

New Statesman

Obama is wrong: this is his Vietnam

"Vietnam is getting worse every day," President Lyndon B Johnson once confessed to his wife. "I have the choice to go in with great casualty lists or to get out with disgrace. It's like being in an airplane and I have to choose between crashing with the plane or jumping out. I do not have a parachute." Lady Bird Johnson recorded these words in her diary on 8 July 1965. Three weeks later, her husband committed a further 50,000 troops to fight in Vietnam. It was the first marked escalation of a war that was to cost 58,000 US lives over the next eight years.

The New York Times

START and Beyond

President Obama had hoped to announce a deal with Russia this week to extend the 1991 nuclear arms treaty known as Start and make some modest additional cuts in both sides' arsenals. On Friday, negotiators were still stuck on how to verify the agreement, and American officials are now saying it won't be done at least until January.

Iraq, the Kurds and the Americans

Four months ago, with little fanfare, the State Department sent a full-time senior diplomat, Alan Misenheimer, to live in Iraq's disputed oil-rich city Kirkuk. For the Obama administration, which had been hoping to back out of its day-to-day involvement in Iraq's fractious politics, it was a smart, if belated, call.

An Officer and a Creative Man

As President Obama and his advisers planned their new approach to the Afghan war, the quality of Afghanistan's security forces received unprecedented scrutiny, and rightly so. Far less attention, however, has been paid to the quality of American troops there. Of course, American forces don't demand bribes from civilians at gunpoint or go absent for days, as Afghans have often done. But they face serious issues of their own, demanding prompt action.

Washington Post

In Iraq, an opening for successful diplomacy

Remember Iraq? For months our attention has been focused on Afghanistan, and you can be sure that the surge will be covered exhaustively as it unfolds in 2010. But next year could be even more pivotal in Iraq. The country will hold elections in March to determine its political future. Months of parliamentary horse-trading are likely to ensue, which could provoke a return to violence.

How partnering with the U.S. could strengthen Pakistan's sovereignty

The United States and Pakistan, always prone to bickering, need a big idea to unite and sustain them through the testing battle in Afghanistan. So here's a strategic concept I've been trying out with officials in both countries: By partnering with America, Pakistan can gain sovereignty over all its tribal territory for the first time in its history -- and thereby finally complete the task of building its own nation.

The Guardian

Gaza must be rebuilt now

It is generally recognised that the Middle East peace process is in the doldrums, almost moribund. Israeli settlement expansion within Palestine continues, and PLO leaders refuse to join in renewed peace talks without a settlement freeze, knowing that no Arab or Islamic nation will accept any comprehensive agreement while Israel retains control of East Jerusalem.

Defence: the cost of Afghanistan

The statement in parliament by Bob Ainsworth, secretary of state for defence, focuses on enhancements to military capability in Afghanistan and the penalties elsewhere in defence: 22 new Chinooks there, one less RAF base here. While no money is to be cut from the 2010-11 defence budget, it is not being increased as necessary to maintain levels of capability. Most important, the £900m of enhancements for Afghanistan are to be funded from the defence budget, and not from the central reserve – a major change, with serious implications for the longer term.

The Times

Britain needs the Bomb? That was the last war

Trident survives. The most severe defence spending review in history — searching for savings of almost £40 billion — ignored the £20 billion that is to be spent on a nuclear weapon that will be redundant before it comes into service. The generals, as has so often been the case, are planning to fight the last war. And the politicians, who must have noticed that the world has changed during the past ten years, endorse the military judgment for reasons that have nothing to do with national security.