



Last month was the deadliest for U.S. troops in Afghanistan in the ten years of the war there, with 67 killed, nearly half of them Navy SEALs in the downing of a Chinook helicopter — the deadliest single incident in this, the longest war in American history. More promisingly, it was also the first month since the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 that not a single U.S. soldier was killed there.

And yet these startling facts received almost no notice: the president never mentioned them, Congress was silent. When it comes to these drawn-out conflicts, both American political parties are increasingly determined to say nothing at all.

The silence is especially striking among the Republican political establishment, on whose watch these wars were launched. At last week's debate of the 2012 presidential candidates at the Ronald Reagan presidential library, Afghanistan rated barely a mention. It came up only twice, once when libertarian Ron Paul complained that it costs "\$20 billion a year" to provide air-conditioning for U.S. troops in the wars and demanded that the U.S. pull the plug, and a second time when the Utah politician-turned-diplomat Jon Huntsman urged a complete withdrawal: "This is not about nation-building in Afghanistan. This is about nation-building at home," he said. "We've got to bring those troops home."

The response? Loud applause from the audience, and a brief protest from former senator Rick Santorum. The frontrunners were resolutely silent, including ex-Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney—the same Mitt Romney who as a Republican presidential candidate in 2008 vowed not only to bolster the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan but to wage what amounted to an extensive nation-building campaign as well.

And Democrats, if anything, are even more resolutely determined both to get out of Afghanistan and Iraq as quickly as possible – and to avoid talking about it before they do. President Obama's calculation here seems purely political; how else to explain the deadline of September 2012—just a couple months before the presidential election, rather than a couple months after, as his generals recommended—for U.S. troops to officially "end" the surge he began last year to much-disputed effect? In Iraq, a similar calculus seems to be taking effect; Obama, the New York Times reported a few days ago, is now prepared to allow just 3,000 or 4,000 troops to remain after the end of this year, down from the approximately 50,000 still there now—and far below the 10,000 said to be under consideration until recently.

The wars America doesn't talk about

Monday, 12 September 2011 15:35 -

[More...](#)