



U.S. Casualties Continue as Support for Afghan War Wanes

Few Americans who experienced the terrorist attacks on U.S. soil on September 11, 2001 expected that the “war on terror” would still be ongoing 11 years later. All of the major wars in U.S. history were resolved in far less time. For example, U.S. participation in World War I lasted just one year, seven months; in Korea, three years, one month; in World War II, three years, eight months; the Civil War, four years; the U.S. War of Independence and our fighting in Vietnam were previous record holders at eight years, five months each. Our official involvement in Iraq lasted eight years, nine months, though U.S. troops remain in “advisory” capacities.



As for the cost in lives, the *Washington Post* reported that “as of Tuesday, Sept. 11, 2012, at least 1,980 members of the U.S. military had died in Afghanistan ... according to an Associated Press count.”

As our military presence in Afghanistan continues without an end in sight, the anti-war protests that persisted throughout the war in Vietnam are curiously absent and even news of the war is becoming infrequent. It seems Americans have tired of even mentioning the war. An [article](#) written September 9 by Robert Burns, national security writer at the Associated Press, carried the headline: “War-weary US is numbed to drumbeat of troop deaths in Afghanistan.”

Burns’ report was prompted by the announcement of five U.S. combat deaths in Afghanistan last week, including 20-year-old PFC Shane W. Cantu of Corunna, Michigan. Observed Burns:

American troops are still dying in Afghanistan at a pace that doesn’t often register beyond their hometowns. So far this year, it’s 31 a month on average, or one per day. National attention is drawn, briefly, to grim and arbitrary milestones such as the 1,000th and 2,000th war deaths. But days, weeks and months pass with little focus by the general public or its political leaders on the individuals behind the statistics.

Curiously, Burns quoted a man named Max Boot, identified as a military historian and defense analyst at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), the internationalist policy organization whose members have largely formulated the interventionist foreign policies of every presidential administration since World War II. CFR members Dick Cheney, Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, and Robert Gates served in the administration of George W. Bush and greatly influenced Bush’s war decisions, with Gates staying on as Secretary of Defense in the Obama administration until mid-2011.

Boot, Burns observes, “has called Afghanistan the ‘Who Cares?’ war. ‘Few, it seems, do, except for service personnel and their families,’ he wrote recently. ‘It is almost as if the war isn’t happening at all.’”



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on September 11, 2012

[Boot's biography in Wikipedia](#) notes: "Boot vigorously supported the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the 2007 surge. He wrote a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed in April 2011 arguing that it is 'in America's Interest to Stay in Iraq' because "having active bases would allow us to project power and influence in the region.'"

AP writer Deb Riechmann noted that both interest in and support for the war in Afghanistan have declined in recent months, a far different public reaction than existed during the Vietnam era, when opposition to the war seemed to fuel passionate interest and anti-war activism. If the youthful Baby Boomers who were at the forefront of the antiwar movement of the late '60s are still engaged in public issues, it is possible they are among those who, according to Riechmann,

show more interest in the economy and taxes than the latest suicide bombings in a different, distant land. Earlier this month, protesters at the Iowa State Fair chanted "Stop the war!" They were referring to one purportedly being waged against the middle class.

Riechmann cited two polls that indicate lack of support for the war in Afghanistan:

Public opinion remains negative toward the war, with 66 percent opposed to it and 27 percent in favor in a May AP-GfK poll. More recently, a Quinnipiac University poll found that 60 percent of registered voters felt the United States should no longer be involved in Afghanistan. Just 31 percent said the U.S. is doing the right thing by fighting there now.

Not since the Korean War of the early 1950s — a much shorter but more intense fight — has an armed conflict involving America's sons and daughters captured so little public attention.

Prospects for the United States resolving its involvement in Afghanistan remain murky. On the eve of the 11th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, AFP reported that the Afghan Taliban, in a statement heavily laced with braggadocio, predicted that U.S. forces face "utter defeat" in Afghanistan:

"The anniversary of 9/11 is approaching America this year at a time when it is facing utter defeat in Afghanistan militarily, politically, economically and in all other facets and it has exhausted all other means through which to prolong its illegal war," said a statement from the Afghan Taliban, the US-based SITE Intelligence Group said Monday [September 10].

In the statement, the Taliban denied involvement in the 9/11 attacks, which it referred to as "the September incident," and claimed it was not a threat but also vowed to defend its homeland and continue with its "sacred struggle" against "the invaders."

In an article published by [TimeWorld](#) (*Time* magazine's online edition), an assessment of the Taliban's likely current position cited a recent report put out by the London-based Royal United Services Institute:

The [report](#), based on a number of interviews with senior Taliban figures (though their identities remain anonymous) conducted by four British and American South and Central Asia experts, makes a number of significant claims: the Taliban leadership — known as the Quetta shura after the Pakistani city where top leaders like Mullah Mohammad Omar are thought to have found safe haven — profoundly regrets its dealings with al-Qaeda and is prepared to renounce any ties to international terrorist outfits; despite certain bullish public utterances [as noted above], the Taliban are willing to commit to parliamentary democracy, allow for modern education in schools and for girls to attend them; they are even willing to accept a U.S. military presence in the country beyond 2014, though insist for an end to drone strikes.



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The article notes that the prospects for a negotiated settlement are increased by the fact that a military victory by the Taliban is next to impossible and that a decisive U.S. victory is also elusive, though the refusal of the Taliban to deal with “the supposedly corrupt government of Afghan President Hamid Karzai” is regarded as a stumbling block.

In a commentary critical of many Republicans’ positions on continuing the overseas wars in the Middle East, Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) told CBS’ *This Morning* program recently:

We should have a more defensive foreign policy, a less aggressive foreign policy. I think that would go over much better [politically] in New England than the typical “we need to bomb everybody tomorrow” policy you hear from some Republicans.

Photo of U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan holding a moment of silence on Sept. 11, 2012: AP Images



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