

AS OBAMA EMBRACES MULTI-FRONTED WAR, HE FIRES CHUCK HAGEL

In recent days, the press has reported that President Obama signed an order (or on second thought, maybe it's just an unsigned decision that can't be FOIAed, so don't start anything, Jason Leopold) basically halting and partly reversing his plans for withdrawal.

President Obama decided in recent weeks to authorize a more expansive mission for the military in Afghanistan in 2015 than originally planned, a move that ensures American troops will have a direct role in fighting in the war-ravaged country for at least another year.

Mr. Obama's order allows American forces to carry out missions against the Taliban and other militant groups threatening American troops or the Afghan government, a broader mission than the president described to the public earlier this year, according to several administration, military and congressional officials with knowledge of the decision. The new authorization also allows American jets, bombers and drones to support Afghan troops on combat missions.

Virtually simultaneously with the decision to permit American forces to be more involved with the Afghan government, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has reversed Hamid Karzai's ban on night raids – and also renamed them “night operations.”

The government of the new Afghan president, Ashraf Ghani, has quietly lifted the ban on night raids by special forces troops that his predecessor had

imposed.

Afghan National Army Special Forces units are planning to resume the raids in 2015, and in some cases the raids will include members of American Special Operations units in an advisory role, according to Afghan military officials as well as officials with the American-led military coalition.

That news comes after published accounts of an order by President Obama to allow the American military to continue some limited combat operations in 2015. That order allows for the sort of air support necessary for successful night raids.

Night raids were banned for the most part in 2013 by President Hamid Karzai. Their resumption is likely to be controversial among Afghans, for whom any intrusion into private homes is considered offensive. Mindful of the bad name that night raids have, the American military has renamed them "night operations."

Night operations ... sort of like the tooth fairy?

And now that Obama has made it clear he will spend his lame duck continuing – escalating, even – both forever wars he got elected to end, he has fired forced the resignation of the Secretary of Defense he hired to make peace.

Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel is stepping down under pressure, the first cabinet-level casualty of the collapse of President Obama's Democratic majority in the Senate and a beleaguered national security team that has struggled to stay ahead of an onslaught of global crises.

The president, who is expected to announce Mr. Hagel's resignation in a Rose Garden appearance on Monday, made

the decision to ask his defense secretary – the sole Republican on his national security team – to step down last Friday after a series of meetings over the past two weeks, senior administration officials said.

The officials described Mr. Obama's decision to remove Mr. Hagel, 68, as a recognition that the threat from the Islamic State would require a different kind of skills than those that Mr. Hagel was brought on to employ. A Republican with military experience who was skeptical about the Iraq war, Mr. Hagel came in to manage the Afghanistan combat withdrawal and the shrinking Pentagon budget in the era of budget sequestration.

But now "the next couple of years will demand a different kind of focus," one administration official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity. He insisted that Mr. Hagel was not fired, saying that he initiated discussions about his future two weeks ago with the president, and that the two men mutually agreed that it was time for him to leave.

But Mr. Hagel's aides had maintained in recent weeks that he expected to serve the full four years as defense secretary.

Some great reporting from the NYT, getting all three scoops about Obama's pivot to war.

I'm just hoping someone is reporting out the really important questions: who will be paying for the resumption of the forever war, and how it will be any more successful than the last 13 years?