

Tom Donilon: Obama's new National Security Adviser

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In the past 10 days, 150 NATO-bound oil tankers were torched in Pakistan, mostly by Taliban but some apparently by their own drivers, who siphoned and sold the fuel and then destroyed the evidence of their theft. Win-win for locals, none of whom are naive enough to believe killing more of their brothers is a good idea. 500 oil tankers and containers that left Port Qasim in Karachi for Kandahar did not even reach the AfPak border. This, while the key Khyber Pass was closed, holding up thousands of supply trucks that did make it intact, after Pakistan shut the border in protest against the almost daily, illegal and unsanctioned US air strikes that have killed 1800 Pakistani civilians.

Lots more Afghans and NATO troops also died across the border. Another (Israeli) drone was downed in southern Afghanistan. NATO deaths so far this year (572) far exceed the total of any previous year. A Senate Armed Services Committee report just published documents the alarming use of up to 26,000 private contractors by the US military and Afghan government "linked to murder, kidnapping and [bribery, as well as Taliban](#) and anti-coalition activities."

How should the new NSA Tom Donilon rate the "success" of the past decade's jingoistic fight against terrorism? The Pentagon keeps coughing up more troops and arms to fight Israel's war in Iraq and someone's war in Afghanistan (what is the US doing in Afghanistan?). Its oversight of billions of dollars in "reconstruction" in Iraq and in Afghanistan is virtually nonexistent. The latest from Iraq is that a military coup is in the works which will confirm Iraq as a Shia-dominated state in alliance with Iran. In Afghanistan, with a little luck — bad or good depending on your point of view — and a few more matches, the Taliban could turn the surging NATO forces into Custer's Last Stand, the Charge of the Light Brigade, a replay of the first Afghan war of 1839-42.

Donilon is dismissed by the jackboots and their cheerleaders, like David Frum (coiner of Bush's "Axis of Evil"), for "not travelling enough". Should he take "a serious field trip" to Iraq since he has "no direct understanding of these places", as his predecessor General James Jones put it? Go to the so-called Green Zone in Baghdad, the huge black hole in the middle of that unfortunate nation's capital, a fortified ghetto for the US occupiers and now their comprador local elite? [Star in a GI porn film?](#)

Or perhaps go to a refugee camp to meet a sample of the millions of Iraqis who have had to flee for their lives, a direct result of the US invasion. Many are in peaceful Syria, but then it is an associate member of Frum's evil axis and off-bounds to US officials. For that matter, Donilon could visit a Palestinian refugee camp in Iraq to meet with some of millions of those innocent civilians who were forced to flee the violence of America's best (only) friend in

the Middle East.

His first stop should be Islamabad to hear Pakistanis' gripes and try to figure out just what this odd US ally is up to. His boss Obama (actually the CIA) has authorised 125 drone strikes on Pakistanis in two years — twice as many as Bush did in five. Donilon will probably not find too many cheerleaders there. He may have to dodge a bomb or two himself, as have US officials in the recent past. He will find that most Pakistanis consider the US their enemy (64 per cent) and their government on the verge of collapse. US military complain that Pakistan (surprise) has its "own agenda", that it wants a stable, friendly Afghanistan. That as a result of this perverse logic, it is failing — in the view of the US — to kill enough Afghan allies (oops, insurgents) on the border in North Waziristan.

His next stop should be London or Paris, despite State Department warnings of a "severe" threat of terrorist attacks, to see the effects of a decade of the "war on terror" there.

Obama's new NSA is condemned in the mainstream media for being a corporate lawyer who "made millions" as a lobbyist for Fannie Mae, an acronym spat out contemptuously (a woman of loose morals?) referring to the Federal National Mortgage Association (FNMA), set up by Roosevelt in 1938 to help ordinary Americans buy houses. That this once-government (read: socialist), now-privatised organisation was sucked into the Wall Street vortex of sleaze is hardly Donilon's fault. And is earning millions as a lobbyist for arms producers or Israel, as Cheney and many other Washington politicians did/do, better than working for an agency which at least once-upon-a-time genuinely helped ordinary Americans put roofs over their heads?

"Mr Donilon's actions at Fannie Mae to undercut meaningful reform precipitated the largest taxpayer-funded bailout in American history. Now President Obama is entrusting him with America's security," puffed Senator Richard Shelby. True, Shelby, the senior Republican on the banking committee, was one of the most vocal critics of the 2008 bailout plan, but this protest is just partisan politics. He is a hawk and doesn't like Donilon's commitment to rein in the military. Shelby actually helped scuttle Obama's efforts to better regulate banks and prevent them from using [TARP bailout money for their own benefit](#). He is a dirty pot calling the kettle black.

Donilon has a very difficult agenda, but also a window of opportunity which we can only hope he has the guts to use. He helped formulate Obama's plan to pull the troops out of Afghanistan by next summer, the condition Obama laid down when the military twisted his arm into allowing their surge in Afghanistan. Donilon "has urged what he calls a 'rebalancing' of American foreign policy to rapidly disengage American forces in Iraq and to focus more on China, Iran and other emerging challenges," reports the New York Times. In the 2009 presidential Afghanistan-Pakistan review, he argued that the US could not engage in "endless war".

Contrary to wild-eyed critics on left and right, Obama is neither Bush-reincarnate nor the anti-Christ. He is neither Israel's best friend nor enemy. There are definitely points against Obama: the military budget has kept expanding; he is presiding over a dance of death around the world playing John Philip Souza marches; the US economy continues to shrivel as [bankers fill their pockets](#).

But perhaps the Nobel committee that [gave him the Peace Prize](#) wasn't so far off the mark.

He has managed to freeze, if only for a few months, Israeli settlements, the first time in two decades, and has prevented the crazies in the Pentagon and Tel Aviv from launching yet another disastrous war — this time against peaceful Iran. If Obama and Donilon can stare down their military captors and mobilise the majority of Americans who now recognise the neocon war strategy as a horrible failure, he could turn his country back from the abyss.

Donilon replaces 65-year-old General Jones, a well-meaning stuffed shirt who dismissed Obama's inner circle alternately as waterbugs, the Politburo, and the Mafia, and criticised his successor as being "out of his depth". It is Jones who was out of his depth, an old Cold Warrior and NATO enthusiast, believer that bombs bring peace.

This appointment is a bold assertion by Obama of his original agenda which could trigger more departures, including that of 67-year-old Defense Secretary and Republican Robert Gates (a parting gift to Obama from Bush) who said that Donilon's appointment would be a "disaster" according to Bob Woodward's Obama's Wars. Donilon is "deeply sceptical" of the military's chain of command and the feeling is mutual, with many commanders viewing him as a politically-connected dilettante. Of course, Gates loudly told the press, "I have had a very productive and very good working relationship with Tom Donilon, contrary to what you may have read," which merely confirms his distaste for Donilon.

The appointment does not show Obama as "thin-skinned" or his foreign policy team in "crisis and disarray" as pundit Toby Harnden puts it. While the [departures of Emanuel, Axelrod and Summers](#) hint at Israeli distaste for Obama, this move shows he is making a last, valiant stand to leave a legacy that has at least a whiff of peace. The only way to turn his presidency into a two-term historic one is to keep moving forward and keep discarding the neocon parasites that infest Washington.

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