



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on December 30, 2015

Obama's Special-Ops Troops Just Another Name for "Boots on the Ground"

When are "boots on the ground" not "boots on the ground"? When they are worn by Special Operations troops, if we are to take President Obama at his word.

A report in the *New York Times* for December 27 stated it plainly:

Even as Mr. Obama has repeatedly said that he opposes American "boots on the ground" in far-flung parts of the world, his administration continues to carve out exceptions for Special Operations forces — with American officials often resorting to linguistic contortions to mask the forces' combat role.



The *Times* report continued by observing that the Obama administration is now considering a Pentagon proposal to maintain at least one base in Afghanistan "for years to come," citing unnamed military officials. The writers explained that these officials spoke about matters related to Special Operations forces only on the condition of anonymity because most of the specifics of their missions are classified.

The report went on to note that such a plan would violate Obama's original pledge to remove all troops from Afghanistan except for a counterterrorism force and the troops guarding the U.S. Embassy in Kabul.

This reversal was declared last fall, however, with the *Times* reporting on October 15 that Obama had just announced that the withdrawal of U.S. military forces from Afghanistan would end and that the United States would keep 9,800 troops in that country through most of 2016 before dropping to about 5,500 by late 2016 or early 2017, when Obama's term ends.

Commenting on these policy reversals, first the decision in October to extend the U.S. troop presence in Afghanistan through 2017, and the just-announced Pentagon proposal cited by the *Times* to maintain a base for "years to come," Zeeshan Aleem, writing for the Mic news website, noted:

The announcement [to keep U.S. troops in Afghanistan indefinitely] meant that ending the war will likely be a responsibility Obama passes on to the next president, and marked a repudiation of one of the central promises he made upon entering office — to end, during his tenure, the catastrophic military interventions launched by his predecessor.

Aleem quoted a statement from Heather Hurlburt, a policy director at the New America Foundation who worked in the State Department and the White House during the Clinton administration, who said:

Obama was always clear that he wasn't anti-war, just anti-"dumb" wars. He sees the heightened reliance on special ops forces, who volunteer and are trained for this range and difficulty of missions, exactly as an alternative to big "stupid" ground wars. And indeed that may exactly be his legacy.



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Micah Zenko, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) — which has played a key role in drafting the interventionist U.S. foreign policies that have dominated our nation’s foreign affairs since World War II — wrote an opinion piece first published on the CFR site and republished online on December 8 by *Newsweek*, entitled: “Mission Creep Disguised as Nothing Much Going on Here.”

Zenko’s article focused on an interview that President Obama gave to Norah O’Donnell of *CBS News* on December 2.

When O’Donnell asked Obama if he was going back on his word by authorizing an expansion of U.S. troops in Iraq and Syria with the deployment of what the Pentagon calls a “specialized expeditionary targeting force,” noted Zenko, the president played with words in a manner worthy of his Democratic predecessor Bill Clinton: “You know, when I said no boots on the ground, I think the American people understood generally that we’re not going to do an Iraq-style invasion of Iraq or Syria with battalions that are moving across the desert.”

Apparently, then, in ObamaSpeak, “boots on the ground” are not there unless they are in battalion-strength numbers, and even then, only if they move across the desert!

As Zenko observed:

It is difficult to imagine that the American people misinterpreted Obama’s pledge of “no boots on the ground,” which he only made publicly sixteen times between August 2013 and July 2015. Moreover, it is unclear how he knows how Americans interpret his pledges.

Perhaps the only refreshing thing about this entire report is that even a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations has apparently become cynical about the Obama interventionist policy in Iraq and Afghanistan, which is basically a continuation of the Bush interventionist policy in Iraq and Afghanistan. It would still be foolishly naïve, however, to suppose from this that the CFR is mellowing after 94 years and becoming noninterventionist.

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