

OBAMA'S WAR

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Tens of thousands of fresh American troops are now on the move in Afghanistan, led by a new commander and armed with a counter-insurgency plan that builds on the lessons of Iraq. But can U.S. forces succeed in a land long known as the “graveyard of empires”? And can the U.S. stop the Taliban in neighboring Pakistan, where U.S. troops are not allowed and the government is weak?

In *Obama's War*, veteran FRONTLINE correspondent Martin Smith (*Beyond Baghdad, Return of the Taliban*) travels across Afghanistan and Pakistan to see first-hand how the President's new strategy is taking shape—delivering vivid, on-the-ground reporting from this war's many fronts. Through interviews with top generals, diplomats, and government officials, Smith also reports the internal debates over President Obama's grand attempt to combat terrorism at its roots.

The brunt of the work is falling on rank-and-file soldiers, and nowhere is it more difficult than the dusty, unforgiving landscape of Helmand province, the Taliban stronghold in southern Afghanistan, where FRONTLINE embedded with Echo Company of the 2nd Marines, 8th Battalion. Since the Marines' arrival in July, Helmand has become the most lethal battlefield in Afghanistan, but FRONTLINE found the Marines trying to act as armed diplomats, attempting to build the necessary trust for badly-needed economic development.

“It's trying to change the culture of the organization,” Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the top commander in Afghanistan, tells FRONTLINE of the administration's plan. “At the end of the day, our best counter-insurgents are going to be young sergeants who just have an ability to deal with people. We've got to give them the flexibility to make decisions.”

Even as American soldiers struggle to make progress in Afghanistan, village by village, equally vexing challenges remain across the border in Pakistan, due to the lack of resources and time.

Barred from sending troops across the border, the U.S. is left with few good options, and no quick fix will solve Pakistan. The only possible strategy is to build up the civilian government to the point where it can be a counter-balance to the military and begin to reorient Pakistan's own sense of their destiny. However, this goal is equally difficult to achieve. With no end in sight, the war in Afghanistan may be remembered as one of the shortfalls of the Obama presidency.

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