

# The Dangers of Obama's Cut-Price Foreign Policy

Written by Samuel Abbott

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## The Dangers of Obama's Cut-Price Foreign Policy

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SAMUEL ABBOTT, MAY 1 2014

### INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Barack Obama's foreign policy was questioned when he took office in 2008, but he survived that and went on to win re-election in 2012. This victory was helped in part by his foreign policy that aimed at appealing to public opinion rather than making strategic decisions.[1] The political short-term gains that Obama has won through this kind of foreign policy only sets to endanger the long-term stability of the Middle East, as well as America's role in global leadership and potentially creates future crises that will require large financial and military investment in the future. Historically second term Presidents have less constraints and therefore can act with more freedom from political and economic concerns. However, Obama has no freedom like his predecessors since the Second World War due to the financial crisis and the fallout from the Bush policy of high cost intervention.

When Obama won his historic election in 2008, he inherited a country divided, in the middle of two wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as a global economic crisis. That night Obama declared that "change had come to America." [2] The expectations for change on him were enormous and unrealistic. However, this predicted change was constrained by political and economic factors, both domestic and international. When Obama took office in January 2009 his number one priority was to stabilise and reboot the American economy. The economy was still a dominant issue in the 2012 election. This demonstrates how the economy was the most important issue to the American population over the last 5 years and therefore why the economy is Obama's priority, as the support for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan has long since evaporated. The American people drive the foreign policy of their country, so for politicians to get re-elected, they have to win the support of these people, and to win this support more often than not means trying to fulfil their wishes. The withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan was being called for by the majority of American citizens.[3] These short-term influences can result in long-term dangers for the United States as well as the rest of the world. America is no longer the country that will "pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship." [4]

The economy arguably swung the 2008 election towards Obama after Senator McCain said that the fundamentals of the American economy were still strong on the day that Lehman Brothers went bankrupt. However, this short-term benefit in the election turned into a long-term problem for the Obama presidency. The financial collapse that reverberated around the world in 2008 just as Obama was about to take his seat in the Oval Office only increased calls for withdrawal from the Middle East and a more isolationist approach, as the United States can no longer afford to police the world. In 2008 the American economy shrank by -0.4% and it shrank by -3.5% in 2009.[5] This can be seen in the budget of the United States government for the Department of Defence, as in Fiscal year 2011 there was reduced funding for Research and Development as well as military construction.[6] This trend continued in 2012 and 2013. There has been sustained pressure on President Obama to reduce the budget deficit and prioritise spending on domestic reforms. This is exemplified in his effort to reduce the Department of Defence budget for 2013 by one percent, which totals \$5.1 billion.

This swing would be achieved by a cut in military personnel and through the money allocated to overseas contingency operations.[7] The unemployment rate has a large influence on the pressure applied to the President domestically as, if many people are unemployed (Figure 1) then the economy takes priority and that means a return to more isolationist thinking that American money should be spent at home rather than on prolonged wars in the

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Middle East, which have not brought any benefits.

The constraints imposed on Obama's foreign policy are not just economic; they are domestic as the will of the American people has to be taken into consideration with every decision. There was a coherent choice by Obama to distance himself from the approaches and policies associated with George W. Bush, as the Bush era left the United States reputation globally in tatters, and America was not 'trusted to act rationally'[8] by other nations. The public demand in America was for a return to normalcy which involved the de-escalation of the military and a refocus of priorities to the domestic economic crisis than the costly foreign policy of the Bush era.[9] These short-term political priorities demonstrate that under Obama American foreign policy 'commitments must not exceed financial capabilities'[10] which is demonstrated by the reduced military expenditure on traditional wars being replaced by cheaper counterterrorism measures, such as drone strikes and intelligence sharing.

Obama repackaged American foreign policy as a result of these economic and domestic pressures by trying to engage with the Middle East and reverse the view of the United States as an invading force in that region. This is proven by his complete withdrawal from Iraq on December 31st 2011,[11] the planned withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014, a reluctance to use military intervention in the Syrian crisis and a failed attempt at diplomacy with Iran. Obama has also refocused Bush's "war on terror" to a narrower objective of defeating and degrading al-Qaeda, through drone strikes targeting mid to high level operatives. Obama has designed a low-cost foreign policy, compared to his predecessor as reaper drones cost only \$10.5 million each, which is a huge saving compared to full scale insurgency.[12] The short-term financial and political benefits ignores the increased usage and spread of drones which threatens future stability as anyone anywhere can be targeted.

The danger that these low-cost policies pose globally and to America itself, through their own withdrawal from the Middle East in Iraq and soon Afghanistan, is one of the causes for Obama's widespread use of UAV otherwise known as drones as they represent a cheap alternative as well as preventing body bags from returning home. The rationale behind this foreign policy approach of counterterrorism based on economic and domestic hindrances are also deeply involved in the reasons why Obama has stated that he will not get militarily involved in Syria in March 2012 as he believes 'unilateral US military intervention there would be a mistake,'[13] now it looks like he will undertake limited military action with no ground troops. It also looks highly unlikely that any action other than economic sanctions will be used against Iran. This counterterrorism approach 'represents an alternative, if recessionary packaging of American exceptionalism'[14] it is a pre-emptive punishment approach, most notably in the wider use of drones rather than traditional land forces. These actions and inactions of the Obama foreign policy are in direct contrast to what Obama said in the 2010 National Security Strategy, that 'failing states breed conflict and endanger regional and global security'[15] and in the failed states index of 2012, Afghanistan is ranked at number 6, Iraq at number 9, Syria at 23rd place and Iran in 34th place.[16] So arguably these countries pose great risk regionally, globally and to the United States, yet the policies undertaken has been one of withdrawal and wait and see, allowing the countries in question to further destabilise.

The on-going economic instability is leading to military disengagement abroad; it increases domestic unpopularity of American intervention overseas and therefore policies that defy these principles will have low approval ratings and are politically harmful in the short term, not just to the president but to the Democratic Party on the whole, especially with the House of Representatives and some Senate elections in 2014, this political way of thinking is summed up perfectly by Gordon Goldstein writing about the Vietnam war that 'politics is the enemy of strategy.'[17] It is this decision making for the short-term political gain that endangers American long-term security. The withdrawal from Iraq has left a dangerous regime in place with Iranian influence is on the up as well. The proposed extraction from Afghanistan by 2014 risks its long-term stability and also allows the Taliban and al-Qaeda to regain a safe haven. The policy in place which allows this "boots off the ground" approach is the use of drones. The American drone program has many dangers in its legality, the spread of technology, blowback and the fact that this policy alone will not secure the United States from terrorism. The crisis in Syria and the long standing trouble with Iran pose long-term regional instability with the rise of extremism, yet the United States is trying to limit any involvement in Syria and avoid anything more than economic sanctions with Iran. These policies that are in place, they do not solve the issues, they merely postpone them for a short period of time, and further down the line America may have to re-engage in these countries at a higher cost militarily and economically to protect their regional interests, hence 'retrenchment

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would be misguided.’[18]

## CHAPTER ONE: Boots off the ground

Obama inherited wars from his predecessor in both Iraq and Afghanistan. These wars have become increasingly unpopular and in financially troubled times they are seen as an expenditure America can do without. To date the estimated costs of these two wars is between \$4-6 trillion, which can be worked out to \$75,000 per household.[19] In his 2008 election campaign Obama pledged to get American troops out of Iraq and in his re-election in 2012 he ran on ending the war in Afghanistan as well[20] which has now become the longest war in American history. The risk with adhering to these pledges, partly driven by economic and political pressures, is that pulling out of both these nations too soon can lead to instability and violence. The most pressing danger of this strategy would be that it ends up providing a safe haven for terrorist operations again and in Afghanistan the re-emergence of the Taliban as a powerful force whilst Iraq is moving ever closer to Tehran. These actions not only affect America’s safety but also the stability of that region for the future. Yet Obama follows the approach of Thomas Jefferson of “the less we use our power the greater it will be”[21] whether by choice or by the situation he has inherited it seems to be a highly optimistic perspective when looking at the cases of Iraq and Afghanistan and their long-term stability.

### *Iraq*

The United States left Iraq on December 31st 2011 as per the agreement reached with President Bush, despite Obama’s efforts to maintain a military presence after that date. Obama defined the Iraq war as a war of choice and America left with no military bases, no territory and no resources as officials in Baghdad refused to sign SOFA.[22] The legacy that the United States has left in Iraq has been described as a

‘Sectarian Shiite based political system, a mutilated society, enforced by a strongman who sanctions no dissent, and who concentrates too much power in his hands.’[23]

This legacy came at a cost of 4,500 American lives with 32,000 wounded and the number of Iraqi dead is over 100,000 and the withdrawal of American forces will not stop that number rising even higher. The war in Iraq cost \$800 billion which came in the form of emergency supplemental spending bills.[24] These costs are deemed too high in America, the body bag effect and times of financial trouble mean that pressure was on politicians to get out of Iraq. These external pressures on politicians cause decisions to be made in the short term. The cost of this short sighted foreign policy of financial restraint is dangerous for the long-term stability of Iraq for the United States. There is evidence of this already and it has been less than two years since America withdrew.

This war and subsequent withdrawal has left Iraq with a budding dictatorship that is ‘ruling by force and fear.’[25] It is potentially a failing state as ethnic and sectarian politics still remain prevalent and just because the United States has left does not mean that Iraq will be left alone.[26] This is more worrying as the current relations between the civil government and the military are fragile and cloaked in distrust.[27] The ironic nature of the American withdrawal is that their mission to bring democracy and freedom to Iraq ends with a growing dictatorship in place. On December 15th 2011 Leon Panetta gave a speech commemorating the end of the United States military presence in Iraq, that same day the Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki’s son surrounded the vice-presidents house with Iraqi troops and tanks and placed the vice president, the minister of finance and the deputy Prime Minister under house arrest.[28] Maliki’s security forces also rounded up many other political rivals and local Sunni officials. This ambition of Maliki was not a secret. An aide to Hashimi the ex-vice president said ‘this is a coup’ and the ex-deputy Prime Minister Mutlaq is quoted saying ‘this is a new dictatorship.’[29] Washington has allowed this to happen and even support Maliki as shown by the agreement to sell Iraq \$11 billion worth of arms to build it as a counterbalance to Iran. Maliki is using the security forces to enhance his domestic control and is also increasingly siding with Iran.[30] This poses a significant threat to the United States as for one thing it means they have failed, wasted lives and an extortionate

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amount of money. If Maliki becomes a dictator he will not be a Washington puppet as America has lost respect in the region and therefore Tehran will have a greater influence and this puts the United States regional interest and security at threat.

The fact that there are no American troops on the ground in Iraq means that America has no ability to fight AQI and affiliated groups directly, the fight against terrorism in Iraq now solely lies with the Iraqi security forces.[31] These forces will not be as effective as if they had American military support. The invasion created chaos and now the war is on-going, just without any American presence. Saddam Hussein's former right hand man Tariq Aziz accused Obama of 'leaving Iraq to the wolves'[32] by pulling out; America has not corrected the problems that their invasion in 2002 created. Long-term deployment of American troops as we have seen in Europe and Asia after World War Two showed that having a physical military presence sends a powerful message to potential adversaries. America will not have the ability to respond quickly in a crisis as it takes many months to deploy troops.[33] Therefore America cannot respond quickly or cheaply against terrorism and extremism in Iraq as they have left before securing a democratic stable country and left the country and region with distrust and hatred of America and this mixture may serve as a danger to America and Iraqi civilians of terrorist blowback. As soon as the Americans left al-Qaeda went on the offensive where they killed hundreds of people in numerous bombings in a campaign that lasted for months.[34]

The fact that there are no troops on the ground and very little money means that the United States is virtually powerless to influence anything anymore. It has no ability to control Baghdad, as they cannot stop them tacitly supporting Iran's lethal aid to Damascus. This state of affairs is by choice as Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlak says 'America could still do a lot if they wanted to. But I think because Obama chose a line that he is taking care of interior matters.'[35] This shows how short-term American domestic stability comes before Iraqi and regional security, despite the fact that this regional insecurity will cost America down the line in their effort to stop extremism and anti-Americanism in a region where they have little influence. As the policy towards Iraq sends the wrong message to the region because it shows that America is not interested, cannot act effectively there now without any troop's present because it is barely engaged at all with Iraq. This suggests to Iran and other hostile neighbours that America is unwilling to take action, which could lead to a rise in violence and hostility, as fear of American intervention evaporates.

The chance of a future crisis is very real in Iraq as the more Maliki centralises power in his own hands the greater chance he has of re-igniting the civil war due to his marginalisation of his main electoral rival Ibrahimiya, who got the most number of votes in the 2010 election with 2,851,823 and 91 seats in parliament, they have been stopped from gaining power through Maliki's use of the police and army. As communities and political parties excluded from power have the ability to challenge Maliki through violence.[36] The potential for future conflict goes further than this political dispute, as Iraqi Kurdistan is a separate state in all but name, and their regional government is in alliance with the United States and Turkey. This has the potential for future conflict over oil and territory between the central government and the regional government of Kurdistan.[37] Hence the United States has left a divided and dangerous Iraq behind.

This lack of America presence has allowed Baghdad to choose their own path in terms of international relations. This is dangerous for the United States as the Shia rulers of Iraq have more in common with officials in Tehran than they do in Washington. [38] The trade between Iraq and Iran is worth \$11 billion per year.[39] The worry here for America is the growing dominance of Tehran in Iraq, which is potentially a long-term danger for the United States if the continual tensions with Iran escalate into a military conflict as a result of SOFA America has lost the potential to utilise Iraq as a front in any future conflict with Iran. The tension with Iran only increased after Secretary of State John Kerry surprise visit to Baghdad where he was rebuffed in his efforts to stop Iraq helping Tehran support Assad's regime in Syria.[40] The Iraq government has been helping Iran skirt economic sanctions put in place by the UN Security Council. If this relationship between Iraq and Iran continues Iran will dominate a politically and economically weak Iraq; this domination will only increase if Iran is allowed to gain nuclear weapons.[41] Fouad Ajami of The Hoover Institution has blamed Obama for not offering 'meaningful protection for the fledgling new order in Baghdad'[42] which results in Iraq seeking protection elsewhere such as Iran as Obama wanted to get the United States military forces out of Iraq.

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The current Syrian crisis has potential to further destabilise Iraq. As the two countries share a common border and there is potential for the conflict to spill over into a destabilising Iraq. There is also the problem of refugees flooding into Iraq, at this moment in time Iraq does not have the infrastructure to cope with this influx of refugees, as by September 2013 there are 200,000,[43] with a thousand people registered daily.[44] The rise of the Salafist Islamist parties in Syria could lead to it becoming a safe haven for terrorist networks.[45] The crisis that is still developing in Syria can pose a potential danger for the United States and their influence in the Middle East, and if they were to intervene, by losing Iraq they have lost a base to launch any intervention they may later undertake.

Just because American forces have left, does not mean that terrorist attacks will stop. One week in August 2012 saw over one hundred people killed by terrorist attacks.[46] Just because reports on violence have become much less common in the western news does not mean that Iraq is free of violence. The chaos created by the United States has produced this chaos and allowed anti-American sentiment for al-Qaeda to flourish. They have then left Iraq alone to face this threat and a government swinging towards a new dictatorship alone.

## *Afghanistan*

The Obama administration's policy towards Afghanistan was initially that of a short-term surge, while they had public support. Once that proved to be another expensive failure, public support waned and the policy shifted to a mix of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism with the main objective being to declare some sort of victory allowing a withdrawal in 2014. This demonstrated a lack of any real attempt to develop a diplomatic approach from Obama, and is an option that might have allowed a different outcome, because as it stands the United States is seen as indecisive and unreliable.[47] As well as putting their short-term priorities first over the regions security and their own long-term security.

The proposed withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan in 2014 poses serious danger to Afghanistan itself and the progress that has been made so far under American occupation. Obama backed Afghanistan as a necessary war at least partly to protect himself from being called a soft democrat in 2008 election, but now public opinion has become disillusioned with the war in Afghanistan, so too has Obama's stance changed to declaring a victory and bringing troops home.[48] It also threatens the achievements under Obama against al-Qaeda as by leaving, the Taliban and al-Qaeda will once again have a safe haven in Afghanistan. If the United States leaves before Afghanistan can maintain stability and security by itself, which is a very realistic prospect. This scenario would be dangerous for America as it will allow terrorist networks to grow and once again strike against western countries; it also runs the growing risk of destabilising Pakistan, with the danger of nuclear proliferation. The peril of withdrawing and destabilising Afghanistan is shown by British soldier's view that leaving with the Afghan forces capable of securing Helmand is little short of ridiculous.[49]

When Obama took office in 2009 he ordered a surge of 30,000 extra troops to turn the tide of the war.[50] Under this surge the number of fatalities increases from 158 in 2008, to 317 in 2009 and 499 in 2010.[51] This only served to make the war more unpopular in America and increased domestic pressure to withdraw. Obama said that investments in Afghanistan 'make the American people safer'[52] and that his main aim was to have an Afghanistan that was able to deal with any security issues and prevent themselves from becoming a safe haven once again.[53] It remains highly unlikely that Afghanistan will be able to maintain its own stability and stop themselves from sliding back to post 2001. If it doesn't remain stable the cost could be astronomical 'the world cannot afford the price that will come due if Afghanistan slides back into chaos or al-Qaeda operates unchecked'[54] yet this is a risk that Obama is running by the proposed withdrawal date. The Afghanistan and Pakistan government are distancing themselves from the United States because of the announcement of the United States withdrawal, so they will make arrangements with other nations to deal with post-American era[55] or even the Taliban.

The public announcement of 2014 for the withdrawal of United States troops has allowed the Taliban to just bide their time until America leaves and they can then operate and regain control of the country, it means that the military surge had a limited impact as it was defined by an end date.[56] The Taliban's perspective is that 'the Americans have the watches, but we have the time.'[57] This is because the Karzai government is not strong enough to maintain power by itself,[58] if anything he is not much more than the mayor of Kabul, who is dependent on foreign protection.

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For normal Afghanistan people Karzai is seen as a 'venal, corrupt, and unreliable'[59] so there is little support for him. There is also the question as to whether he would retain the Afghanistan constitution or throw it out to stay in power once the Americans leave. The return of the Taliban would 'condemn their country to brutal governance, international isolation, a paralyzed economy and the denial of basic human rights'[60] with America leaving concerns about human rights, women's rights and education would all be shelved, and have been a wasted effort.[61] This would be a massive setback for the United States and their war on terror. Leaving has huge political and economic costs with Afghanistan once again becoming a safe haven for terrorists and a platform to destabilise Pakistan.[62] The security costs of terrorist networks gaining such a safe haven could be that terrorists might try to attack the United States again on their home soil, which would cause tremendous political damage if Afghanistan was the origin of the attack. It would also incur huge financial costs as if such an attack would happen; it is not unreasonable to see America invading for a second time. The decision to withdraw has been made as a result of public and economical pressure, but in the long term that public pressure may change and the costs of going back to Afghanistan will be even higher.

With a United States withdrawal in 2014 the leverage the United States has over Pakistan will decrease and their ability to try to control and influence the Pakistani government will be at an all-time low. Leaving Afghanistan even with a defeated al-Qaeda and Taliban there will not guarantee Afghanistan's safety and security. At the moment terrorists and the Taliban are operating and ruling in the FATA region in Pakistan, which is roughly the size of the state of New Jersey and has around 4 million Pashtun tribe's people.[63] Hence even leaving behind a newly stable Afghanistan will not ensure any long-term security because there would be no large United States force to deter the Taliban and other extremists from crossing the Pakistan border into Afghanistan and establishing control in the rural and tribal regions of Afghanistan. Afghanistan is still a tribal country where tribal leaders see it as their duty to get what they can from the state or Taliban for the benefit of their community first and foremost.

The importance of Pakistan to the war in Afghanistan is shown by the way the United States treats both countries as one challenge, that of "Afpak" and instability in one country feeds instability in the other. Withdrawal from Afghanistan destabilises a nuclear power, which has a weak government and a strong military that makes decisions for themselves, as well as terrorist networks operating out of FATA. This poses a massive danger to America of potential nuclear proliferation, or a more aggressive regime comes to power or theft of these nuclear weapons by terrorist groups. Also FATA can continue to be seen as a relative safe haven for al-Qaeda and others, which threatens regional and global security.

The Vietnam syndrome looms over the Afghanistan conflict. With Obama declaring, 'I'm not doing ten years. I'm not doing a long-term nation building effort', it is clear that Obama wants an exit strategy.[64] In theory Obama, as a second term President, has the option to think in the long term, but unlike any President since World War Two Obama does not have the ability to think about the future due to the financial crisis. A major reason for wanting to cut American loses is that spending another \$1 trillion in Afghanistan would come at the expense of other domestic programs and America can no longer afford both. The American public would not accept that amount of spending when domestically many people are struggling financially and are unemployed. Obama likens his kind of policy to that of Eisenhower and Obama quotes Eisenhower's farewell speech 'Each proposal must be weighed in the light of a broader consideration: the need to maintain balance in and among national programs.'[65] These broader considerations are the state of the economy and the will of the American public. The short-term need to appeal to these pressures ignores long-term costs, danger and repercussions of pulling out of Afghanistan before it can rule itself.

The evidence of the danger of withdrawing from Afghanistan can be shown by the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 when the United States and the international community ignored the problem in Afghanistan and let the Afghans deal with it alone. Much like the Americans are doing now with building up the Afghan army and security forces to around 230,000 (which will still cost the United States \$4 billion a year)[66], the Soviet Union tried this policy before and as soon as they stopped paying the Afghan army they melted away and resorted to crime and terrorism to earn their keep.[67] This implies that the money being spent on the Afghan security forces is a waste as there is no evidence to suggest they are ready to keep the Taliban and other insurgents at bay, without the help of NATO troops. There is also a problem in stopping Taliban members from infiltrating the fledgling Afghan Army, evidenced by the green on blue killings in 2012 showed the short sightedness of assuming this new and inexperienced army can defeat an

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ideologically motivated enemy.[68] The blowback from this Soviet withdrawal was seen four years later in 1993 when al-Qaeda launched their first attack on the World Trade Centre from Afghanistan.[69] Eight years later the second attack on the World Trade Centre was planned from Afghanistan. The lesson here is for the United States is not to turn their back on Afghanistan, but if they do then they should be prepared to face the violent consequences. If there is not a standing American presence in Afghanistan after 2014 there is no deterrence to al-Qaeda from operating out of Afghanistan once again.

The announcement of the withdraw date and the on-going drawdowns of troops means that people in Afghanistan will be seeking to cut deals with the Taliban as no one will want to be seen as a collaborator with the Americans as they will not be around for much longer, this can result in more attacks on United States troops, and an increase in violence in the region as 'extremists in Pakistan will be emboldened, as they correctly conclude that there will be no contravening forces, domestic or international.'[70]

The drone policy only adds to the danger of leaving Afghanistan in 2014 as they are used to encourage extremism by being a tool to motivate radical thinking. The drone policy will not limit the influence of organisations that turn people into terrorists.[71]

## *Conclusions*

People say it is unrealistic to expect to have troops in Afghanistan and Iraq indefinitely, well the examples of when the United States have maintained a long-term military presence after a conflict have proved highly successful as the United States has had a substantial force in South Korea for 60 years, there are still troops in Germany and Japan and there have been peacekeeping troops in Bosnia since the mid 1990's.[72] These cases have shown that by sustaining a presence there it has created a stable environment rather than leaving behind an instable and violent situation to collapse on itself, these troops have helped to secure peace through their presence and through the message they give out, which is that America has an interest.

Similar foreign commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan would detract money, time and attention from Obama's ambitious domestic agenda.[73] Obama wants to reform America with his ambitious health care bill, together with a pressing need to create jobs at home and kick start the economy. The withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan would be a step backwards for those countries as stability there hangs by a slender thread, this includes Pakistan as well. It is not yet clear if Obama can withdraw without leaving a dangerous mess behind.[74] With the situation in both these countries are right now it seems highly likely that Obama is leaving a dangerous mess behind, with a budding dictatorship in Iraq and a Taliban biding its time to retake control once America leaves and if they do al-Qaeda will once again have a safe haven to operate out of. Obama is virtually leaving Iraq and Afghanistan on the precipice of becoming failed states.

These dangers are created by making decisions based on short-term political, economic and public pressure for short-term gains and political points. However, the risk of this way of thinking could be astronomical with threats still posed to regional and United States security and the future economic cost as well as lives that may suffer the consequences of leaving Iraq and Afghanistan to fend for themselves against hostile neighbours and insurgent groups which will destabilise an already fragile country further.

## **CHAPTER TWO: Drones**

The drawdown of American troops in Afghanistan and Iraq and a refusal to engage in nation building and counterinsurgency, has led to a policy of counterterrorism under Obama. The new and effective tool in this fight has been the use of drones. This policy has numerous dangers; firstly the widespread use of drones has killed twice as many suspected al-Qaeda and Taliban members than were ever imprisoned in Guantanamo, as well as many

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innocent civilians, which increases the risk of blowback. Secondly the use of drones by the United States violates state sovereignty and international humanitarian and human rights laws.[75] Thirdly the technology will only spread further afield, and finally there is potentially a catastrophic risk of blowback which will increase the threat to American military and civil populations. When Obama took office he had very few options as he had to avoid a Bush type foreign policy, not endanger American soldiers, create a cheaper foreign policy, whilst defeating al-Qaeda. The increase of drone strikes is a result of political and economic pressure to defeat al-Qaeda but to do it cheaply and without large loss of life as well as a move away from the Bush era counterinsurgency and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan and importantly 'drones do not bare the dreaded Bush trademark.'[76] Drones are used as the American people are unwilling to have any large-scale and potentially long-term commitments abroad anymore so drones allow Obama to maintain active in the fight against al-Qaeda and terrorism in more general terms without having to make politically unpopular and costly decisions such as boots on the ground in countries like Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia.[77] Drones are not replacements for political settlement.

## *The United States' Use of Drones*

The United States' use of drones in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia has increased dramatically since Obama took office. There have been 370 drone strikes confirmed in Pakistan, 56 confirmed in Yemen and 9 confirmed attacks in Somalia, with the possibility that these figures could all be much higher.[78] This shift from capturing enemies under Bush, despite the illegality of these black prisons and use of torture at least allowed the collection of information. However, under Obama the strategy has been to kill not capture, so every successful drone strike is a wasted intelligence gathering opportunity.[79] This can have a long-term destabilising effect as intelligence has the ability to save lives by discovering planned attacks, yet this potential lifesaving intelligence is lost. With the disappearing moral distinctions and expansion of targets under drones the United States are now killing people they would never have bothered to capture.[80] A large factor in this is that drone strikes are cheaper and are more in a legal grey area than firmly in the black like illegal detention and torturing. Drones do not have the complications of what to do with suspected terrorists; there is no judicial second guessing. This lack of intelligence gathering, however, is not a sustainable policy.

Obama's foreign policy is plagued by withdrawal and inaction in Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and Syria. Yet his drone policy allows him to appear tough on foreign policy and someone who is not afraid to take military action.[81] Politically Obama has to appear tough on terrorism as otherwise his re-election chances would have been slim, and his drone record and the killing of Osama Bin Laden gave him that political boost. It shows the tightrope that Obama had to walk in his first term in office especially his election campaign of 2012 where he needed to appear tough on terrorism whilst not putting American soldiers in danger whilst also reducing military expenditure. Drones allowed him this short-term political lift as it allowed him to achieve what the American public wanted, as shown by the fact that 83% of Americans support the use of drones[82], but the long-term consequences of drones has yet to be seen.

The drone policy according to Philip Alston a UN investigator 'exerts an ever expanding entitlement' to target individuals and that there are no geographic boundaries to the United States drone strikes.[83] The policy is basically killing with no accountability for their actions, there are no boundaries to it, and everyone could potentially be a target. This is a major long-term danger of the drone program, that once more and more countries have this technology the use of drones could be completely unrestricted and no matter who or where you are there is no protection. It has set in motion a new and dangerous arms race for this technology, at least 76 countries have acquired UAV technology and there are now 680 drone programmes in the world.[84] We have already seen the use of drones by Iran near Dimona, the site of Israel's nuclear facility.[85] Philip Alston elaborates on the potential spread of drone technology by saying that if other states claimed such a broad based authority for using drones like the United States to kill people anywhere and at any time there would be chaos.[86]

The escalation that has taken place under the Obama presidency is the expansion to include low level targets for attacks, such as foot soldiers of al-Qaeda. According to sources from the United States government drones kill twelve times more low level targets than mid to high level ones since Obama took office.[87] This raises the question how can each drone strike be so rigorously reviewed when there are so many deaths and attacks.[88] This means there is a risk of killing more innocent people and this expansion raises further questions over procedures and



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standards for selecting targets as it seems that drone strikes are becoming more indiscriminate and based more and more on behaviour of individuals on the ground than the status of the individual which risks misinterpretation of events on the ground and increases the likelihood of innocent people being killed.[89] The danger with killing these low level targets is that they are easily replaced and the continuing strikes provide more recruits. This risks a rise in anti-American sentiment.[90] This can be proven by the data that shows between 2009 and 2010 out of 161 drone strikes there were 7 high value targets killed, but with a total of 1029 deaths, thus the ratio of high value targets to deaths is 1:147.[91] Deaths are increasing as drones can deliver ever larger payloads.

America claim that these attacks are legal under the September 2001 Authorisation to use military force Act which allows the use of 'all necessary and appropriate force'[92] as well as claiming legality under the UN through a right to self-defence, as the countries where the strikes take place cannot defend for themselves.[93] This is said despite the violation of state sovereignty and human and legal rights as many drone strikes are pre-emptive strikes so their targets in some cases are being killed because of suspicious behaviour, which is up to the interpretation of whoever orders the attack. These kinds of attacks are killing individual people in another state without the other state's permission most of the time. The expansion to include low level targets makes it harder to justify drones legality under self-defence. There remains the question that are these low level people a real and direct threat to the United States safety to justify their killing.[94] Another legal grey area is when state sponsored killing is legal and when is it murder or assassination.[95] As assassination is prohibited by executive Order 12333 which states that 'no person employed by or acting on the behalf of the United States government shall engage in, or conspire to engage in, assassination.'[96] This policy is handing out the American version of justice, it is not a war against al-Qaeda.[97] The legal precedent set now by the United States, which is one ignoring many laws, will lead the way for how other countries in the future will utilise their drone technology. America has created a 'major accountability vacuum'.[98] Therefore the model America has laid out is potentially dangerous for every nation as there is not much legal ground to stand on to rein in the use of drones as America has wielded them with abandon. It will erode the norms of use of force which can lead to chaos.

The United States argues that the benefits of drones far outweigh the human, political and legal costs. This rationale is easy to believe, because as long as America will benefit and the costs do not really affect them there is not a logical reason to curtail their use. So in the short term this cut-price policy is exactly what they needed. However, the costs will soon come to haunt the United States when other countries apply the same logic to their drone programs, which could easily threaten American interests in the Middle East and Asia. As drones are a way to wage a form of warfare without declaring war, as in 2010 drones fired more than one hundred missiles in Pakistan, which was twice the amount in Afghanistan which is meant to be the recognised war theatre.[99]

## *Blowback*

The most pressing danger and result of the use of drones is blowback, which is attacks on American people at home and military personnel in the in the Middle East as a result of anger and hatred directed at America because of the civilian casualties they cause. The drone policy is basically an attempt by the United States to kill their way to a solution and this policy potentially has consequences that will exceed the benefit of drones. General James E. Cartwright adheres to this viewpoint and said 'If you're trying to kill your way to a solution, no matter how precise you are, you're going to upset people even if they're not targeted'[100] and they may turn to extremism and try to gain retribution on the United States. The precise elimination of terrorists through drones has not had a calming effect on the local populations it has increased instability and violence, they complicate matters further for troops on the ground in Afghanistan by risk of provoking militant attacks.[101] The United States seems to be becoming addicted to drones as they are simple and cheap, but they are not paying close attention to the potential side effects of them.

An example of this blowback was the failed Time Square bomber Faisal Shahzad who claimed that he was driven to anger as a result of the drone strikes that he witnessed in his home country of Pakistan.[102] This attempt may have failed, but there have been countless bombings which could easily have been as a result of drone strikes. The people who argue that drone strikes make United States personnel safer are short-sighted as one can ask how many victims have there been due to suicide bombings as revenge for drone strikes. The main cause of this blowback is as a result of family and friends being killed by drones and America is not held accountable as it is estimated between 18-26%

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of the total dead in Pakistan from drone attacks are civilians, in Yemen it is 16% and in Somalia it is between 7-34%.<sup>[103]</sup> However, the real number of civilian casualties could be much higher as it depends on who is classified as a civilian. This civilian death will rightly anger the local population and can lead them to seek retribution.

Even for people in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia who have not been directly affected by a drone strike, the impression that they gain of America is that Obama is playing 'judge, jury and executioner to unseen combatants.'<sup>[104]</sup> This is something that damages the United States and Obama's reputation in the Muslim world and can spark further acts of violence. This is compounded in Pakistan where the majority of drone strikes take place as only 17% of Pakistanis support drone strikes in the FATA region, whilst 74% view the United States as an enemy.<sup>[105]</sup> This only adds to the division between Pakistani government and the population over the use of drones. As Dr David Kilcullen says 'the current path that we are on is leading to loss of Pakistani government control over its own population'<sup>[106]</sup> which will only increase the confrontation of the Pakistani population and the American use of drones. This destabilisation could be the most dangerous as Pakistan has nuclear weapons spread out across the country, and drones are destabilising trust in the government and increasing anti-American sentiment as well as giving rise to extremism.<sup>[107]</sup> Hence the biggest fear and possible consequence is the theft, proliferation or an election of someone who hates America as it could lead to the use of these weapons, which would cause catastrophic damage.

In Yemen the drones are killing members of al-Qaeda but by doing so they are turning them into heroes and martyrs. The al-Qaeda presence in Yemen has increased as a result of drones, as the ranks of AQAP have risen from 300 in 2009 to 1,000 in 2012.<sup>[108]</sup> It is turning an unstable nation into one of al-Qaeda's most important bases, as over the past few years several attempted terrorist strikes on the United States have originated from there.<sup>[109]</sup> Drones provide very good propaganda for AQAP to exploit, which they do in their own newsletter. With more members they can carry out more attacks in retaliation as Figure 3 demonstrates. This is another reason for the danger of a drone centred policy as it is just selective killing, there is no attempt to win over the hearts and minds of the population, and there is no reason for them to support you as drones will not provide safety on the ground for the local population like having troops stationed there to guard and patrol would. There is no attempt to strengthen the economy, stop corruption or improve public services by using drones the United States offers no help.<sup>[110]</sup> For America to truly fight terrorism they have to tackle the situation that feeds extremism through committing financial resources to try to curtail political and economic instability<sup>[111]</sup> rather than adding to it through drone strikes.

A reaction to the drone campaign in FATA, which is a very inaccessible area, has been that as a result of fear and paranoia over drones al-Qaeda operatives move to urban areas where there is a more dense population. There it is less likely for drones to be used and, if they are used, it will increase the number of casualties, anti-Americanism and members of terrorist groups. The propaganda is very effective as it is seen as cowardly and the deaths of children and civilians are highlighted. Their propaganda also includes critical analysis by Western individuals and scholars, to further gain sympathy for their plight.<sup>[112]</sup> The drone policy has not stopped shari'ah courts by the Taliban in Afghanistan or by AQAP. As in February 2012 three spies were sentenced to death in a shari'ah court. The fact that this continues shows how al-Qaeda do not see the drone policy as an effective one that will defeat them, if anything it inspires them to take revenge 'war between us is not over and the days are pregnant [and] will give birth to something new'<sup>[113]</sup> thus demonstrating that drones have not stopped them from having the ability to plan attacks against the United States or influence the local population, if anything it increase their desire and control over the population.

The expansion of the drone campaign to include low level targets of al-Qaeda or members of the Taliban risks blowback from the international community over the use of drones.<sup>[114]</sup> As the ever expanding definition of who is a justifiable target threatens the fragile legitimacy that the program had to begin with.<sup>[115]</sup> The United States is in danger of alienating not just people from Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia but they risk blowback domestically and from their allies in the region and in the West. The short-term gains through drone strikes risks damaging long-term political alliances, as if the drone program expands more and more it will become harder and harder for the United States to justify it back home and to the rest of the world. This only damages their reputation further, which was at a low point when Obama took office, and with the apparent declining power of America they need their allies more than ever.

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## *Conclusions*

The drone policy is a cheap and effective policy in degrading al-Qaeda and Taliban networks; however, this policy can only be a short-term measure. The longer drone strikes continue the more the technology and use will spread across the globe as there is no legal precedent to halt their use. Also the continuing use in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia and possibly elsewhere will only enhance al-Qaeda's network through boosting membership by creating heroes and anti-American sentiment that can boil over into attacks on United States military personnel in the region and even on American soil. The greatest danger of this cheap and popular policy is the destabilisation of a nuclear power in Pakistan which will only weaken the region and lead to further violence. The expansion of this policy is a reaction by Obama to prove politically that he is tough on foreign policy, despite his withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan and his lack of progress with Iran and Syria; this helped to prove to many Americans that he is tough and he is taking the fight to al-Qaeda. Without this tough appearance it would have been much more difficult for Obama to gain re-election in 2012. This demonstrates the danger that making decisions based on short-term economic and political pressures that can potentially lead to decades of chaos in the future.

## **CHAPTER THREE: The Danger of Inaction**

The United States has not come out of Iraq and Afghanistan to plunge themselves into a further conflict that has no clear exit and will only drain more money and lives. The conflicts that happened under Bush became very unpopular and Obama has made a concerted effort to distance himself from the Bush era, publicly at least anyway. Especially with the failures of recent conflicts, which came at a huge expense. Expenditure like that is almost unthinkable now given the economic crisis and the fact that even now they are still coping with the economic aftermath of it. Yet again this is very short-term thinking, as the main instance of inaction is Syria, with Obama dabbling in Iran relations when he took office but since then the policy under Bush of economic sanctions has become the mainstay. The effectiveness of these sanctions is questionable and it does not target the main Iranian concern over their development of nuclear capability. Syria is in crisis and a revolt against the brutal leader Bashar al-Assad is in progress, but with the shadow of Iraq and Afghanistan America is cautious and unwilling to spend money and risk lives despite the atrocities that are being committed, but Assad seems to have now pushed the United States over the red line by his use of chemical weapons, possibly provoking a limited military response. This conflict has the potential to disrupt not just Syria but all the surrounding nations, because a Shia and Sunni civil war as well as changing the regional power balance in favour of Iran. All of which would be detrimental to the United States interests in the region. This is all as a result of the policy makers aims to satisfy the public to win votes and political points rather than making decisions based on long-term strategic costs or gains by actions.[116]

## *Iran*

For many people Iran is the most important country in current American foreign policy, and how Obama deals with it over the next four years will help determine his political legacy. But it is a situation where intervention and inaction would be costly and unpopular politically back home in the short term whatever decision he makes. Obama needs to choose the course of policy that would be most beneficial for America in the long run. However, there is a need to act at some point as the longer he waits the worse it will be if he later on has to intervene. Obama's policy is one of economic sanctions whilst being the 'proverbial ostrich with its head in the sand, hoping that the problem will go away'[117] which suits Iran perfectly who seem to be delaying and playing for time.[118] This will only increase the violence and costs of any long-term intervention with Iran, as at the moment it seems that the United States and Iran are destined for conflict with the rising tensions and dangerous differences in stances.

When Obama took office he removed himself from the confrontational policy of his predecessor and started upon a policy of engagement in an attempt to check Iran's march towards becoming a nuclear power, which in turn would give them regional hegemony.[119] This policy was undertaken because Obama does not want another conflict,

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especially one that could escalate to nuclear war and engulf the whole region, not to mention the huge cost it would entail. Iran knows that 'Washington is in no mood for all out military confrontation'[120] which allows them to rebuff Obama's efforts of engagement.

This engagement policy, which was undertaken for fear of conflict, resulted in a lost chance to destabilise the Tehran regime as it meant Obama did not embrace the pro-democracy green roots movement that emerged in 2009. These were the first buds of the Arab springs but they received no support from Washington as Obama feared that if he identified too closely with the dissidents he would make their struggle for democracy about the United States rather than the discontent of the people. This approach was met with chants of 'Obama, Obama, either you're with them or with us'.[121] Here his policy of inaction cost the United States a chance to promote democracy whilst destabilising a government who are anti-American and pursuing a nuclear capability. This movement for democracy came right at the start of Obama's time in office and if he got involved he risked souring relations with Iran for the rest of his presidency, so there would have been no hope of achieving anything with Iran.

The main policy that Obama has undertaken is that of economic sanctions designed to cripple the Iranian economy. It has been designed to change the cost - benefit analysis of their nuclear program for the worse. The new set of sanctions approved in November 2009 would keep diplomatic options alive and reduce the risk of a military conflict, or so America argued.[122] In reality these sanctions would only increase the hostility between Iran and The United States, as this dual track approach of exerting economic and political pressure, whilst at the same time expressing an interest to negotiate failed as Iran argued that if they wanted to negotiate then do so, don't increase sanctions. By trying to follow two different approaches Obama has ended up undermining any hope of engagement, therefore one policy cancelled out the other, which meant that basically no action was undertaken. Engagement alone became too risky as there was no political benefit to it domestically.[123]

Sanctions continued when Obama signed the Accountability and Divestment Act of 2010 on July 1st 2010.[124] Again in March 2012 sanctions on Iran claimed to put them in a 'world of hurt'[125] and that economic duress might force Tehran to rethink their nuclear aspirations. However, the effects of sanctions on a regime are always unclear and they do not always force uprisings. If you look at the sanctions on Saddam Hussein's regime in the 1990's the sanctions there actually enhanced his power.[126]

The Tehran declaration of May 2010 over the swap deal of 1,200 Kg of LEU to Turkey and then the Vienna group would deliver 120kg of fuel that was needed for Tehran's Research reactor.[127] This is a deal that the Americans failed to get a year earlier in October 2009 and this saga is seen as a delaying tactic by the Tehran government. If they agreed to the deal with Russia, France and the United States in 2009 the 1,200 Kg of LEU was 75% of their stockpile (which would have been removed) whereas by May 2010 it was only 50%, which meant they had enough for a bomb if they chose to build one.[128] The period between the two deals allowed Iran to produce more LEU, and therefore make the deal that much better for them, and worse for the United States. By the time of the Tehran declaration Obama had had enough of Iran's delaying tactics after two failed face to face meetings over the initial deal. By the time the Turkish and Brazilian delegation arrived in Iran, Obama had gained approval from Russia and China for a sanctions resolution. After the failed talks with Iran Obama needed to be seen to have done something, sanctions would show this and if he failed to get sanctions it would be seen as another victory for Iran. Obama could not domestically accept the Tehran declaration as 'Congress was coming at the Obama administration like a steamroller'[129] over the saga that had been the Tehran declaration for the United States and Obama did not want to invest political capital on this when he had other priorities.

The danger with inaction by the United States is Israel, as they may take it upon themselves to act. As evidenced when Obama started his outreach campaign to Tehran early on Israel's insistence of a military option undermined Obama's engagement.[130] Israel feels much more threatened, due to the close proximity of Iran to them. However, Israel is being restrained by the United States for now, but the threat from Israel is dangerous as Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have a strained relationship and Israel is unhappy with the United States policy of inaction, so there may well come a time when they ignore the United States and undertake their own foreign policy which is that 'no enemy should in time muster the capability to threaten Israel's existence'[131] which they believe Iran does.

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The policy of containment that Obama settled on along with economic sanctions will not work, it is an empty policy. Containment has always been a primarily military doctrine, thus depending on strategic resources.[132] For containment to work there needs to be clear red lines which if Iran crosses the United States will take action. This will not happen as the United States is not willing to use military force, especially because Iran will require a large sustained presence.[133] America is not willing to pay that price after Iraq and Afghanistan, as like the Vietnam syndrome another loss would compromise the American identity and dominant position, so now after Iraq and Afghanistan the same syndrome is in place.[134] This political need to portray a strong America globally would be threatened if they did not succeed, and these pressures as well as the economic costs prevent Obama from taking any action. Inaction is only allowing Iran the time to build a nuclear capability and weapons if they choose to. Therefore the longer America waits the more dangerous Iran becomes to them, and their allies in the surrounding area.

The regional situation can be hugely effected if Iran is allowed to achieve a nuclear capability, as it would only encourage other states to pursue the technology as well, and could lead to a nuclear arms race in the Middle East.[135] Most likely it will spur Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey to pursue a nuclear capability as these are Iran's chief rivals in the region. Saudi Arabia has stated that a nuclear Iran will force them to act to maintain the balance of power.[136] This is true for Turkey as well as it would give Iran a strategic advantage and harm their own interests, and in 2009 a Turkish foreign ministry official claimed that if Iran gets nuclear weapons Turkey will be forced to arm itself with a nuclear weapon as well.[137] Egypt under the old regime said it would be forced into a nuclear arms race if Iran got a nuclear bomb, but after the uprisings and with a new government it is unclear if this stance will soften. This shows how an arms race will most likely take place if Iran gets the bomb, as it only motivates other nations to obtain it to maintain regional parity.

The inaction of America is detrimental to the region, especially from their point of view as Iran has been transferring IED technology and training to insurgents. In Afghanistan NATO has failed to disrupt ties between Iran and the Taliban. This also happened in Lebanon which the United States has virtually abandoned,[138] while Iran funds Hezbollah and Hamas \$700 million per year.[139] Ignoring the problem, only increases the boldness of the insurgents and Iran in their pursuit of regional hegemony.

## *Syria*

Obama's handling of the situation in Syria has been one of inaction, as the American people are war-weary and they would rather he focuses on domestic economic issues. Still Syrian intervention does not have to be boots on the ground like in Iraq and Afghanistan. Syria is split into many factions and groups fighting, such as al-Qaeda and Hezbollah with their links to Iran shows how the regions balance of power is being threatened. The conflict is split among Sunnis and Shi'ites which has the potential to escalate and reverberate across the whole region, and this is not helped by the large spread of Syrian refugees flooding into neighbouring countries that do not have the infrastructure to cope with them. The issue with Syria is that over the last two years the longer the United States has stood watching on the side-lines the worse the situation has become, which means the tougher it will be to confront and control it. But now Assad has pushed America to seek action from the UN Security Council of a limited military response after his use of chemical weapons.

Getting involved in Syria challenges one of Obama's key aims to reduce the American presence in the Middle East. This is a policy undertaken because of the impact of Afghanistan and Iraq under President Bush and the need to reduce military costs and loss of American lives. The United States may be hated by Muslims in the Middle East and North Africa, but if Obama stands by when Assad gasses his own people, he will be remembered as the President who stood by and allowed another deadly chapter to unfold.[140] But it seems Obama may sanction a limited military response, without ground troops two years after the crisis began, it remains to be seen how effective it will be.

The big reason why Obama has been cautious about getting involved in Syria so far is that he views it as a humanitarian crisis. Therefore this implies that there are no strategic interests for the United States.[141] This means that it is much harder to justify intervention to the American people as the public do not want another war where their family members and friends die for needless reasons. This crisis comes at a time of American declining power,

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where there are limits on what the United States can afford to do. This is why since the civil war began in March 2011 Obama has resisted international calls for intervention; especially as in 2011 America was still involved in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, his stance has changed with the use of chemical weapons, in effect he has been pushed into some response by their use.

The danger that the inaction causes is that it allows the situation to become more violent, and gives an opportunity for people to exploit a country that is in civil war. This is highlighted by the fact that al-Qaeda has officially merged with Syrian jihadists as AQL has been a feeder for Jabhat al Nusra militia and provided a staging ground for attacks in Syria. It creates the possibility of Syria facing two civil wars.[142] As well as Iran's proxy force Hezbollah who are building a network of militias inside Syria.[143] The inaction by the United States has ceded Syria to other interested parties. Yet if America ignored the political and economic pressures against intervention and acted earlier it would have been much easier to facilitate a resolution, which would help to contain the fighting and in turn undercut outside groups, like al-Qaeda.[144] The inaction over the last two years to even arm the opposition in Syria has allowed the extremist forces to gain the upper hand.[145] It seems now that Obama is willing to send military support and arms to moderate opposition to Assad after there has been confirmation of the use of chemical weapons along with Iran stepping up their involvement in the conflict.[146] A realist may put the timing of the military aid down to the fact that Syria is becoming a strategic interest to the United States, solely to stop Iran gaining regional hegemony; therefore they are supplying arms, which may escalate to some military actions in the future.

The danger of standing by is not just that other interested parties will try to gain control; it also allows Assad to go on killing indefinitely.[147] The death toll in the Syrian conflict is around 110,000 people since the conflict began in March 2011 according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.[148] This number has been steadily increasing over the last few years and only looks to continue this trend. This is by far and away larger than the number estimated killed by Colonel Gadhafi in Libya that prompted UN intervention.

David Shedd, the Deputy Director of the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency said that there are at least 1,200 groups in opposition to Assad, many of them small and with mainly local grievances. However, left unchecked more radical segments will take over these smaller opposition groups and can cause the conflict to last for many more years. These groups are there for the long haul as they want to claim as much land as they can for themselves.[149] This demonstrates the explosive nature of the Syrian conflict and that the end of the civil war may just be the beginning of the violence as afterwards the country will be split up by many different factions all fighting each other for what was Syria. Without intervention there is no sight of the violence ending and not much hope of an outcome free from widespread violence. As even with American intervention it will be limited and brief, with no ground troops, which seems an ineffective policy to solve the Syrian crisis.

There is a major rift in the Middle East between Sunnis and Shi'ites (which dates back to the seventh century over the dispute of Mohammed's successor) and Samir al-Ibrahim the secretary-general of the Syrian Free Religious Scholars Association says that there is a great fear over a massive sectarian war starting.[150] Which is something beyond the control of Obama, but he has allowed Syria to become the latest battleground despite the fact that Assad is pro-Iran, so by supporting anti-Assad groups to replace Assad he would have dealt a blow to Iran.[151] As Syria under Assad was Iran's most important Arab ally, so the overthrow of Assad would undermine Iran's push for regional hegemony.[152] It would also mean that Iran could not support Hezbollah as effectively if they could not use Syrian territory.[153] If America had acted in helping the opposition to defeat Assad they would have enforced a strategic loss on Iran, but America did not act for fear of the consequences and that has put the regional stability at risk.[154] The inaction has allowed religious groups to gain dominance in Syria, evidenced by the growing number of incidents of Sharia law being handed out in rebel held areas; this could lead to Syria becoming a religious state and is something that America does not want. Therefore through their sitting on the side-lines, the outcomes that America want to avoid, look much more likely to become reality.

Since the beginning of the crisis the inaction has only increased the danger to surrounding nations, partly because of the expected 3 million refugees by the end of 2013 who have flooded into Iraq, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon and Turkey, this unstable population can destabilise the countries where they seek refuge as they put a strain on resources and are a breeding ground for extremism.[155] Jordan has over 540,000 Syrian refugees and an average of 2,000 a day

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at the start of the year his figure is around 10% of their population, which affects 'water, energy, education, health and, most importantly, job opportunities' for Jordanians as well as Syrian refugees.[156] The threat of refugees causing instability in other countries, as in Syria there are 3.5 million people internally displaced as well.[157]

Obama does not have good options in Syria, but that is partly down to his policy of inaction, as while he and other western nations have looked on the extreme militants have grown in strength, al-Qaeda has an increasing presence. Obama is more worried about the costs of acting rather than the cost of allowing the situation to develop on its own.[158] Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya all weigh on his decision to stay out of the crisis for fear of plunging America into another war, he does not want to be seen as a world policeman like his predecessor, but the longer the war goes on the louder the clamour for United States intervention will be. On 31st August, America is on the verge of limited military intervention in Syria and Obama himself reiterates the need for this intervention of national security to protect their allies in the region and if they do nothing they risk an 'escalating use of chemical weapons, or their proliferation to terrorist groups.'[159]

## *Conclusions*

The policy of inaction or wait and see, whilst hoping you do not have to make a big decision that may cost money and lives which will cause unpopularity back home. The question Obama has to ask is does the cost of inaction outweigh the cost of action?[160] In the short term the benefits of inaction clearly outweigh the cost of inaction for the United States anyhow, but this is precisely the dangerous decision making for the future as Obama has not made any great inroads with Iran, and dealing with their pursuit of nuclear capability is a long-term issue. The international community has pushed Obama to call for military intervention, in its most limited format. This will virtually do nothing for the long-term stability of Syria. Future Presidents may well have to deal with a nuclear Iran which will hugely complicate matters and lead to a regional nuclear arms race and possibly worse. Inaction only allows the situation to spiral further out of control and the longer that goes on the harder it will be to intervene, as we are seeing with Syria at the moment. Not only that but it allows other interested parties to gain a foothold making an acceptable outcome from the American perspective that much more difficult to achieve, and at a larger economic cost and endangering more lives of Syrians and possibly American soldiers.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Obama foreign policy, especially that of his first term as president, has been shaped and defined by economic pressures to cut costs and focus his efforts on the domestic front and job creation. It has also been moulded by political and public pressure to undo the mess that he inherited and withdraw from Iraq and Afghanistan. This is why the drone policy has been so widely used under Obama as it is vastly cheaper than conventional counterinsurgency or counterterrorism. Whilst allowing Obama to take the fight to al-Qaeda, which was vital to do as he wanted to get re-elected and Republicans are seen as stronger on foreign policy (so it is an area the opposition would target Obama on). The pressures of the economy and the public allow Obama to avoid tough decisions on intervention; it made coming out of Afghanistan in 2014 an obvious move to satisfy the public. It is also why there has been little action against Iran or Syria as the American public have become more isolationist in their thinking since the financial crisis of 2008. As they think that domestic matters should take priority and money should not be sent overseas. Hence it is easy for Obama to undertake a policy of wait and see with Iran and Syria, despite the long-term dangers of allowing the situation in these countries to get worse in the case of Syria, and more threatening to the United States in the case of Iran.

The issue with making decisions and policy based on these short-term factors is that there is no long-term planning for the future. The decisions that he has made may be beneficial for the United States in the short term, but it is not beneficial for their long-term safety or even the short-term safety and stability of Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Syria and allowing Iran to grow their power and influence.

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This short-term thinking is dangerous as in Iraq America has left behind a nation edging ever closer to an autocratic dictatorship with increasing ties to Iran and a growing presence of al-Qaeda, leaving America with no influence there or any means of maintaining a democratic stable country. The withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014 leaves the United States a year to fix everything and leave a stable country behind, but if that highly unlikely scenario does not develop then the Taliban will step back into control, as the government in Kabul has no one to protect it and chances are that it will once again become a safe haven for terrorists and all of this will only destabilise a nuclear power in Pakistan further. The drone policy has evidence of blowback and increasing anti-Americanism with the program of killing first and asking no questions, also the spread of the technology will only increase this kill rather than capture people all the while that innocent bystanders are killed as well. The longer America ignores Iran the stronger they will get as any efforts so far have been fruitless and used as a delay tactic by Iran. The situation in Syria will only get worse for the United States with the death toll and refugee numbers constantly rising and a civil war with interested parties from American enemies in Iran, al-Qaeda and other extremist and proxy groups.

This shows that the short-term decision making process of the Obama foreign policy is too highly influenced by domestic economic and political influences; this may change the further he goes into his second term in office, but the mistakes have been made in his first term. The problems I have outlined in the last three chapters will not go away easily or quickly, also if America continues on this path these problems will not be resolved in a beneficial way for them, unless they take the decision to re-engage in these countries and regions in general. I think it is highly likely that in the future America will get involved in one or more of these issues, but if that happened the situation would be worse, harder to resolve, more costly financially and risk more lives of American personnel. However, it now seems that Obama will get militarily involved in Syria, all be it in a limited format, so it remains to be seen what will happen with that and if this limited intervention escalates into a dull scale involvement.

President Obama lacks freedom in his own foreign policy as a result of the financial crisis of 2008 and political fallout of the Bush era expensive failures in Iraq and Afghanistan. These constraints are leading the United States down a dangerous path for the future as Iraq is heading towards a dictatorship, Afghanistan is likely to be seized again by the Taliban when America pulls out and therefore allowing it to once again become a safe haven for terrorists. The financial situation has increased the drone policy as it is a cheaper alternative in the short term, but again the long-term danger is of blowback and the spread of this technology to countries opposed to America. The danger of leaving Iran and Syria for fear of repercussions politically as well as the cost leaves Iran creeping towards nuclear capability and enhancing their regional power. Syria has the potential to become more than a civil war, with many different interested parties tearing the country apart it is anyone's guess what might become of it.

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