

Mainstream Media Omissions and Distortions: The World as the Washington Post Would Like It to Be

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So much of our discussion of public policy consists of absurd accusations from the right matched with self-serving justifications from the somewhat-less-right. The most obvious example of this is the perennial think piece on Obama's foreign policy, which is invariably analyzed as being either foolishly pacifistic or prudently diplomatic. The reality that the Obama administration has used military force on a large scale in many countries is not acknowledged, because it's not something either major party likes to point out (FAIR Blog, [7/16/13](#), [8/30/13](#), [3/18/14](#), [8/12/14](#)).

The latest installment in this genre comes from the Washington Post([8/22/14](#)), where [Zachary Goldfarb](#) presents a classic false dichotomy:

Obama's detractors revived criticism that his foreign policy is based on retreat from the world, typified by the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq three years ago, a lack of direct action in Syria and an economics-first approach to driving Russia's military back from Ukraine.

His supporters argue that his approach has been consistent with his strategy of returning the United States—after post-September 11 wars—to a foreign policy built around economic engagement rather than military intervention.



Obama's forgotten Afghan surge (graphic: NPR)

How do you write a sentence like this one—"In place of the large military deployments, Obama has relied on smaller operations to manage, rather than resolve, many of the conflicts that have arisen during his time in office"—without mentioning that Obama sent nearly 70,000 extra troops to Afghanistan, tripling the deployment there? Since then, 1,700 US troops have died, and at least [13,000 Afghan civilians](#), along with an unknown number of Afghan combatants; surely this has a bearing on whether you can characterize Obama's presidency as a "retreat from the world"?

But the only mentions of Afghanistan, Obama's biggest single military engagement, in Goldfarb's piece are in a passage in which Obama adviser Ben Rhodes is allowed to claim that Obama policy there is the exact opposite of what it actually was:

At the same time, he said, Obama is not reconsidering his view that Iraq-and Afghanistan—must be primarily responsible for their own security.

“The basic premise still holds that we’re transitioning from wars in which the United States was on the ground in big numbers fighting to secure Afghanistan and Iraq to Afghans and Iraqis fighting on the ground to secure their own countries,” Rhodes said.

In Afghanistan, Obama has mostly been “transitioning” from the “big numbers” of troops that he sent there himself (FAIR Blog, [11/25/13](#))-but that’s an inconvenient detail that interferes with the story Goldfarb is trying to tell.

To get another viewpoint that is essentially the same viewpoint, only with a frowny face, Goldfarb goes to Cheney-era State Department official David Kramer, who says things like, “The problem for Obama is he often sets up these false choices between essentially doing nothing and sending in the 82nd battalion.”



The Washington Post’s Zachary Goldfarb

This would have been a good time to mention that in numerous countries, rather than doing nothing or sending in the 82nd, Obama has chosen to use drones to assassinate some 2,400 people, including several hundred civilians and at least 168 children (Huffington Post, 1/23/14). But, remarkably, the word “drone” never appears in an article ostensibly about whether Obama has done a “retreat from the world” or not.

After setting up his fake dichotomy between Obama as namby-pamby pacifist and Obama as wise diplomat, Goldfarb writes:

The question, though, is whether he is contradicting the pledge embraced in his 2009 Nobel Prize lecture: “[to face the world as it is,](#)” not as he would like it to be.

No one who writes an article like this one is any position to give lectures about facing the world as it is.

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