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At War

Notes From the Front Lines

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A Resignation in Afghanistan Reverberates

By [JAMES DAO](#)

To the get-out-of-Afghanistan crowd, he is a hero. To the fight-on camp, he is a goat. And to the anguished in-betweeners, he is a conundrum.

[News about Matthew Hoh](#), a State Department employee in Afghanistan who resigned out of frustration with American policies, has stirred passionate comment on the Internet that mirrors the debate over whether President Obama should send more troops to Afghanistan.

War skeptics and opponents swiftly embraced Mr. Hoh, a former Marine officer who served in Iraq and was most recently a reconstruction official in Zabul province, as a principled naysayer, an insider who had seen a failed war effort close, and took a courageous stand against it. Mr. Hoh's four-page resignation letter can be found [here](#).

On [Huffington Post](#), [Earl Ofari Hutchinson](#) urged the president to listen to Mr. Hoh lest Afghanistan ruin his domestic agenda and severely wound Democrats in the 2010 midterm elections.

"Afghanistan looms large as Obama and the Democratic Party's Vietnam, if Hoh's warning is not heeded," Mr. Hutchinson wrote. "He knows that failed and flawed wars and the public's distaste for those wars helped topple two sitting Democratic presidents, and hopelessly discredited a Republican president."

[Malou Innocent of the libertarian Cato Institute](#), also writing on [Huffington Post](#), said that Mr. Hoh had largely echoed her view that the conflict involves "a local and regional ethnic Pashtun population fighting against what they perceive to be a foreign occupation of their region; that our current strategy does not answer why and to what end we are pursuing this war; and that Afghanistan holds little intrinsic strategic value to the security of the United States."

But on his blog [Forward Movement](#), [Jules Crittenden](#) argues that Mr. Hoh has given in to despair, that defeating the Taliban and Al Qaeda will require far more patience and resolve and that drawing down in Afghanistan now will show America's enemies that "If you bleed them, they will run."

"Which I'd suggest is a hint that abandoning Afghanistan may cause more problems than it solves," he concluded.

There were also those who, while endorsing Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal's proposal to send as many as 40,000 more troops to Afghanistan, found Mr. Hoh's letter convincing evidence that the war might have become hopeless.

[On The Captain's Journal](#), TSAlfabet wrote, “As I predicted months ago, this Admin will not commit the resources to win this fight, so getting out, as horrible as that would be, is less evil than sacrificing troops to a half-hearted approach that is under-resourced and, therefore, doomed to failure.”

Andrew Exum, an occasional adviser to General McChrystal who blogs at [Abu Muqawama](#), counseled caution in making too much of Mr. Hoh's resignation.

“Suddenly the opinion of a junior State Department employee — talented and patriotic though he may be — is the only opinion that matters?” Mr. Exum wrote. “I know about 50 really smart people on Afghanistan with lots of time on the ground there, and no two have the same opinion about what U.S. policy should be. Let's not turn one dude whose opinions on Afghanistan happen to line up with the zeitgeist into the flippin' Delphic oracle.”