



Obama's War: Avoiding a Quagmire in Afghanistan

James Gannon

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Since the United Nations adopted the principle of self-determination in 1945, great powers have found that military strength is no guarantee of success in small wars fought against insurgents who use guerrilla and terrorist tactics. The author argues that it is well past time for Americans to understand that military victory is usually beyond their reach in this kind of warfare. Although Gannon believes that the war in Afghanistan is justified by the attacks of 9/11, he contends that the American and NATO forces should withdraw as soon as can be done responsibly. As Gannon sees it, President Barack Obama realizes that such long, drawn-out wars waste lives and drain resources far out of proportion to any possible gain.

The dual-track strategy in Afghanistan now, Gannon explains, is to apply the lessons of Iraq's Anbar Awakening by negating the Islamists' influence, driving them out of population centers—with military force, if necessary—and building trust between the tribes in the hinterlands and the central government. At the same time, the American and NATO commanders must encourage negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban. The goal is a stable, peaceful Afghanistan. The fight against such Islamist fanatics as al Qaeda and the Pakistani Taliban requires a different strategy—a relentless campaign using special operations forces and high-tech weapons such as drones to disrupt insurgents' operations. Only when Afghanistan has become stabilized and anti-government operations disrupted can America and NATO safely withdraw, according to Gannon. Nobody should think it will be quick or easy.

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