

New York Times
What Torture Never Told Us
Public bravado aside, the defenders of the so-called enhanced interrogation techniques are fast running out of classified documents to hide behind. The three that were released recently by the C.I.A. ♦ the 2004 report by the inspector general and two memos from 2004 and 2005 on intelligence gained from detainees ♦ fail to show that the techniques stopped even a single imminent threat of terrorism.

Can the U.S. Lead Afghans?
The Afghanistan debate is increasingly focused on two words: troop numbers. Those numbers certainly deserve serious attention as President Obama decides whether to raise them even further this year. But in Afghanistan, as in past counterinsurgencies, it is important to remember that all troop numbers are not created equal. When it comes to indigenous forces, quality often matters more than quantity, and quality often declines when quantity increases.

New Statesman
In Afghanistan, political success remains as elusive as military triumph
In June, amid widespread claims of vote-rigging and ballot-stuffing, the leaders of western nations were united and outspoken in their condemnation of the Iranian presidential election results. Referring to Tehran's ruling regime, Gordon Brown said that questions "have got to be answered".

The Washington Post
In Afghanistan, Let's Keep It Simple
For much of the 20th century before the Soviet invasion in 1979, Afghanistan was a peaceful country living in harmony with its neighbors. There was a king and a real government, which I witnessed in the 1970s when I frequently traveled there. Afghanistan had what I'll call a minimalist state, compared with the vast governmental apparatuses that colonialists left behind in British India and Soviet Central Asia.

Barack Obama As Charlie Wilson?
Twice in 25 years, Afghanistan has been cast in American politics as the "good" war, worthy of American support, and contrasted with a "bad" war that allegedly was not. The first time, this worked out reasonably well for America and its Afghan allies. It is unclear whether that will be true this time around.

One Way Or Another, Leaving Iraq
Since U.S. troops withdrew from Iraq's cities, two months have passed, and so has the illusion that Iraq is smoothly transitioning to a normality free of sectarian violence. Recently, Gen. Ray Odierno, commander of U.S. troops there, "blanched" when asked if the war is "functionally over."

Setback in Afghanistan
LAST MONTH we expected that Afghanistan's elections would mark a modest step forward for the country. Now it appears that they could be a major reverse. Though the election campaign was positive in many respects, Election Day itself is emerging as a disaster of relatively low turnout and massive irregularities.

Foreign Policy
Think Again: Realism
Amid war and recession, Americans are in a no-nonsense, matter-of-fact mood. But that, says a leading architect of George W. Bush's foreign policy, is no reason to adopt a misguided doctrine.

The Guardian
Gordon Brown and Afghanistan: The futility of being earnest
Last year the Rand National Research Institute produced a revealing fact. A study of the 90 insurgencies that had taken place since 1945 found that it takes an average of 14 years to defeat insurgents once they are up and running. Gordon Brown has not got that long in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan: Hollow power in Helmand
We are manning a series of Potemkin settlements in Afghanistan. The territory that US and British troops are holding shows no signs of being filled by a state which Afghans can trust. The forts that dominate south Helmand are proving to be every bit as hollow ♦ for the purpose of state-building ♦ as the theatrical sets that Field Marshal Grigori Potyomkin had built along the route Catherine the Great took, to persuade her that Crimea was being civilised by Russian rule.

The Telegraph
A question of trust at the heart of the Ministry of Defence
Labour prime ministers are

not always wrong about military matters, nor Chiefs of the General Staff always right. In 1948, Clement Attlee rejected Field Marshal Montgomery's nomination of General Sir John Crocker to succeed him as Chief of the Imperial General Staff, bringing out of retirement instead the incomparable Bill Slim. "Slim makes do with the scrapings of the barrel," said Attlee, who as an infantry officer had been one of the last out of Gallipoli in 1916.

The Wall Street Journal

How to Win in Afghanistan

Given declining poll numbers and rising casualty figures, it is no surprise that the chattering classes are starting to bail out on a war in Afghanistan that was launched with their enthusiastic support. From Sen. Russ Feingold on the left to columnist George Will on the right, these born-again doves seem to be chastened by the fact that the Taliban won't simply stop fighting. Rather than rise to the challenge, they propose that we stick to what Mr. Will says "can be done from offshore, using intelligence, drones, cruise missiles, airstrikes and small, potent Special Forces units, concentrating on the porous 1,500-mile border with Pakistan, a nation that actually matters."