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Bring the Afghanistan Troops Home

INTERNATIONAL POLICY

Matthew Hoh

As he was announcing his second increase in troops for Afghanistan in December 2009, President Obama promised that by July 2011 those troops would begin coming home. As relayed by Bob Woodward's book, *Obama's Wars*, we know the president was skeptical about the United States' war effort in Afghanistan. In spite of that skepticism, the president's new plan for the war extends the longest war in American history for the foreseeable future.

President Obama announced his first surge of 20,000 troops in spring 2009. Pushing American forces well above the 50,000 mark and reinforcing a counterinsurgency strategy, he escalated a war in a country entering its fourth decade of continuous conflict.

Thousands of Marines and soldiers were rushed in, with the announcement that they were there to ensure free and fair Afghan elections. That summer, these troops found an insurgency fueled by resentment of their presence. Either because of hostility to foreign occupation or because our troops simply sided with someone else's rival, akin to supporting just one side in a Hatfield-McCoy feud, 2009 became the deadliest year of the war, doubling the amount of American dead in 2008.

Meanwhile, the fire hydrant-like stream of dollars, being pumped into the second most corrupt nation in the world, seemed to purchase only further grievances among the population against a government radiantly kleptocratic. When President Hamid Karzai blatantly stole the elections in August, American officials were forced to abandon any narrative of Americans fighting and dying for democracy in Afghanistan. Then, in October, National Security

March to May of this year increased 41 percent from last spring's totals.

Nationwide, a U.S.-led campaign of night raids on homes has terrorized families, while a massive nation-building program funded by U.S. taxpayers has enriched a corrupt few and disenfranchised a poor majority. Again, betraying our own values, we looked the other way when elections were stolen for the second time in as many years. The number of civilian deaths are on pace to

Advisor Jim Jones announced that al-Qaeda had fewer than 100 members in Afghanistan. However, given little political cover from the left, feeling little political pressure from the right and receiving nothing but a choice of small, medium or large escalation of the war by the Pentagon, President Obama in December

surpass the totals from 2010, the deadliest year of the war for civilians since 2001. The result: Eight in ten Afghan men now say the U.S. presence is bad for Afghanistan.

By the administration's own account, al-Qaeda has not existed in any meaningful capacity in Afghanistan since we successfully scattered them in 2001. Over the last decade, they have evolved into an increasingly flat or networked organization(s) of individuals and small cells around the globe that is most successfully attacked through good intelligence, international law-enforcement cooperation and surgical-strikes, such as the raid against Osama bin Laden's compound in Pakistan. Our Afghan war policy does not

affect al-Qaeda.

American troops killed or maimed in Afghanistan and others who have returned home with physical and mental injuries, increasing numbers of whom are taking their own lives, cannot be said to have made a worthy sacrifice. We must acknowledge to families that their losses did not prevent another Sept. 11.

Moreover, our policies have destabilized the region, most notably in Pakistan, a nuclear nation with 170 million people.

Indeed, President Obama was right to be skeptical.

However, despite growing bipartisan support for an accelerated drawdown, on Wednesday President Obama announced the withdrawal of 30,000 troops through next year. Such a withdrawal, particularly without a change in strategy will only bring us back to where we were in December 2009. With only modest cuts in troop levels and no real changes in our strategy, we will continue to be stuck in Afghan quicksand for years to come.

The president should go further — removing the most recent 30,000 surge troops by the end of 2011 and reducing to a total of fewer than 30,000 troops by the end of 2012. Combined with sincere political efforts in Afghanistan and the broader region, and by maintaining a focus on al-Qaeda, the United States can move Afghanistan and the region toward stability, while freeing itself from its quicksand.

Hoh is a Senior Fellow at the Center for International Policy and the Director of the Afghanistan Study Group. He served with the Marine Corps in Iraq and with State Department teams in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The fire hydrant-like stream of dollars, being pumped into the second most corrupt nation in the world, seemed to purchase only further grievances among the population against a government radiantly kleptocratic

2009 ordered 30,000 more troops and billions of dollars into what soon would become America's longest war.

Predictably, by doubling down on a policy that had proved counterproductive, we betrayed our national values and failed to inflict damage on al-Qaeda. We also went from being waist-deep to chest-deep in quicksand.

This past year surpassed 2009 as the deadliest year of the conflict, killing 57 percent more American service members.

Tragically, but unsurprisingly, 2011 has been even more deadly. Insurgent attacks from January to March increased nearly 50 percent from the same period in 2010, while American deaths from

My New Neighbor: 'Don't You Like Kids?'

NEW YORK

Jeff Tryens

So I opened the door to my apartment building for a young woman last Sunday. I said hello to no apparent response - not unusual here in New York. As we walked into the elevator she asked if I had kids. (It was Fathers' Day.) When I said no, she asked, very matter-of-factly, "Don't you like kids?" Bam. Right between the eyes. Now I'm not saying that all New Yorkers are like that but I found her directness refreshing. A member of my staff likes to say "To be brutally honest..." before pointing out my latest screw-up; but, again, without malice.

To make the elevator encounter even more interesting, she was Black. I can't even begin to think through all of the cross-currents that would be going on had that happened in Portland. In New York - no big deal. In fact, so far, skin color/ethnicity seems to be less important here than anyplace I've ever lived. I think it's related to the fact that racial/ethnic segregation - economic, social, geographic - is less prominent here; especially economic. I'm sure New York is far from perfect, but

something boss is on maternity leave until July 5 but I've jumped right into projects. Lots to do.

Getting around is a challenge but I'm getting to know the subway system pretty well. I take the Q or B to the R - which is right across the platform - which leaves me right across from my office. The biggest challenge has been figuring out which direction to walk when getting off at an unfamiliar station. The trains must be 200 yards long so exiting at the

Broadway, West Broadway and Broadway. And they're not that close to one another, so be careful.

The biggest issue is, no surprise here, the NOISE. The police/fire/ambulance all run their sirens constantly when answering a call. The city must have gotten a special deal on buses with no mufflers. And, while the subway isn't as noisy as some, it's oppressive.

For the moment I live right across from Prospect Park. Called his "perfect park" by the country's greatest park designer, Frederick Law Olmsted, it's 3.5 miles around and has some very beautiful features but I fear Mr. Olmsted would be disturbed by what I can only call managed deterioration. It's lovely but shabby around the edges.

Well, that's all for now. In an attempt to be a real New Yorker, I'm going to the Baryshnikov Theater tonight to a brand new dance piece. Something Pat couldn't drag me to in Portland.

Jeff Tryens is a transplanted Portlander living and working in New York City

... so far, skin color/ethnicity seems to be less important here than anyplace I've ever lived

people of every imaginable racial and ethnic background. My neighborhood in Brooklyn is probably 80% Black but I yet to experience that familiar white-guy-out-of-his-element feeling.

So far I'm having a blast. Work is a bit undefined because my 30-

wrong end can mean disorientation and a long walk. Of course there's an app for that and as soon as I figure out how to turn on my new Blackberry I'm going to download it. Okay, so here's a hint for getting around Manhattan. There are three Broadways - East