

# Home Ground Horror #2

*Withdrawal of combat forces from Afghanistan is planned to start in July 2011. Bin Laden, however, needs US and NATO forces in place to keep The Long War going, to kill Americans and other westerners, and to help maintain his call for jihad. If the withdrawal proceeds, I argue he'd be forced to act. Consider the following....*

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The noise from and about Afghanistan is getting louder. Almost every day, there is an op-ed or analysis or interview appearing online and offline.

Only eighteen months ago, in March 2009, there were ideas about [Saving Afghanistan](#), with some American commanders thinking that “a Taliban victory is not only not inevitable, “it is not even probable.” However, also at that time, the [Pew Research Center](#) found that “the public has grown skeptical that progress has been made in the ongoing war in that country.”

With the passing of time, Taliban attacks have ballooned; a negotiated, political settlement is under debate; General Petraeus has replaced General MacChrystal; the costs for US and NATO forces mount; and there is an apparent lack of real progress despite efforts to defeat the Taliban. Uncertainty continues about probable outcomes, particularly who, exactly, is ‘winning’.

This much is known, however: President Obama has publicly stated that US forces will *begin* withdrawing in July 2011; some NATO allies have already done so. Meanwhile, the body count for all participants continues to mount inexorably, with even Australian forces now experiencing an increase in casualties.

From that horrific perspective, the Taliban are winning because Afghanistan **“is more dangerous now than at any time since 2001”** according to a very recent news report. And, as most know, any mention of Afghanistan’s history includes the well-worn cliché of it being the graveyard of empires. In sum, nobody has ever completely defeated the Afghans, although the Persians (modern Iranians) and the Mongols occupied the region for hundreds of years, the former twice. Afghanistan has, arguably, the most difficult terrain upon which to fight any type of war.

Home ground has its advantages. Or should have....

Hardly mentioned, however, amongst all the gloomy press in the previous twelve months, is al-Qaeda, the group that started the whole shebang with the home ground horror nine years ago, and which dragged the U.S.A. into its longest war in American history. Only recently, with the ninth anniversary of that attack, has the vexed issue of al-Qaeda, and what to do about it, resurfaced.

Read, for example [Ted Koppel’s recent comments](#) on that very topic in an oped where he urges America to reflect on “what our enemy sought, and still seeks, to

accomplish -- and how we have accommodated him.” In this context, Mr Koppel and I would seem to share some points of view – along with many readers, I feel sure.

But, instead of agonizing on what to do about al-Qaeda – as if that’s *truly* necessary, anyway – perhaps we should turn the question around: what is al-Qaeda likely to do about the U.S.A. when US and NATO forces leave Afghanistan? Search the net and you’ll find many opinions.

One of the most comprehensive reviews I found (and worth reading) – [Why no more 9/11s?](#) – analyses eight different reasons why al-Qaeda has not executed another attack. Despite the failure of many al-Qaeda affiliates, the writer, Timothy Noah, cautions that another serious attack in U.S.A. is always possible. Quite obviously. It’s an ongoing threat and potential nightmare that keeps security agencies awake.

A slightly different perspective, however, is presented by [The Afghanistan Study Group](#), a think-tank consisting of academics and military experts. In a recently released report, their suggested approach to manage the problem of Afghanistan includes political reconciliation with Taliban elements (*check!*); much reduced combat operations by US and NATO forces (??); a focus on al-Qaeda using Special Forces (*double check!*); broad economic development (*check!*); and a comprehensive attempt to raise Afghanistan’s political credibility with regional and global partners (*check!*).

A key comment in the report is significant vis-à-vis al-Qaeda: “The ongoing threat from al Qaeda is better met via specific counter-terrorism measures, a reduced US military ‘footprint’ in the Islamic world, and diplomatic efforts to improve America’s overall image and to undermine international support for militant extremism.” Note that the perspective is *entirely* America-centric; whereas, I argue that, in order to fully understand the enemy, one must always attempt to see his point of view.

By 2008, for example, al-Qaeda “corporate” had no need to conduct another catastrophic attack, except under certain conditions. Well, those specific conditions are now highly likely in view of the planned withdrawal from Afghanistan and the already completed withdrawal from Iraq. Yes, we all know that large support forces will remain in both countries for many years to come; but, without an appreciable American presence in the Iraq/Afghanistan/Pakistan region, Osama bin Laden’s main objective of bleeding the U.S.A. white, physically and economically, will come to a gradual and grinding halt.

So: assuming that al-Qaeda corporate is still as fanatical about and committed to killing Americans, then inevitably the gang will be like alcoholics with no booze. Because bin Laden and al-Zawahiri are on record, many times, exhorting jihadists to kill Americans particularly and all westerners in general. So, what’s a realistic outlook?

Well, considering the consistency of their message to the West, I’d strongly suggest bin Laden, al-Zawahiri *et al* wouldn’t want to see the grunts go. So, before that happens, I’d further suggest that al-Qaeda must do something to bring the conditions back to ‘normalcy’: that is, the continuation of what the Pentagon calls The Long

War, in which al-Qaeda and Taliban factions can very easily continue dealing death to infidels nearby.

Hence, the most effective way to reverse a withdrawal of American forces is for al-Qaeda to attempt another cataclysmic attack, *soon*, somewhere in U.S.A.; one so awful, so horrible that it would be politically and emotionally impossible for President Obama, Congress, and the American people to ignore.

Would al-Qaeda still do that, considering the probable negative reaction from most of the Islamic world? Does al-Qaeda even have sufficient resources now? Only the top people in that criminal gang and allied intelligence know that, for sure. Assuming the worst though, as we must, just *how* likely is “soon”?

Oddly enough, and earlier this year, heads of three US intelligence branches (see [Why Didn't Faisal Run?](#)) claimed to a Senate Intelligence committee that a terrorist attack *would* occur somewhere in the United States within six months. Were those three public servants just excellent gamblers? Because: three months after that prediction, many will recall that a botched attack actually took place at Times Square. With that sort of high level prescience (or luck?), maybe the Senate should get another intelligence committee going, and sooner, rather than later?

Because, while [some might think that the times are now safer](#), others – including me – suggest that [vigilance is now even more necessary](#). In 2011, the planned withdrawal from Afghanistan is to begin; and 2011 happens to be the tenth anniversary of the 2001 attack. That's not a good mix, psychologically and emotionally, for all concerned.

While security in America *is* now better, even amateur extremists have shown they can cause major, short term disruption and threaten loss of life. It's therefore logical to suggest that the extremist experts – the top echelon of al-Qaeda – would go all out to excel, should they decide that the timing is now not only right, but also *necessary*, to plan and execute the next big strike. Moreover, with the constant improvements in conventional explosives, it matters naught that [experts continue to publicly debate](#) the issue of a nuclear or dirty bomb in al-Qaeda's hands – simply because with so many well-populated and soft targets in U.S.A., traditional munitions will suffice. [Timothy McVeigh](#) proved that, long ago. Al-Qaeda's only dilemma, in my opinion, is not which target to choose, but which is the easiest.

Because no suicidal jihadist *needs* a nuclear bomb at a packed NFL game, a major freeway interchange at rush hour, an overcrowded hospital on a weekend, a busy college at exam time, a giant shopping mall any day, or Disney Land on Sunday.

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