the remaining 9,000 US troops being withdrawn, as NATO-trained Afghan soldiers and police under the control of President Ashraf Ghani were to take over all security responsibilities.

The remaining US troops are said to be in a «non-combat role» and are there, officially, to train and advise Afghan security forces. But that official «non-combat» designation will hardly make much sense to the American families of the six soldiers killed last week.

Due to the rapidly deteriorating security situation across Afghanistan amid a surge in Taliban advances over recent months, Washington is having to postpone its troop withdrawal until 2017 and possibly beyond. That's when Obama's second presidential term expires.

Afghanistan's southern province of Helmand is feared to be on the brink of Taliban military takeover, adding to gains already made by the militants in the west, north and east of the country. The beleaguered central government in Kabul propped up by Washington appears to be spinning out of control.

One Afghan provincial lawmaker quoted by the Guardian said that the entire Helmand province was «in danger of falling to the Taliban». She said: «If the British and American forces do not

*help... Helmand will be in danger».*

Obama was first elected in 2008 partly on the promise that he would end the Afghan war, which his predecessor George Bush had started, allegedly in response to the 9/11 terror attacks on New York and Washington DC in 2001. Two administrations later, Obama's promise looks pathetically far from being fulfilled. As with Iraq, Obama is sending troops back into the country, albeit on a much smaller scale than when the wars were officially on.

Whether officially «on» or «off», the facts on the ground are that America is very much still at war in both Afghanistan and Iraq, trying to shore up local governments that it installed but which are battling to contain the sectarian and tribal chaos that Washington unleashed by its unlawful interventions.

From a financial perspective, both wars are reckoned to have racked up \$6 trillion of the total US national debt of \$18-19 trillion, according to a Harvard University study. That's a third of the US' unsustainable debt pile, which is not only crippling the US economy, it is also attributed as a main cause of stagnation in the world economy.

But even more damaging to US global reputation is the horrendous loss of human life from wars that were illegal in the first place – and wars that are continuing with no end in sight because of Washington's geopolitical vandalism.

Moreover, the global contamination of extremism and terrorism from groups like Al-Nusra, Ahrar ash-Shams, the so-called Islamic State and Boko Haram can all be traced to the illegal US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Whatever moral authority the United States may once have projected to the rest of the world has been squandered. The world is no longer enthralled to the post-Second World War Pax Americana; it is appalled by it.

Geographically and climatically inhospitable, Afghanistan is not called the «graveyard of empires» by historians for nothing. In centuries past, the warrior tribal people of that remote country have laid waste to the military forces of Genghis Khan, Alexander the Great and the British Empire. Russia's decade-old war in Afghanistan (1979-1989) against Mujahideen – mobilized and weaponized by the American CIA it has to be said – is reckoned to have played a part in the demise of the Soviet Union.

Now it would appear to be America's turn for the graveyard, with rich irony and not a little poetic justice, given how it was Washington that laid the Afghan trap for the Soviet Union – or as former US planner Zbigniew Brzezinski reputedly once said «*to give the Soviets their Vietnam*».



The difference is that the US has aggravated the notorious traditional resistance of Afghanistan by having introduced new strains of terrorism into the country during the 1980s to fight against the Soviet Union. British military intelligence and Saudi oil money also had a hand in stirring the terror cauldron.

Those US-backed Mujahideen fighters are the precursors of today's Taliban, who are dragging Washington into a seemingly never-ending quagmire. And not only the Taliban but other Al-Qaeda-linked terror groups that spilled over from the Afghan terror cauldron, and who are running amok in the Middle East and in many parts of Africa.

Obama is not just being haunted by the graveyard of empires. America has dug its own grave.