Written by **Thomas R. Eddlem** on September 12, 2009

Obama Pledges to "Renew Our Resolve" Against Al-Qaeda

President Obama made a solemn and mostly non-political speech on the anniversary of the September 11 bombings that will have politicos guessing about his policies in Iraq and Afghanistan for weeks to come. "Let us renew our resolve against those who perpetrated this barbaric act and who plot against us still," Obama told an audience in front of the Pentagon memorializing the attacks of September 11, adding that "in pursuit of al Qaeda and its extremist allies, we will never falter."

But the disappearing connection between al-Qaeda and America's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in the minds of most Americans means that if President Obama meant to use the speech to drum up public support for the wars, he likely misstepped. "With a record 44 U.S. soldiers dying in Afghanistan in July and last month's Afghan presidential election dogged by allegations of widespread fraud," the Associated Press reported on September 11, "Obama faces an uphill battle in persuading fellow Democrats in Congress of the need to commit more resources to the war."

And it's not just Democrats who have become more sceptical of America's wars abroad. During the past month, ABC news pundit and syndicated columnist George Will abandoned his neoconservative colleagues on both wars. Will published columns in the *Washington Post* earlier this month advocating U.S. withdrawal from Iraq (September 4) and a pullout from the erstwhile "good war" in Afghanistan (September 1). The U.S. Afghan effort, Will says, "should be called Operation Sisyphus." Sisyphus was the Greek mythological figure cursed with having to roll a stone to the top of a hill, only to watch it roll back down again. Sisyphus as forced to repeat the feat for eternity, and has become emblemmatic of a task that is impossible to complete.

Will's columns met with fire from the neoconservative establishment, with the *Weekly Standard's* Robert Kagan calling Will's ideas a "double surrender" in a *Washington Post* rebuttal. Kagan is a cofounder of the neoconservative Project for the New American Century and a member of the establishment Council on Foreign Relations.

But even very public fire by Kagan and other formerly powerful Republicans may not be enough to stem what could become a Republican tide away from the wars. While the Republican Party leadership has remained strongly behind the wars (and Democrats have not), the rank and file of the Republican Party

has given itself more over to "tea parties" where the majority of attendees are skeptical of both the Washington GOP establishment as well as the President's increasingly unpopular foreign wars. The slight erosion of support for the wars among Republicans could become a flood as "tea parties" make their influence felt in home districts and the Democratic President becomes the face of those wars.

President Obama's speech was the first federal "National Day of Service and Remembrance" address by a president. September 11 became the National Day of Service and Remembrance after the April passage of the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act in April, a bill that tripled the size of the Americorps federal service program.

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