

Erasing Obama's Record on the Afghan War

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US media would like to pretend that the “surge” they supported in Afghanistan never happened. (cc photo: US Army/ Michael Casteel)

What is Barack Obama's record on the Afghan War? Judging by some recent press, the main lesson is that he's ending that war. But that requires ignoring some pretty inconvenient history.



On ABC's This Week ([1/19/14](#)), the New Yorker's David Remnick objected to Mary Matalin's suggestion that Obama is similar to Dick Cheney. Nothing wrong with that, but he started off by saying this:

The historical analogy between Dick Cheney and, with respect, and Barack Obama, is absurd. I mean, this is a president who's withdrawn from two wars.

And here's Washington Post reporter Scott Wilson ([1/17/14](#)) placing the Afghan War in the category of policies that demonstrate how Obama broke with the Bush record:

Having run for office as a critic of the Bush administration's national security policies, Obama was always going to be measured, in part, by how he scaled back the excesses of post-9/11 national security practices and preserved the essentials in a still-dangerous world. The reviews on that account have been mixed.

Obama withdrew US troops from Iraq, a conflict he once called a “dumb war,” and has set an end-of-the-year end date for US participation in Afghanistan's war.

At the same time, he has expanded the battlefield for the US drone fleet and stepped up the tempo of strikes from the Bush years, another counterterrorism tool that many within his party say should have far more accountability and

oversight.

The problem is that in focusing on how Obama might end the Afghan War—which hasn't ended, of course—these accounts omit the fact that Obama massively increased the number of US troops in Afghanistan—from about 32,000 to about 100,000 (FAIR Blog, [11/25/13](#)). This isn't an obscure fact—but it does muddy up the narrative that Obama made a serious break with Bush foreign policy.

When Obama was considering whether to further increase troop levels he had already raised in Afghanistan, corporate media largely ignored the option of withdrawal (Extra!, [3/09](#)). Since then, more than 10,000 [Afghan civilians](#) have been killed in the fighting, along with more than [1,600 US fighters](#) and uncounted Afghan combatants—and the US is concluding that the war is unwinnable after all. It's unsurprising that now the media would like to pretend that never happened.

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