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## Staying in Afghanistan Is a Recipe for More Terrorism

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Barack Obama is daring the terrorists. He's standing in their front yard. He's calling them out.

Of course, that's not how it's reported. "U.S. 'nowhere near' decision to pull all troops out of Afghanistan," was the understated Reuters headline. Under negotiation is an agreement keeping 8,000 to 10,000 American troops in Afghanistan "through 2024 and beyond." Also on the table are night raids and drone strikes that Afghan President Hamid Karzai refuses to allow.

This is madness. "If the job is not done," said the Russian ambassador to Kabul, "then several thousand troops...will not be able to do the job that 150,000 troops couldn't do."

The only thing worse than the hopelessness of this plan is the backwardness of it. In an effort to prevent terrorism, we are continuing the very thing that creates terrorism: our presence!

Al Qaeda "has been precise in telling America the reasons [it's] waging war on us," according to CIA analyst Michael Scheuer, who tracked Osama bin Laden from 1996 to 1999. "None of the reasons have anything to do with our freedom, liberty, and democracy, but have everything to do with U.S. policies and actions in the Muslim world."

In his book *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, political scientist Robert Pape analyzed every known case of suicide bombers from 1980 to 2005. He found that "what

nearly all suicide terrorist attacks have in common is a specific secular and strategic goal: to compel modern democracies to withdraw military forces from territory that the terrorists consider to be their homeland." Specifically, he discovered that "al Qaeda is today less a product of Islamic fundamentalism than of a simple strategic goal: to compel the United States and its Western allies to withdraw combat forces from the Arabian Peninsula and other Muslim countries."

The Obama administration can't pretend that it doesn't know this fact. In 2004, the Pentagon concluded that "American direct involvement in the Muslim World has paradoxically elevated the stature of and support for radical Islamists, while diminishing support for the United States to single-digits in some Arab societies. Muslims do not 'hate our freedom,' but rather, they hate our policies. [In] the eyes of the Muslim world, American occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq has not led to democracy there, but only more chaos and suffering."

Firsthand accounts confirm these conclusions. British journalist Johann Hari interviewed former Islamic militants who had since rejected jihad. He probed them, in independent interviews, about what made them join the cause in the first place. "Every one of them said the Bush administration's response to 9/11 -- from Guantanamo to Iraq -- made jihadism seem more like an accurate description of the world." One of them put it this way: "You'd see Bush on the television building torture camps and bombing Muslims and you think -- anything is justified to stop this. What are we meant to do, just stand still and let him cut our throats?"

*New York Times* reporter David Rohde saw this attitude up close when the Taliban held him hostage for seven months. Looking back on his captors, he remembered, "Commanders fixated on the deaths of Afghan, Iraqi and Palestinian civilians in military airstrikes, as well as the American detention of Muslim prisoners who had been held for years without being charged."

BBC journalist Owen Bennett-Jones found the same reaction in his research on the drone strike that killed Taliban leader Hakimullah Mehsud earlier this year. "Although many Pakistanis were happy that Mehsud was no long threatening them," Bennett-Jones reports, "their relief was outweighed by the thought that the US's use of drones in Pakistan was an unacceptable breach of sovereignty and a national humiliation." The result was "a wave of sympathy in the country" for Mehsud and his fellow terrorists.

"As I travelled around the Middle East during the Arab Spring," writes Bennett-Jones in this week's *London Review of Books*, "the word that most often cropped up in the slogans in various capitals was not 'freedom' - the one the Western media recognised and highlighted - but 'dignity.'"

These are the sad facts of a desperate region. We do not condone their violence, but we must understand their motives.

American troops, night raids, and drone strikes in Afghanistan will only make it easier for terrorists and insurgents to recruit angry young men to fight and die for their cause. By extending the occupation into perpetuity, we are not stopping terrorism at the source, as President Obama

would have us believe. We are multiplying their ranks. We are taunting and humiliating them. We are endangering our nation.