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## America's Foreign Policy Fiasco

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US President Barack Obama is piling up the foreign policy disasters. In at least three areas crucial for world peace and US interests – Arab-Israel tensions, Afghanistan-Pakistan and Yemen-Somalia – he's pursuing a course that can only be described as foolhardy. Indeed, the anger and hate towards the United States that he's generating could take a generation to dispel.

Obama's abject surrender to Israel on the Palestine question has shocked much of the world and gravely damaged the United States' standing among Arabs and Muslims. In what is seen by many as an effort to court the Jewish vote at next year's presidential election, Obama has thrown into reverse the policy of outreach to the Muslim world that he expressed so eloquently in his [2009 Cairo speech](#). If he's now driven to use the US veto at the UN Security Council to block the [application of a Palestinian state for UN membership](#), he will have been defeated by the very forces of Islamophobia he once hoped to tame.

Obama's policy in Afghanistan is equally perverse. On the one hand, he seems to want to draw the Taliban into negotiations. But on the other, some of his army chiefs and senior diplomats apparently want to destroy the Taliban first. This is hardly a policy likely to bring the insurgents to the table. In an interview with the *Wall Street Journal*, Ryan Crocker, the new US ambassador to Kabul, actually said that the [conflict should continue](#) until more of the Taliban are killed. Who, one wonders, is in charge of US policy?

In a message on the occasion of the Eid at the end of Ramadan, Mullah Muhammad Omar, leader of the Afghan Taliban, seemed to [hint at his readiness for a comprehensive negotiation](#). 'Every legitimate option can be considered,' he said, 'in order to reach the goal of an independent Islamic regime in Afghanistan.' He urged foreign powers to withdraw their troops 'immediately' in order to achieve a lasting solution to the problem. In a gesture to his local opponents, he stressed that the Taliban didn't wish to monopolize power and that all ethnicities would participate in a 'real Islamic regime acceptable to all the people of the country.'

Surely the United States and its allies should respond positively to this message? A conference in Bonn next December is due to review NATO's war in Afghanistan – a war that seems closer to being lost than won. About 25,000 soldiers reportedly deserted the Afghan armed services in the first six months of this year because they had lost faith in the Hamid Karzai government's ability to protect them and their families. Coalition troops are due to withdraw their troops by the end of 2014. Might there not be an argument for an immediate offer of negotiation together with a pledge of an earlier withdrawal? It is, after all, far from clear what strategic interests, if any, the West is defending in Afghanistan.

The subject is of considerable urgency since the US counter-insurgency strategy is in real trouble. In July, Ahmad Wali Karzai, Karzai's powerful brother, was shot dead in Kandahar. In August, the Taliban attacked the British Council in Kabul. On September 10, a truck packed with explosives [killed five people and wounded 77 US troops](#) at a NATO military base south-west of Kabul – the highest injury toll of foreign forces in a single incident in the 10-year war. On September 13, insurgents staged a [20 hour-long assault](#) on the US embassy and ISAF headquarters in the heart of Kabul – supposedly the best protected perimeter in the whole country. And on September 20, Burhanuddin Rabbani, head of the High Peace Council, [was assassinated](#).

Rabbani, an ethnic Tajik, was charged by Karzai with the task of seeking peace with the Taliban. He seems to have made little or no progress. He was a mujahidin leader in the war against the Soviets in the 1980s, then president of Afghanistan from 1992 to 1996, before being ousted by the Taliban. He then became a leading figure of the Northern Alliance of Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras who fought the Islamists until the Taliban were driven from power by the US invasion of 2001. Although it's not yet clear who is responsible for Rabbani's murder, suspicion has fallen on the Pakistan-backed Haqqani network.

Pakistan has a vital strategic interest in Afghanistan. It wants to keep Indian influence out of a country that it considers its strategic depth. It suspects Karzai of being in league with India, and would appear to prefer a Taliban-governed Afghanistan to Karzai's US-backed regime. In any event, Rabbani's death robs Karzai of a key ally and strains his relations with Pakistan. It could be a step towards a civil war if no early attempt is made to engage the Taliban.

Now entering its 11th year – at the colossal cost to the US taxpayer of about \$120 billion a year – the Afghan war has drained US resources, dangerously undermined the Pakistani state and threatened to destroy the US-Pakistani alliance. Addressing the US Senate in mid-September, Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, accused Pakistan's army and the ISI, the powerful military intelligence service, of being in league with the Haqqani network. By using 'violent extremism as an instrument of policy', Mullen said, Pakistan was undermining the American military effort and jeopardizing the US-Pakistani strategic partnership.

Pakistan's response was not long in coming. Speaking on the BBC programme *The World Tonight* on September 22, Gen. Asad Durani, a former head of the ISI, described US-Pakistan relations as in a state of 'low-intensity conflict.' Pakistan should back the United States' opponents in Afghanistan, he said, if the US continued drone strikes against targets in Pakistan.

Meanwhile, in their hunt for the Taliban and their supporters, US special forces mount frequent night raids in Afghanistan, such as the one on September 2 that killed Sabar Lal , a wealthy Afghan, in his home in Jalalabad. According to [press reports](#), the Americans broke in, handcuffed and blindfolded him and his guests, then took him out on the veranda and killed him. He had fought the Soviets in Afghanistan, spent five years in Guantánamo, then built a new life for himself and his family. Clearly this wasn't enough to allay US suspicions of his links with Islamic militants, with US officials claiming he was an al-Qaeda affiliate.

In Yemen and the Horn of Africa, the United States' increasing resort to drones, with their inevitable toll of civilian deaths, has enraged the local populations and driven recruits into the arms of the militants. According to the *Washington Post*, the Obama administration has used CIA-operated drones to carry out lethal attacks against al-Qaida in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen. The drone programme has killed more than 2,000 militants and civilians since 2001.

Surely, now is as good a time as any to ask whether US policy hasn't created more terrorists than the CIA has managed to kill? Would it not be better if the United States were simply to declare victory in Afghanistan – and indeed in all the other places where its Special Forces operate – bring its troops home as soon as possible, and turn its attention to tending the wounds in its own broken society?