

CLOSEOUT FILES



Resolved:
President Obama's plan for increasing
troops in Afghanistan is in the United
States' best interest.

Introduction

Resolved: President Obama's plan for increasing troops in Afghanistan is in the United States' best interest.

Overall, I think it's a good topic, and it's exactly the type of topic that pfd is supposed to have every month considering it's both highly controversial and drawn right from the headlines. Perhaps the topic is a little lopsided and there may be some bias judges, but other than that it is a great topic.

The resolution should be pretty clear. In a nutshell, Obama's plan is to send 30,000 additional troops to Afghanistan, and then start withdrawing troops in 18 months. In terms of the resolution, the only question is whether the timetable aspect is topical. In my opinion, the timetable is definitely topical and an intricate part of Obama's plan for increasing troops. That being said, you should be prepared for some teams to contend otherwise, but it shouldn't be too hard to effectively persuade a judge the timetable is topical.

The pro side is pretty straightforward and doesn't really lend itself to many creative arguments. Con on the other hand is much more flexible. In theory in order to refute the resolution con could argue that it is in the United State's best interest to withdraw troops immediately, to maintain troop levels, to send more than Obama is calling for, to send more troops without a timetable, etc. Looking back, most people would agree the troop surge in Iraq was successful, so I would avoid arguing that a troop surge wouldn't be effective. Instead I would focus more on whether or not the United States has the resources to send that many more troops there, whether it's necessary given the number of insurgents left in Afghanistan, and whether the timetable is in the best interests of the United States.

I think con's best arguments against Obama's plan pertain to the timetable. On the pro, don't let con get away making the timetable look incredibly restrictive. All the plan says is troops will start being withdrawn in 18 months. Even if only one troop is withdrawn then it still technically satisfies the plan. As a result, the plan is flexible in terms of how many troops are withdrawn then, so obviously if we're not quite finished with the job in 18 months we won't withdraw all troops, just some. Of course on the other side, if you are going to define the timetable that loosely do we need it at all? Does the timetable help the Taliban more or less than it will incite the Afghani government to get their act together? That's for you to decide.

Good luck debating! As always feel free to send us an email about any question you might have about the topic or to run stuff by us at CloseoutFiles@yahoo.com.

Pro Analysis

The Pro team faces an immensely difficult challenge this month when trying to justify President Obama's plan for increasing troops in Afghanistan. Even if this plan were to be the best option for the American public it would still be difficult to support in a debate round due to the ground the Con team has to argue. You need to be ready to support much more than just Obama's plan; it may be necessary for you to justify why we need more troops in Afghanistan, why 30,000 is the right number of troops, and even why we shouldn't be withdrawing troops. Despite all of this, the Pro team does have the added benefit of having the President Obama on their side (and that may be enough for some judges). Although I hardly think it is a legitimate reason to support a specific plan, there is bound to be a certain contingent of people who support any policy proposed by the President. Even though President Obama is a Democrat, don't be surprised when a portion of the democratic party strongly disagrees with a policy that promotes war of any kind.

Since there is so much potential ground for the Con side, I would suggest that you keep your case focused only on supporting President Obama's plan opposed to dealing with potential objections, as to not notify your opponents of objections that they may not have thought of initially. Even though you do not put this information in your case, you need to be prepared to address these objections because it is possible that opponents spend the majority of the round talking about those issues.

The war in Afghanistan hasn't been a successful endeavor for quite a long time. There were benefits on the ground for the first couple of years, but then direction got shifted and priority moved to Iraq. Because of that, insurgencies were able to reclaim some of the lost ground while we were diverted in Iraq. The war in Afghanistan got increasingly less news coverage as it seemed we were only there to catch Osama Bin Laden, a worthy goal, without any tangible success. Times are changing and due to President Obama's plan for a troop increase in Afghanistan, the country's military focus is now back on Afghanistan. According to the Brookings Institution, "But while we may no longer be losing this struggle, we aren't winning either -- and Afghans know it. As one tribal leader in Uruzgan province recently put it, explaining why he had half of his tribal youth fighting for the Taliban and half for the government, 'I can't tell who's going to win yet.' We need to make him, and others like him, realize that NATO and the Afghan government are going to succeed on the battlefield." This is a time where anecdotal evidence is successful at illuminating an important issue. The war is in a standstill; therefore, the Afghan people are not confident in either side winning and have consequently chosen to hedge their bets and support both sides. This concept is of particular importance when we consider what would happen if the U.S. would withdraw from Afghanistan. Given the ambivalence of the Afghan people, a U.S. withdrawal would certainly signal an impending insurgent success unless something can be done to instill confidence in the Afghanistan government. It is important for the U.S. to send more troops to Afghanistan to change the battlefield momentum and to help train Afghan soldiers and police to manage the territory. The Afghan government can only be successful at governing the country if they have the might to counter Al-Qaeda and the only way for that to be accomplished is if more resources are dedicated to training.

Throughout every facet of the war in Afghanistan, more resources will make the military more apt to accomplish their goals in Afghanistan. The Wall Street Journal reports, “A properly resourced counterinsurgency probably means more forces,” Adm. Mullen told the Senate Armed Services Committee. “It’s very clear to me that we will need more resources.” Afghanistan has been wracked by unrelenting Taliban violence and growing political instability in the aftermath of last month’s disputed presidential election.” For the U.S. to a legitimate effort in countering insurgency then they U.S. must be willing to dedicate more resources, specifically troops, to help stabilize the region. The U.S. has tried fighting a technological war by using unmanned bombing droids by those can only be so effective without the ground support necessary to finish the job. According to CNN, “When asked about McChrystal’s assessment, Rasmussen (NATO Chief) said he believed that the training of Afghan security forces should be strengthened. “It takes more trainers and more funds to develop the capacity of the Afghan security forces. And it’s my strong conviction that this is the way forward, transition to Afghan lead, so we have to do more now so that we can be able to do less in the future.” This sentiment is exactly what we are trying to accomplish in Afghanistan, we need to help the Afghan people now so that we won’t need to continue to help them in the future. Don’t let your opponents try to claim that we do not need more troops in Afghanistan to accomplish what we have set out to do; ask them how more troops in Afghanistan would make the mission less successful. No general has ever said, I think we need less troops to win a war, the same goes for Afghanistan.

The primary goal of U.S. involvement in the middle east is to promote stability in the region. Instability has disastrous consequences that negatively affects the world. In addition to stabilizing Afghanistan, the surge of troops will also help stabilize our strategic partner of Pakistan. According to the Christian Science Monitor, “The Taliban in both Pakistan and Afghanistan have made dangerous advances in the past few years, raising the specter of Al Qaeda having a larger haven for training. This fall, Pakistan finally sent its Army into Taliban-run areas. To reassure both countries of American resolve, Obama now wants to roll back the Taliban in its stronghold of southern Afghanistan. This will reassure Pakistan and other countries that the US will ‘finish the job,’ as Obama put it. Doing so will help create a third reason for hope – preventing a Taliban takeover of Pakistan and its nuclear weapons.” This effort will only help to ease the threat of an attack coming from the middle east. The U.S. has far more to lose if Pakistan deteriorated due to pressure from insurgency groups than if the same happened in Afghanistan, but the best way to prevent this from happening is by stabilizing Pakistan’s neighbors.

At some point in your case it may be a good idea to cite some evidence that supports the idea that the surge of troops is the best option for the U.S. The Brookings Institution states, “In the complex environment of today’s Afghanistan, there are no guarantees about the outcomes of a policy—even an appropriate one, such as President Obama’s decision to substantially increase the numbers of U.S. troops in Afghanistan. However, there would have been no chance to turn the security situation around, take the momentum away from the Taliban, and hence, enable economic development and improvements in governance and rule of law, without the surge. Clearly, the surge will make an important difference on the ground.” Although there are many options for how to best deal with Afghanistan and given the justification to be in the middle east, the best step forward is to increase the number of troops.

Con Analysis

It is much easier to tear something down than it is to build something up and, therefore, the Con side is at a distinct advantage when debating about President Obama's plan for a troop increase in Afghanistan. There are so many options the Con side has to negate the resolution; you could attack the policy itself, or argue that the U.S. should withdrawal troops, not add more troops, or send even more than 30,000 troops. You can and should argue all of these if you want a comprehensive case against Obama's plan. Although this method is essentially throwing arguments against the wall and seeing which stick, it may be important with this topic due to the personal biases of judges.

U.S. Shouldn't be in Afghanistan

U.S. Security Not Threatened by Afghanistan

The U.S. does not have a need to be in Afghanistan, especially considering that the U.S. is not threatened by Afghanistan in really any way. According to the Cato Institute, "As the president's national security adviser, General James Jones, noted in October, 'the al Qaeda presence [in Afghanistan] is very diminished. The maximum estimate is less than 100 operating in the country, no bases, no ability to launch attacks on either us or our allies.'" Let it be known that there are only 100 operating al-Qaeda members within Afghanistan, yet we're choosing a plan to add 30,000 more soldiers? There is simply not a need for such a fight against an enemy with no real capability to harm us. The Cato Institute state, "And as Paul Pillar, the National Intelligence Office for the Middle East between 2000 and 2005 notes, the preparations most important to the September 11, 2001 attacks 'took place not in training camps in Afghanistan but, rather, in apartments in Germany, hotel rooms in Spain and flight schools in the United States.'" Furthermore, even the 9/11 attacks weren't planned in Afghanistan, therefore, occupying Afghanistan doesn't help the U.S. prevent the planning of another large terrorist attack. In addition, The Cato Institute goes on to say, "The president's decision to double-down in Afghanistan parallels the Bush's administration's notion that unstable areas such as Afghanistan must be made 'safe for democracy' or they will inevitably threaten U.S. national security." Although President Obama was supposed to be the president of change, this policy mimics the same mentality used by President Bush.

Should Not be Nation Building

The War in Afghanistan is no longer focused around capturing those responsible for 9/11, but now the mission lacks a specific goal and the military is forced to do everything. The Cato Institute says, "Our troops are now chasing after an extremely broad set of objectives, including: promoting 'a more capable, accountable and effective' government; cracking down on the cultivation of illegal narcotics; and providing economic assistance in both Afghanistan and Pakistan." The Afghan government needs to start taking some responsibility to help govern their own country without forcing the U.S. to fix every problem in the country. The Cato Institute goes on to say, "The U.S. should have gotten out of the nation-building business a long time ago."

Most such projects fail. The prospects in Afghanistan — a country notoriously suspicious of outsiders and lacking central authority — are worse. Obama's escalation places the burdens of police work, governance and economic development on the backs of U.S. troops and taxpayers, when Washington should be forcing Afghans to take the lead by drawing down our military presence there. Our social-engineering project in Afghanistan is a costly folly, one we could have avoided by heeding the proper lessons from the disastrous wars in Vietnam and Iraq.” The United States should have learned from its mistakes in the past, nation-building rarely turns out to be a successful endeavor.

Cannot Afford to Be in Afghanistan

The United States and the world are going through the biggest financial crisis in 75 years, and we do not yet know how it will play out. The economy is only starting to recover but there are still fears of an impending double-dip recession. Prudence dictates that we refrain from making new investments of troops, equipment, and money until the uncertainty passes. The Independent Forum notes, “ The US is running a \$1.4 trillion budget deficit...US national debt has now surpassed the \$12 trillion mark...The Afghanistan War has already cost about \$250 billion and is steadily climbing...[and] since Obama was elected, the US Dollar has lost about 10% of its value, and is approaching its all-time record low set back in early 2008. Since 2002, the US Dollar has plummeted by about 37%.” The U.S. is simply not in a position where we should be wasting more money in Afghanistan when we have larger issues to be facing in our own country. The Cato Institute states, “Prolonging our occupation is likely to erode its economic well-being more than would a cost-effective policy limited to targeting al Qaeda.” It is not in the United States’ best interest to follow a policy that that is going to yield more cost than benefit.

Encourages Afghans To Join the Insurgency

Every foreign soldier who enters Afghanistan provides one more incentive for Afghans to join the insurgency against the foreigners. The Afghans have a track record of driving out foreign occupiers. The presence of American and allied troops combating a religion-based insurgency (of course, also a narco-insurgency) in a Muslim country provokes many Muslims worldwide, so fighting this war gives young Muslims a reason to join anti-American groups. The footprint of foreign troops is working against American and Western attempts to turn Afghan hearts and minds in their favor. Foreign troops are increasingly seen as occupiers in the Soviet style, not as liberators. One reason: foreign troops are perceived as the chief support of an Afghan government that has no credibility in Afghan eyes.

Problems with Obama Plan

No Need for More Troops

The United States is in a position where it should be bringing the soldiers home from Iraq, not transferring them to fight in another war. There is not a need for more troops in Afghanistan, even if there needs to be troops there. As the Cato Institute noted, there are only 100 al-Qaeda

fighters and there does not need to be 130,000 troops. The Cato Institute states, "The 2009 troop "surge" hasn't worked. It hasn't built up an Afghan military. It hasn't taken control of more Afghan territory (it has lost it). It has not helped turn the tide against the Taliban. Yet more troops will not likely change the equation--not after a war that, by March 2010, will have lasted more than America's involvement in World War I, World War II and Korea *combined*. The U.S. need not maintain more than 100,000 troops in Afghanistan in order to keep Americans reasonably safe and secure. Committing more troops in one particularly inhospitable place harms our best interests by pulling us deeper into a bloody guerilla war with no end in sight. We should be looking for ways to leave Afghanistan, not excuses to dig a deeper hole. U.S." The U.S. has already tried sending more troops to Afghanistan and it has only lead to the desire to send more troops to Afghanistan. This is a perpetual cycle that leads to no exit from the region.

30,000 Troops Less than Necessary

If sending more troops is really the best policy then the United States should not have chosen to only partially commit to the effort. If President Obama was truly confident about his assertions for the need to be in Afghanistan then he wouldn't have promised less than necessary soldiers. The Heritage Foundation says, "President Obama has adopted a "McChrystal Light" strategy that embraces the new counterinsurgency plan announced by the Administration last March but fails to give McChrystal all the troops that he deemed necessary to succeed with a low level of risk. McChrystal's lowest risk option reportedly called for 60,000 to 80,000 more troops.)" It would seem only logical to commit the number of troops needed for the lowest risk plan if there were legitimate reasons to be there. Military policy should not be a political move, there is too much at stake to implement strategy to please certain groups instead of focussing on accomplishing military ventures.

Not Enough Time

President Obama's surge has a surprising short timeline, and given that the surge will only last for a little over a year there are questions about the efficacy of such a plan. A commentator on HotAir.com describes the problems well when he says, "Obama has undermined whatever good the counterinsurgency strategy will do. For [the surge] to work, forces have to "flood the zone," but they also have to build trust with locals and encourage better intel. The only way to do that is to impress on locals the notion that we're sticking around. No one will cooperate with American troops if they know we're bugging out in 18 months. They're going to decide to cut the best deals they can with the Taliban, who will simply decide to outlast us." The Heritage Foundation states, "The President's awkward effort to square the circle of his Afghanistan policy led him to state that 'it is in our vital national interest to send an additional 30,000 U.S. troops to Afghanistan. After 18 months, our troops will begin to come home.' The close juxtaposition of his statement to send more troops with that of a pledge to begin withdrawing them after 18 months will be confusing to the American public, America's NATO allies, and most unfortunately, to Afghans and Pakistanis, who are all too familiar with the U.S.'s history of turning its back on this volatile region. Also left unsaid was why such a vital national interest would change after 18 months. Given his clarity about the threat posed to U.S. national security by a Taliban-dominated Afghanistan, it is difficult to comprehend why Obama would have

designated such an early date to begin withdrawing U.S. forces--particularly since most observers acknowledge that it will take at least three to four years to fully train and equip the Afghan National Army to a level sufficient to engage the Taliban.” Obama’s policy doesn’t make sense given the timeline, its necessary for us to be there but we want to leave quickly? Something doesn’t quite add up, and it may be that this plan served another purpose than actually trying to be successful in Afghanistan.

Exit Plan is a Sign of Weakness

The fact the President Obama chose a date to begin to withdraw troops is a questionable move and may serve to indicate that the U.S. is not confident in their ability to be successful in Afghanistan. The The Heritage Foundation states, “Last night, President Obama said that ‘just as we have done in Iraq, we will execute this transition responsibly, taking into account conditions on the ground.’ But in Iraq, President Bush ordered the surge without placing artificial timelines for withdrawing the troops. Only after conditions on the ground improved did the Bush Administration reach an agreement with the Iraqi government for the gradual withdrawal of U.S. forces. By establishing a timeline for withdrawal before the troops have even been deployed, the Obama Administration has placed the horse before the cart.” If a surge is to truly be effective then we must wait for the affects to be seen before we start pulling troops. It is possible that the surge could be effective, but that is compromised by the early withdrawal date. The Heritage Foundation goes on to say, “Such indications of wavering commitment will be interpreted in Afghanistan and Pakistan as a sign of weakness. This perceived weakness will in turn undermine the Afghan government, encourage many Afghans to hedge their bets by cultivating better ties with the Taliban, and undermine Pakistan's resolve to confront the Afghan Taliban leadership that finds sanctuary within its borders.” The Afghan people lose faith in the U.S. when we commit to leaving their country at a certain date, no matter the level of progress in the country.

Taliban Will Plan for When the U.S. Leaves

Setting an exit date tells our enemies when they should attack us. Now they know that there will be more troops on the ground for the next two years, but after that we’re willing to leave. The Brookings Institution states, “setting such a timeline creates a real possibility that the Taliban will lay relatively low for the next 18 months and quietly prepare for the big push when the United States starts drawing down.” The Heritage Foundation says, “The announcement of a withdrawal date also provides a psychological advantage to the Taliban who will convince their recruits that America has lost its will and thus they can just ‘wait us out.’ Instead of acting as a decisive commander-in-chief firmly committed to success, President Obama came across as an uncertain political leader eager to split the differences within his divided Administration to implement an exit strategy, despite the likely disastrous consequences of such a plan.” Despite any gains made by the surge, the Taliban know that they can become more powerful again in two years once the U.S. decides to leave. If we are to commit ourselves to this war, then we should only be withdrawing troops once tangible benefits can be seen in the country.

Pro Blocks

Timetable Bad

The timetable is critical to our success in Afghanistan. “On the one hand, the timeline allows the administration to build support domestically and indicate to the skeptical American public that the effort in Afghanistan is not an open-ended commitment, regardless of outcomes; to rein in and limit the economic and political costs in the United States; to indicate to the Afghan government that free-riding and counterproductive behavior on the part of the Afghan state will not be tolerated; and to indicate to the Afghan people that the United States does have no intention whatever of occupying Afghanistan.”

Also the timetable part of Obama’s plan isn’t as restrictive as con suggests. It isn’t like the United States is going to suddenly withdraw all troops in 18 months. The timetable is more of a target for when troops will hopefully start to be withdrawn. If for some unforeseen reason that many troops are still required to finish the job then obviously Obama is going to keep them there. “To that end, Defense Secretary Robert Gates has said the new strategy will be assessed monthly and, in December 2010, will get a fundamental reexamination.”

The timetable isn’t some kind of political ploy either. “The consistency between McChrystal's assertions and Obama's words Tuesday appears to provide a military rationale for the timeline, which has been criticized as a purely political ploy made with the 2012 elections in mind.”

Withdraw/Maintain Troops/Can’t Afford

We can’t afford to not finish the job, and that is exactly what Obama’s plan aims to do. The potential harms of allowing Afghanistan to fall into the wrong hands again are too great. At the same time, we can’t afford to continue fighting an endless war either. Obama’s plan successfully avoids both by both upping the heat, providing the means necessary to win and creating an end in sight.

According to the Brookings Institute, “If the United States withdrew today, significant portions of the country, especially in the south and east, would fall into the hands of the Taliban. Other parts would either become engulfed in Taliban-generated and other local conflicts, or splinter into fiefdoms. Civil war à la the 1990s could easily be envisioned under such circumstances. At the same time, continuing with the current troop deployments would at best mean a stalemate, or at worst, a deepening of a quagmire.

The military and civilian surge that President Obama has decided to undertake is not a guarantee that such a highly dangerous outcome can be avoided. It is, however, the only possible strategy to reverse the momentum on the ground, and it is also the last chance the United States and the international community have to achieve such a strategic reversal. If this large military and civilian push does not work, if the government of Afghanistan does not live up to its commitments to significantly curtail corruption and improve governance, and if the hope of the Afghan people is not restored once more and their aspirations are not harnessed, the patience of the Afghan people will run out, and the U.S. effort in Afghanistan will become unsustainable. In that case, the only opportunity the United States will have to influence events in Afghanistan and Pakistan (including preventing al Qaeda and salafi safe havens in the area) and to influence developments in this region—vital from security, geostrategic, and counterterrorism perspectives—will be from the outside, with even far more limited leverage than the United States currently has.“

Con Blocks

Need Troop Increase/Surge Good

Perhaps we need to increase troops perhaps we don't; however, even if you believe more troops are needed to finish the job, Obama's plan isn't in the United States' best interest. One of the biggest problems with the plan for increasing troops in Afghanistan is the timetable of 18 months which is also part of the plan, "an unrealistically brief timeframe in which to accomplish their mission. The announcement of a withdrawal date also provides a psychological advantage to the Taliban who will convince their recruits that America has lost its will and thus they can just 'wait us out.'" "Having an 18-month timetable may or may not be a mistake, but *announcing* one is a terrible blunder in wartime." Overall, we don't necessarily have a problem with a troop surge, but that isn't entirely what Obama's plan is. Calling Obama's plan just a troop surge without mention of the timetable is a blatant misrepresentation. Why restrict ourselves and give a boost to our enemies when we don't need to?

Timetable Helps Against Free-Riding by Afghan Gov't

I think everyone agrees the United State can't afford to stick around forever in Afghanistan with the Afghan government living off our resources; however, everyone probably agrees they're not ready yet to support themselves without our help either. If they're not ready now, how do we know for sure they'll be ready in 18 months? We don't. Obama's plan is too inflexible, and we can protect against free-riding in myriad other ways. Just as an aside, the plan does nothing to prevent against economic free-riding.

Crossfire

P: Would you agree that the surge in Iraq was effective?

P: How much longer can the United States afford to bear the burden as Afghanistan's protectorate?

C: So the Obama plan calls for troops to start withdrawing in July 2011, what if their not ready by then?

P: I believe they will be ready by then.

C: But hypothetically if they're not?

P: If we're not ready, part of the plan is to remain flexible. As Obama said, "well look, as commander in chief, obviously, I reserve the option to do what I think is gonna be best for the American people at that point in time. And our national security." The timetable isn't as definite as you're making it out to be.

C: So it's not really a strict deadline?

P: No, but Obama likes schedules.

C: Then why have it? Isn't it kind of defeatist and send the wrong message to our enemies? Also doesn't the United States lose a certain degree of credibility setting deadlines and not sticking with them?

C: Given the current state of the economy, can the United States really afford to expedite more troops to Afghanistan?

C: Couldn't the presence of 30,000 more troops simply make the region less stable by upsetting the natives?

C: Shouldn't the focus be on Pakistan rather than Afghanistan?

Pro Outline

The Taliban Cannot be Negotiated With	15
Cannot Stay with the Status Quo	16
Surge is the Best Option	18
Goals of Troop Increase	19
Need for More Resources	20
Change the Battlefield Momentum	24
Neutralizing Taliban Sanctuaries	25
Supervising Unofficial Armed Groups	26
More Troops Necessary for Training	27
Surge Will Help Stabilize Pakistan	28
Pullout Would Signal Victory for Anti-US forces	29
Taliban Would Take Control	30
Discrepancy Between Request and Plan is Acceptable	34
Benefits of the Time Table	35
Plan is Different than the Bush Strategy	36
History Isn't Against Us	37
Taliban and Al Qaeda are One	41
Afghan People Pro West	44
Institutions can be Built in Afghan Government	45
Surge Brings All Forces Together	46
If Surge Doesn't Work then Changes Will be Made	47

Con Outline

U.S. Security Not Threatened by Afghanistan	48
The U.S. Should Not be Nation Building	49
U.S. Cannot Set Up a Successful Government	50
War Should End Now	51
No Need For More Troops	52
Cannot Afford to Send More Troops	53
Issues Need to Be Resolved with Pakistan	54
Fighting the Wrong Enemy	55
Not Enough Time to Be Effective	58
Taliban Will Plan for When the U.S. Leaves	59
30,000 Troops Less than Necessary	60
Americans Against More Troops	61
Exit Plan is a Sign of Weakness	62
Timetable bad	63
2011 Near Impossible	64
Americans Oppose Timetable	65
Timetable Doubtful	66
Troops will barely get there before the December reassessment	67
Might not be able to get troops there that fast	68
Karzai is an Unreliable Partner	69
War in Afghanistan Helps Recruiting for Taliban	70
Plan will further destabilize region	71
U.S. Inability to Recruit Afghans	72

Pro Evidence

The Taliban Cannot be Negotiated With

http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2009/1202_afghanistan_felbabbrown.aspx

President Obama's New Strategy in Afghanistan: Questions and Answers

The Brookings Institution

DECEMBER 02, 2009

Q. Can the Taliban be negotiated with?

Under the current circumstances, strategic negotiations with the Taliban will not produce any positive results. Mullah Omar has clearly stated many times that the only thing he is willing to negotiate about is how fast the United States will withdraw from Afghanistan. Disarmament negotiations with tribes and individual Taliban fighters are also unlikely to generate significant numbers of defections, if the Taliban members believe that they will ultimately prevail, and that defectors will be killed by the remaining Taliban. A reversal of the military situation on the ground in favor of NATO and the Afghan government will be an important element in inducing a willingness on the part of Taliban members to lay down their weapons.

Cannot Stay with the Status Quo

<http://www.slate.com/id/2236148/pagenum/all/>

Slate

Confessions of an Uncertain Columnist My mixed feelings about the war in Afghanistan.

By Fred Kaplan Posted Monday, Nov. 30, 2009, at 12:50 PM ET

Holding at the current level of troops, with perhaps some slight rejiggering, is another tempting option, but it's also the clearest recipe for war without end. The constant refrain one hears from soldiers and commanders in the field—confirmed by any journalist who spends much time with them—is that they're strained by the shortage of resources. No matter what strategy President Barack Obama decides on—chasing terrorists, protecting population centers, or some combination of the two—there aren't enough troops now to pursue it with much chance of success.

The existing troops can probably hold the Taliban at bay and keep Afghanistan from falling apart, but little more than that. The war then becomes a contest of endurance, and we're not likely to win. (Yes, lots of American troops stayed in West Germany and South Korea for several decades—some remain there still—but they were deterring wars, not fighting and dying in one.) As for fighting from afar: With a mix of special-operations forces and airstrikes, it's appealing in the abstract, but it neglects the mundane realities of warfare—that you need good intelligence to know who and where the bad guys are, and that to get good intelligence you need troops on the ground, and more than a handful of commandos, to cultivate and earn the local people's trust.

http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2009/1203_afghanistan_riedel.aspx

Brookings Institution

President Obama's Afghan Gamble

YaleGlobal Online

DECEMBER 03, 2009

The situation there is dire and deteriorating. There is no guarantee more troops and a smart strategy will work to stabilize the country and defeat Al Qaeda and the Taliban. But the alternatives – drawing down or standing pat – are certain to fail. The President's approach is the best of the bad options Americans have. The stakes are enormous – preventing another 9/11, war in South Asia, the security of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal, the fate of NATO and future of the global Islamic jihad. To succeed, the President will have to invest not just more American and NATO troops, but also his political capital to convince a war weary country to persevere. Obama's war may come to consume his Presidency.

Cannot Stay with the Status Quo Cont'd

http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2009/1203_afghanistan_riedel.aspx

Brookings Institution

President Obama's Afghan Gamble

YaleGlobal Online

DECEMBER 03, 2009

The situation has gotten worse in the last year but it is not yet hopeless. The Afghan presidential election was a disaster for the war effort. President Karzai cheated (with over a million fraudulent ballots), got caught and got away with it. The international community failed Afghanistan. The result is an Afghan partner that lacks legitimacy, perhaps a fatal blow to the war effort. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will have her hands full trying to get the best out of Karzai. Fortunately, some of his war cabinet members are first rate.

The United States and its partners in Afghanistan confront a syndicate of terrorist groups in the badlands between Afghanistan and Pakistan. They are not a monolith, nor do they have a single agenda. They have no single leader, although most groups (including Al Qaeda) swear allegiance to Mullah Omar. But they work together, they inspire each other and often they protect each other. A victory for the syndicate in Afghanistan would have enormous implications throughout the Islamic world. It would symbolize dramatically that the global Islamic jihad movement was on the march.

Surge is the Best Option

http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2009/1202_afghanistan_felbabbrown.aspx

President Obama's New Strategy in Afghanistan: Questions and Answers

The Brookings Institution

DECEMBER 02, 2009

In the complex environment of today's Afghanistan, there are no guarantees about the outcomes of a policy—even an appropriate one, such as President Obama's decision to substantially increase the numbers of U.S. troops in Afghanistan. However, there would have been no chance to turn the security situation around, take the momentum away from the Taliban, and hence, enable economic development and improvements in governance and rule of law, without the surge. Clearly, the surge will make an important difference on the ground. The question remains, however, whether the difference on the ground will be sufficient, and whether the amount of resources dedicated the effort will be sufficient.

Q. What about alternatives to the announced strategy, such as immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, or continuing with current troop deployments?

A. If the United States withdrew today, significant portions of the country, especially in the south and east, would fall into the hands of the Taliban. Other parts would either become engulfed in Taliban-generated and other local conflicts, or splinter into fiefdoms. Civil war à la the 1990s could easily be envisioned under such circumstances. At the same time, continuing with the current troop deployments would at best mean a stalemate, or at worst, a deepening of a quagmire.

The military and civilian surge that President Obama has decided to undertake is not a guarantee that such a highly dangerous outcome can be avoided. It is, however, the only possible strategy to reverse the momentum on the ground, and it is also the last chance the United States and the international community have to achieve such a strategic reversal. If this large military and civilian push does not work, if the government of Afghanistan does not live up to its commitments to significantly curtail corruption and improve governance, and if the hope of the Afghan people is not restored once more and their aspirations are not harnessed, the patience of the Afghan people will run out, and the U.S. effort in Afghanistan will become unsustainable. In that case, the only opportunity the United States will have to influence events in Afghanistan and Pakistan (including preventing al Qaeda and salafi safe havens in the area) and to influence developments in this region—vital from security, geostrategic, and counterterrorism perspectives—will be from the outside, with even far more limited leverage than the United States currently has.

Goals of Troop Increase

<http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/2009/1214/Afghanistan-war-What-success-will-look-like>

Christian Science Monitor

Afghanistan war: What success will look like

December 14, 2009

The administration has dramatically pared back the idealistic goals pursued by the Bush administration – robust democracy, human rights, and a free-market economy – to the practical essentials:

- Deny Al Qaeda from regaining a haven in Afghanistan; disrupt, dismantle, and defeat it in Pakistan.
- Build the Afghan security forces to the point that they can maintain a reasonable level of security in Afghanistan.
- Degrade the Taliban insurgency to the point that Afghans can manage it.
- Curtail rampant Afghan corruption so that the government can begin to meet the most basic needs of its people.

“Progress towards each of those [is] important,” says Michael Vickers, assistant secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict at the Pentagon.

Achieving that will allow Obama to meet a primary goal of his new strategy: begin drawing down forces by July 2011.

To that end, Defense Secretary Robert Gates has said the new strategy will be assessed monthly and, in December 2010, will get a fundamental reexamination.

Need for More Resources

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB125302644252312177.html>

Wall Street Journal

MIDDLE EAST NEWS

SEPTEMBER 17, 2009

"A properly resourced counterinsurgency probably means more forces," Adm. Mullen told the Senate Armed Services Committee. "It's very clear to me that we will need more resources." Afghanistan has been wracked by unrelenting Taliban violence and growing political instability in the aftermath of last month's disputed presidential election.

<http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/asiapcf/09/22/rasmussen.zapatero.amanpour/index.html>

NEW YORK (CNN)

September 22, 2009

-- More resources and personnel are needed to train Afghan security forces so they can become "masters in their own house," NATO's secretary-general said Tuesday.

"We can't allow Afghanistan once again to become a safe haven for terrorists. Therefore, we must succeed," Anders Fogh Rasmussen told CNN's Christiane Amanpour in an interview. The United States now has about 62,000 troops in Afghanistan, with NATO and other allies contributing about 35,000 more. The Pentagon currently plans to add 6,000 troops by year's end. Top U.S. Gen. Stanley McChrystal recently warned U.S. President Barack Obama that more troops are needed within the next year or the nearly 8-year-old war "will likely result in failure," according to a copy of a 66-page document obtained by The Washington Post. Asked about McChrystal's assessment, Rasmussen said he believed that the training of Afghan security forces should be strengthened.

"I think we have to beef up our training mission in Afghanistan to ensure that we develop the capacity of the Afghan security forces so that the Afghans can become masters in their own house," he said.

"It takes more trainers and more funds to develop the capacity of the Afghan security forces. And it's my strong conviction that this is the way forward, transition to Afghan lead, so we have to do more now so that we can be able to do less in the future," he said in the interview, on CNN's new show "Amanpour."

Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero also said Tuesday that he agreed with McChrystal's assessment.

"There is a need to strengthen security and the number of troops," he told [Amanpour](#).

Need for More Resources Cont'd

<http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/asiapcf/09/22/rasmussen.zapatero.amanpour/index.html>

NEW YORK (CNN)

September 22, 2009

Spain's government agreed recently to send 220 more troops to Afghanistan, though the decision needs to be approved by parliament.

"We can send more troops, but if there's not also a corresponding political, strategic action ... certainly it will cost us a lot more to finally have an Afghanistan that is a situation of stability." The fighting in Afghanistan has ramped up sharply in the past year as U.S. troops and a NATO-dominated coalition battle a resurgence of the Taliban, the al Qaeda-allied Islamic militia that previously ruled most of the country.

Washington poured an additional 21,000 troops into Afghanistan to provide security for the recent election.

McChrystal also wrote in his report that NATO's troops have "operated in a manner that distances us physically and psychologically -- from the people we seek to protect. In addition, we run the risk of strategic defeat by pursuing tactical wins that cause civilian casualties or unnecessary collateral damage."

<http://www.rusi.org/analysis/commentary/ref:C4A5AFE9666718/>

Royal United Services Institute

By [Professor Michael Clarke](#), Director, RUSI

Better equipment can help, but we need more troops in Afghanistan

While greater numbers of helicopters and armoured vehicles are needed in Afghanistan, what British soldiers at the front want most are reinforcements to make operational success more certain and the political benefits more long-lasting.

The loss of more troops in Afghanistan shocks the nation but not the soldiers. They are on the offensive and they know that such operations are a dangerous business. They have pushed out from their bases, UK troops in the north and US marines a few miles to the south, to establish better control in the Sanguin and Helmand River valleys. This is designed to keep Taliban forces on the run and to create in the minds of the Afghan people a sense, ahead of the August elections, that the Kabul government and NATO troops are a firm presence in Helmand.

Need for More Resources Cont'd

<http://www.rusi.org/analysis/commentary/ref:C4A5AFE9666718/>

Royal United Services Institute

By [Professor Michael Clarke](#), Director, RUSI

Military Equation

The military equation does not bother NATO troops too much. They can always chase Taliban forces out of an area once they shift into gear. Taliban commanders have made Helmand their key objective since last summer and new recruits to their units flow in from Pakistan readily enough. But they are not well trained or well led. Key commanders are absent from the heart of the action and the Taliban have had real difficulties in launching the offensives they planned. Unless they get very lucky, Taliban forces cannot overwhelm any unit of NATO troops who are so much better equipped and backed up by air power. Hence the resort to improvised explosive devices, which cause most of the coalition's casualties. IEDs can be devastatingly effective even against the most heavily armoured vehicles, but they are the technique of the terrorist; not decisive and not the weapon that will win a campaign.

Nor do the troops doing the fighting in Afghanistan criticise their equipment. What they have got is close to state of the art for infantrymen and it works pretty well. Equipment problems lie more in the availability of essential back-up. Helicopters for the UK's forces are still far too few and heavily over-worked. At the start of the British operation two weeks ago American helicopters dropped Black Watch troops into their assault around Babaji. Meanwhile, the mixed fleet of UK armoured vehicles is at full stretch most of the time. The most appropriate vehicles are not always where they need to be in a fast-moving operation. And the 'airbridge' that ferries supplies to and from the battlefield is groaning and might easily collapse.

Rationalising a worthwhile cause

What the soldiers on the ground would most like to see are more of their comrades brought in to join the campaign. For what they fear most – in fact what troops in war generally fear most beyond their personal safety – is that they will have to do it all again. Soldiers can rationalise the loss of their comrades when their units are achieving their objectives. But it becomes very hard for infantrymen to fight and die for territory that is relinquished to the enemy. They will continue to fight for each other, but they lose the sense that they are fighting for a worthwhile cause.

Need for More Resources Cont'd

<http://www.rusi.org/analysis/commentary/ref:C4A5AFE9666718/>

Royal United Services Institute

By [Professor Michael Clarke](#), Director, RUSI

The key test in the present offensive is not chasing Taliban forces out of the most populated areas of Helmand, or tolerating the sad and inevitable military deaths that ensue. The military are confident on both these scores. But they need to be reassured that the Kabul government can get some grip on the administration of Helmand thereafter, that some worthwhile development will flow through it into the local economy, and that there is a coherent international strategy for dealing with narcotics production which is more pervasive in Helmand than anywhere else in Afghanistan.

This offensive has already created internal refugees and more will follow. Local people in Helmand are cowed by insecurity and the war that flows around them. Ultimately, the whole campaign is about them and their inclination to stop fearing the Taliban and start trusting the government. This military offensive can create some of the conditions for that, but it cannot make it happen.

Change the Battlefield Momentum

http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2009/1201_afghanistan_ohanlon.aspx

Brookings Institution

Four Reasons for More Troops in Afghanistan

Washington Examiner

DECEMBER 01, 2009

The last two or three years, the Taliban-led resistance in Afghanistan has had the momentum. McChrystal's changes, combined with the arrival of forces approved by Obama in March, have begun to arrest the slide. But while we may no longer be losing this struggle, we aren't winning either -- and Afghans know it. As one tribal leader in Uruzgan province recently put it, explaining why he had half of his tribal youth fighting for the Taliban and half for the government, "I can't tell who's going to win yet." We need to make him, and others like him, realize that NATO and the Afghan government are going to succeed on the battlefield.

Neutralizing Taliban Sanctuaries

http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2009/1201_afghanistan_ohanlon.aspx

Brookings Institution

Four Reasons for More Troops in Afghanistan

Washington Examiner

DECEMBER 01, 2009

In Nawa, in Helmand province, U.S. Marines have cleared the area of Taliban and can now patrol without body armor. But in nearby Marja, no clearing has occurred, and enemy forces can use the town as a safe area from which to mount attacks -- including, against key political leaders and friendly forces in Nawa. This is the kind of dilemma we face with our current number of deployed forces. And in Kandahar province, the Taliban is increasingly able to infiltrate Kandahar City to intimidate the population. We need reinforcements there so that limited numbers of NATO soldiers can establish joint stations with Afghans within the city -- and so that the approaches to the city can be secured by friendly forces and kept out of enemy hands. Again, having a patchwork of relatively secure areas right next to enemy sanctuaries is unstable. We need to consolidate these areas of security and control. Only with more forces is that possible.

Supervising Unofficial Armed Groups

http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2009/1201_afghanistan_ohanlon.aspx

Brookings Institution

Four Reasons for More Troops in Afghanistan

Washington Examiner

DECEMBER 01, 2009

In Iraq, we worked with Sunni tribes as part of the "awakening" process. Doing so helped enormously with the success of the surge. Afghans are understandably wary of anything that would re-arm the very groups that often contributed to civil war in the past. As such, NATO has pursued initiatives with tribes very carefully. But an approach tailored to Afghanistan's specific circumstances is now emerging. The Afghan government and NATO want to do any agreement on a communitywide basis (not a tribal basis), expecting elders to form a shura inclusive of the various groups in a given region to oversee the effort. Armed groups would then be under government supervision, and trained by NATO forces. The plan would avoid paying the fighters directly, instead providing funds to their communities for development projects. They would have to keep Taliban out of their vicinities as a condition of any agreement. This approach requires the presence of NATO (or dependable Afghan) forces to work, in order to provide supervision and if necessary enforcement -- meaning that it is a complement to McChrystal's troop buildup plan rather than an alternative.

More Troops Necessary for Training

<http://www.slate.com/id/2236148/pagenum/all/>

Slate.com

Confessions of an Uncertain Columnist My mixed feelings about the war in Afghanistan.

By Fred Kaplan Posted Monday, Nov. 30, 2009, at 12:50 PM ET

The proposal made a few months ago by Sen. Carl Levin, Democratic chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, to focus more on training than on fighting—and to send no more U.S. troops until the Afghan army has grown substantially—makes sense. Earlier this year, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said that enlarging the Afghan army was the key to success (and to America's exit). In March, [when Obama ordered another 21,000 troops to Afghanistan](#),

Gates assigned 4,000 of them—the 4th brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division, a highly decorated combat unit—specifically to train Afghan soldiers.

However, in this war, "training" is done on the job—not so much by drilling and exercising the Afghan soldiers on bases (though there is some of that) but rather by leading, observing, and fighting alongside them out in the field. In other words, the line between "support troops" and "combat troops," ambiguous to begin with, is fuzzier still here. And at least in the short run (for the next few years), it's unlikely that enough Afghans can be trained quickly enough or thoroughly enough to secure the country on their own.

http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2009/1201_afghanistan_ohanlon.aspx

Brookings Institution

Four Reasons for More Troops in Afghanistan

Washington Examiner

DECEMBER 01, 2009

Going beyond what was done in Iraq, McChrystal proposes a form of apprenticeship for Afghan police and army forces. He wants to partner Afghan and NATO units, so that they would pair off as "sister formations" and train, plan, deploy, patrol and fight together. The goal of this sister-unit pairing concept is to build up Afghan security forces to be larger and more effective -- ultimately reaching levels of 240,000 Afghan soldiers and 160,000 police. Within two or three years, a smaller NATO unit might be able to partner with a larger Afghan one -- say, a NATO battalion (of about 800 troops) for an Afghan brigade (of some 2,000 to 3,000). But at first, the NATO and Afghan units will have to be of comparable size.

Surge Will Help Stabilize Pakistan

<http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/the-monitors-view/2009/1202/p08s05-comv.html>

Christian Science Monitor

Five reasons for hope in the Obama Afghanistan plan

By *the Monitor's Editorial Board* / December 2, 2009

The Taliban in both Pakistan and Afghanistan have made dangerous advances in the past few years, raising the specter of Al Qaeda having a larger haven for training. This fall, Pakistan finally sent its Army into Taliban-run areas. To reassure both countries of American resolve, Obama now wants to roll back the Taliban in its stronghold of southern Afghanistan. This will reassure Pakistan and other countries that the US will "finish the job," as Obama put it. Doing so will help create a third reason for hope – preventing a Taliban takeover of Pakistan and its nuclear weapons.

Obama has set the US on a mission to create a nuclear-free world. (He receives the Nobel Peace Prize on Dec. 10 for embracing this goal.) His commitment to stabilize Pakistan – both with direct aid but also by stabilizing Afghanistan – is essential to that goal.

Pullout Would Signal Victory for Anti-US forces

<http://www.slate.com/id/2236148/pagenum/all/>

Slate.com

Confessions of an Uncertain Columnist My mixed feelings about the war in Afghanistan.

By Fred Kaplan Posted Monday, Nov. 30, 2009, at 12:50 PM ET

Another problem with withdrawing is that it would signal, correctly or not, a huge victory for anti-American forces generally. If we left Afghanistan to the Taliban (and, by extension, al-Qaida), especially after such a prolonged commitment (at least rhetorically), what other embattled people would trust the United States (or the other putative allies in this war) to come in and protect them from insurgents? None, and they could hardly be blamed.

I am uncomfortable making this case for two reasons. First, it's reminiscent of the bankrupt rationales, involving "credibility" and the "domino theory," for staying in Vietnam long after that war was widely viewed as a horrible mistake. But Afghanistan is different. The Taliban are not the Viet Cong, and Osama Bin Laden is not Ho Chi Minh; there is no case, this time, that the enemy has a just claim to power. And the stakes are much higher: Communists ruling South Vietnam was never a serious threat to our security; al-Qaida controlling a huge swath of South Asia is.

Taliban Would Take Control

<http://www.slate.com/id/2236148/pagenum/all/>

Slate.com

Confessions of an Uncertain Columnist My mixed feelings about the war in Afghanistan.

By Fred Kaplan Posted Monday, Nov. 30, 2009, at 12:50 PM ET

If we simply pulled out, it's [a near-certain bet](#) that the Taliban would march into Kabul, and most other Afghan towns they'd care to, in a matter of weeks. True, the Taliban are not the same as al-Qaida, but there's little doubt that they would provide sanctuary and alliance (as they did after the Soviets were ousted), and this would strengthen al-Qaida in its struggle against Pakistan, the United States, and others.

One might dispute the significance of this, at least for its direct danger to the United States. Al-Qaida, after all, can plan attacks on U.S. territory from other sanctuaries, even from apartments in Western cities. But it's naive to claim that leaving Afghanistan would have no broader effect.

http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2009/1203_afghanistan_riedel.aspx

Brookings Institution

President Obama's Afghan Gamble

YaleGlobal Online

DECEMBER 03, 2009

The impact of a Taliban victory now would be felt most immediately in Pakistan where a weak civilian government is already tottering. The Pakistani army, which has long had close ties to parts of the syndicate (especially Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Afghan Taliban), would have to make adjustments to live with a victorious Taliban next door. The Pakistani Taliban would be emboldened to push for a jihadist state in Islamabad. India's own enormous Muslim minority would face the danger of radicalization. Central Asia would be infested with Taliban inspired violence. Moderate Muslim voices throughout the Islamic world would be on the defensive.

Last week Indian Prime Minister Singh delivered a strong message to the United States – don't go wobbling on Afghanistan. The soft-spoken Singh was very direct and candid in describing the stakes in an interview with the Washington Post on the eve of his meetings with Obama. Singh said "a victory for the Taliban in Afghanistan would have catastrophic consequences for the world, particularly for South Asia, for Central Asia and for the Middle East. Religious fundamentalism in the 1980s was used to defeat the Soviet Union. If this same group of people that defeated the Soviet Union now defeats the other major power, this would embolden them in a manner which could have catastrophic consequences for the world."

Taliban Would Take Control Cont'd

<http://www.centcom.mil/en/news/president-provides-glimpse-of-afghanistan-strategy.html>

United States Central Command

President provides glimpse of Afghanistan strategy

by Jim Garamone American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON (Nov. 24, 2009)

During a news conference with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Obama said the strategy review he and his national security team performed was extremely useful, and he provided a glimpse at the conclusions.

“I can tell you ... that it is in our strategic interest, in our national security interest, to make sure that al-Qaida and its extremist allies cannot operate effectively in those areas,” Obama said. “We are going to dismantle and degrade their capabilities and ultimately dismantle and destroy their networks. And Afghanistan’s stability is important to that process.”

The president said that since the United States went into Afghanistan, the war there lacked the resources or strategy to deal effectively with the Taliban and their al-Qaida allies. “It is my intention to finish the job,” he said. “And I feel very confident that when the American people hear a clear rationale for what we’re doing there and how we intend to achieve our goals, they will be supportive.”

Obama stressed that Afghan security is important globally. “The whole world, I think, has a core security interest in making sure that the kind of extremism and violence that you’ve seen emanating from this region is tackled, confronted in a serious way,” the president said.

Singh agreed with that assessment.

“It is important for the international community to sustain its engagement in Afghanistan, to help its emergence as a modern state,” the Indian prime minister said. “The forces of terrorism in our region pose a grave threat to the entire civilized world and have to be defeated. President Obama and I have decided to strengthen our cooperation in the area of counterterrorism.”

Confronting extremism must be a multinational effort, Obama said, noting that his announcement of the strategy will include the obligations of international partners.

The strategy, he added, will recognize that the Afghan people ultimately are going to have to provide for their own security. “So we’ll be discussing that process whereby Afghan security forces are properly trained and equipped to do the job,” he said. “And it’s going to be important to recognize that in order for us to succeed there, you’ve got to have a comprehensive strategy that includes civilian and diplomatic efforts.”

Taliban Would Take Control Cont'd

<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/top-stories/2009/11/07/afghanistan-the-great-debate-should-we-stay-or-should-we-go-115875-21804779/>

Daily Mirror Newspaper

Afghanistan - The Great Debate: Should we stay ..or should we go?

[7/11/2009](#)

COLONEL RICHARD KEMP CBE Former commander of British forces in Afghanistan

Withdrawal from Afghanistan is not an option. Every single military casualty is a tragedy. But the alternative is to expose our people back home to lethal and devastating terrorist attacks. The London bombings in 2005 were prepared and directed in Pakistan by the very people we are opposing in Afghanistan. Virtually every Islamist extremist strike since 9/11, itself launched from Afghanistan, was linked to the al-Qaeda terrorists ejected by the Americans and the Northern Alliance from Afghanistan in 2001.

Pulling out would leave the way clear for the Taliban and their al-Qaeda bedfellows to establish a safe haven there.

The Afghanistan campaign is part of a global war on international terrorism. Withdrawal without defeating the Taliban would encourage and motivate violent jihadists around the globe. Concurrently we have to build up the Afghan security forces to a level of capability that allows them to take over completely the management of a reduced insurgency. That task has been made more difficult by the killing of five soldiers by an Afghan police officer. But our brave troops are used to taking risks.

None of this can succeed, however, with a corrupt government in Kabul unable to gain the support of the Afghan people and security forces. President Obama, Gordon Brown and other world leaders must bring irresistible pressure to bear on President Karzai to clean up his act. We are running out of time. Before the patience of the British and American people is exhausted, we must achieve real, visible progress in Afghanistan. That will require significantly more troops on the ground, both to fight the Taliban and train the Afghan forces.

Taliban Would Take Control Cont'd

<http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=52832>

American Forces Press Service

Military Ready to Send More Troops to Afghanistan, Gates Says

Jan. 27, 2009

“Quite honestly, in terms of the remaining requests that [McKiernan] has, the infrastructure requirements that are needed in Afghanistan to be able to support and sustain a force that size would probably make it not possible for us to deploy [the troops] before they would be ready, in any event, later this year,” he said.

Additional troops are needed in Afghanistan so NATO forces have the numbers to clear an area and then hold it. The Taliban and their terrorist allies continually return to the same areas and re-establish their presence, officials have said. More troops can potentially keep insurgents out and allow economic and political development to begin in Afghanistan.

The secretary reminded senators that Afghanistan has a drug trade that forms most of its gross national product, an insurgency that is gaining strength, and terrorists who look at the area as a safe haven. Still, Afghans are good farmers, and there is mineral wealth and a legal economy that can be developed. “But it seems to me that we need to keep our objectives realistic and limited in Afghanistan; otherwise, we will set ourselves up for failure,” he said.

More than 40 countries, the United Nations, the European Union and many nongovernmental organizations have a presence in the country. “There are a lot of people trying to help Afghanistan come out right, but figuring out how to coordinate all of that, and then how to coordinate it with the military operations is a very complex business,” Gates said.

Ambassador Kai Eide of Norway, the U.N. senior special representative to Afghanistan, is perhaps in the best position for coordination efforts. “Finally, after long delays, he has begun to get both the financial and human resources from the U.N. that would enable him to do this,” Gates said. Foreign troops in Afghanistan are not the long-term solution. Gates said an increase in the Afghan National Army and other security forces “is our ticket out” in the long term. American and other NATO forces will be needed to train these new Afghan forces, which also will help security forces hold and develop parts of the country.

As for Afghanistan, Gates said the American people must have the patience for a long and difficult fight. But, “we can attain what I believe should be among our strategic objectives: above all, an Afghan people who do not provide a safe haven for al-Qaida, who reject the rule of the Taliban and support the legitimate government they have elected and in which they have a stake,” he said.

Discrepancy Between Request and Plan is Acceptable

<http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1943707,00.html>

Time Magazine

Obama's Afghanistan Speech: What to Watch For

By [Mark Thompson / Washington](#) Tuesday, Dec. 01, 2009

Obama is expected to give Army General Stanley McChrystal somewhat less than the 40,000 troops he requested in the midsize of the three options he presented to the President. Like a kid seeking a \$10 weekly allowance who starts the bidding at \$20, McChrystal's "lowest-risk" option was for some 80,000 reinforcements. But both he and the Pentagon knew that the U.S. military doesn't have enough troops for such an increase. McChrystal's smallest option — about 10,000 more troops — was scrapped because the U.S. military felt it was too risky. They've coalesced around the "Goldilocks option" of 40,000, minus what some Pentagon officials call a "Commander in Chief's tax" to show who's in charge. (Some of the difference will be made up by 5,000 extra troops expected from allies.) The troop decision will win grudging support from congressional Republicans and the military, but it will anger lawmakers in the President's party. Many Democrats will see in this second escalation, following the 21,000 additional troops Obama dispatched earlier this year, an echo of President Lyndon B. Johnson's doomed Vietnam strategy.

Benefits of the Time Table

http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2009/1202_afghanistan_felbabbrown.aspx

President Obama's New Strategy in Afghanistan: Questions and Answers

The Brookings Institution

DECEMBER 02, 2009

On the one hand, the timeline allows the administration to build support domestically and indicate to the skeptical American public that the effort in Afghanistan is not an open-ended commitment, regardless of outcomes; to rein in and limit the economic and political costs in the United States; to indicate to the Afghan government that free-riding and counterproductive behavior on the part of the Afghan state will not be tolerated; and to indicate to the Afghan people that the United States does have no intention whatever of occupying Afghanistan.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Foreign-Policy/2009/1202/p02s04-usfp.html>

Obama's Afghanistan timeline adheres to McChrystal assessment

The Christian Science Monitor / December 2, 2009

President Obama's decision to set a timeline on the "surge" of 30,000 new US troops into Afghanistan is consistent with a vehement assertion from Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the top US commander in Afghanistan, in his battlefield assessment.

In urgent language, McChrystal stressed the importance of time in America's Afghan venture – suggesting that the next 12 months could well determine the success or failure of the mission. The timeline Mr. Obama announced Tuesday night appears geared to providing McChrystal with as many boots on the ground in Afghanistan as soon as is logistically possible in an effort to turn the tide of the war.

The consistency between McChrystal's assertions and Obama's words Tuesday appears to provide a military rationale for the timeline, which has been criticized as a purely political ploy made with the 2012 elections in mind.

"We face both a short- and a long-term fight ... but I believe the short-term fight will be decisive," he wrote. "Failure to gain the initiative and reverse insurgent momentum in the near-term (next 12 months) – while Afghan security capacity matures – risks an outcome where defeating the insurgency is no longer possible."

The decision appears to mean that McChrystal's assertion that the "next 12 months" will be crucial is a fundamental tenet of US strategy going forward: Speed is of the essence, and the sooner America can get more troops to Afghanistan, the better.

Plan is Different than the Bush Strategy

http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2009/1202_afghanistan_felbabbrown.aspx

President Obama's New Strategy in Afghanistan: Questions and Answers

The Brookings Institution

DECEMBER 02, 2009

Q. How does President Obama's strategy in Afghanistan compare with that of President Bush?

Under President Bush, the strategy remained—even as the security situation was deteriorating steadily and dramatically—an economy of force. The military effort, as well as the development effort, was never sufficiently resourced to allow for a sustainable momentum to develop on the side of the Afghan government and NATO. President Obama's commitment of additional multifaceted resources provides an opportunity—though far from a guaranteed outcome—that such a strategic reversal will be achieved. Also, under President Obama's strategy, there is, for the first time, a clear emphasis on the quality of governance, and a sense that Afghan leaders need to be held accountable to the Afghan people and their international partners. There are no more blank checks. Finally, there is now a far stronger emphasis on the regional aspects of the Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy and the need to involve all of the important stakeholders in the region and worldwide.

History Isn't Against Us

http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/10/16/three_reasons_for_democrats_to_support_more_troops_in_afghanistan

Foreign Policy

Three reasons Democrats should support more troops in Afghanistan

Fri, 10/16/2009 - 11:34am

2. History is not necessarily against us.

Over the summer Democrats began to turn against the war in Afghanistan. At the time it became conventional wisdom that history was not on the U.S.-led coalition's side. One such voice [recently opined](#), "Afghanistan is a 40,000 rural, rugged village fortress and thus a graveyard of empires since Alexander the Great -- unconquered by Romans, Medians, Persians, Turks, Mongols, British, Soviets and our shrinking "coalition" forces."

Overlooking the fact that the Romans never came anywhere near Afghanistan and that many village fortresses are pro-American, the truth is that all of the above people except for the Soviets actually *succeeded* in "conquering" the Afghans! A perusal of maps of bygone empires will show that [Alexander](#), the [Persians](#), the [Turks](#), the [Mongols](#), and even the [British](#) at times succeeded in "conquering" Afghanistan (the British absorbed the tribal territories of the North West Frontier Province from Afghanistan into their Indian empire).

As for the Soviets, their experience actually has very little in common with that of the U.S. The Soviets fought a *mujahideen* 'freedom fighter' army of 250,000 men. The Taliban insurgency by contrast is limited to 20,000 men. If this were not enough, the CIA funded the *mujahideen* insurgents and the Pakistanis, far from attacking them, actually provided training and equipment. And the Soviets were forced to fight all Afghanistan's ethnic groups to varying degrees. In particular, the Tajiks led by the indomitable Ahmad Shah Massoud, the Lion of Panjshir, [killed two thirds](#) of Soviet soldiers. Today the Tajiks are fully with the U.S. led coalition as are the Uzbeks, Turkmen, Aimaqs, and Hazaras. It is only the Pashtuns in Afghanistan that support the Taliban (and most of them are actually on the U.S. side, including the Pashtun president Hamid Karzai).

Additionally, the anti-Soviet freedom fighters were armed with Stinger ground-to-air missiles, something the Taliban today do not have. Plus, the Soviets were trying to bolster communism in this conservative land via a 100,000-man conscript army. The U.S. and its NATO allies are professionals who have total air superiority and the support of millions of Afghans. By contrast they are trying to support something the Afghans seem to genuinely want.

History Isn't Against Us Cont'd

[http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/10/16/
three_reasons_for_democrats_to_support_more_troops_in_afghanistan](http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/10/16/three_reasons_for_democrats_to_support_more_troops_in_afghanistan)

Foreign Policy

Three reasons Democrats should support more troops in Afghanistan

Fri, 10/16/2009 - 11:34am

As for those who make glib comparisons to the U.S. quagmire in Vietnam, the U.S. lost 58,000 troops in that war. In eight years of fighting in the Texas-sized country of Afghanistan the US has by contrast lost just over 800. The two wars are very different in scale and have even fewer points of comparison than the U.S.-Soviet experiences in Afghanistan.

History would indicate that a war can be won in Afghanistan and that numerous empires such as the Persians, Medes, Alexander, Arabs, Turks, Mongols, Safavids, and Moghuls did control this land at times. The Cassandras who call Afghanistan the "Graveyard of Empires" prove the maxim that a little knowledge is worse than none.

The Afghan People.

In the 1980s America fought the Soviets using our Afghan allies as proxies. In essence, we fought the Soviets to the last drop of Afghan blood. And bleed they did. As many as 1.5 million Afghans died in the war that helped bring down our communist adversary. In other words, in the 1980s this small population [lost more people](#) than America has lost in all its wars combined. But when the war was over the U.S. did not offer the Afghans anything similar to the Marshall Plan that was used to rebuild post-World War II Europe. On the contrary the U.S. turned off all aid to this devastated land and left the Afghans to suffer in isolation. As a result, another [60,000 Afghans died](#) in the post-Soviet civil war in which the previously-preserved Afghan capital was utterly destroyed. Many others died from starvation and wounds in refugee camps in Pakistan. Not surprisingly, many Afghans feel used by their American Cold War allies.

But not everyone abandoned the Afghans. The Saudi extremist charities and fundamentalist Pakistani political parties pumped in millions of dollars to building *madrassas* (religious schools) that acted as *de facto* orphanages and jihadi incubators for a new generation of Afghan war orphans. In the 1990s this generation of *Talibs* (religious students) formed the Taliban regime which turned Afghanistan into a fundamentalist prison camp. The once-free Afghans were horribly abused in this medieval time warp which came about as a result of U.S. inattention. What eventually caught the U.S.'s attention was not the fact that the misogynistic Taliban treated half the population (the women) as thralls and closed girls' schools and hospitals, it was the fact that they harbored al Qaeda terrorists. When these terrorists attacked the United States on September 11, 2001, U.S. President George W. Bush and his wife Laura belatedly [spoke](#) of a noble project to free Afghan women from the Taliban's oppression.

History Isn't Against Us Cont'd

[http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/10/16/
three_reasons_for_democrats_to_support_more_troops_in_afghanistan](http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/10/16/three_reasons_for_democrats_to_support_more_troops_in_afghanistan)

Foreign Policy

Three reasons Democrats should support more troops in Afghanistan

Fri, 10/16/2009 - 11:34am

They also spoke of making up for lost time and rebuilding this war torn land as an antidote to future extremism. It was the sort of far-sighted vision that led the U.S. to rebuild post-World War II Europe as an antidote to communism.

Despite the fact that Bush was distracted by the invasion of Iraq, much has been achieved in succeeding years. Eight years on Afghanistan is a changed place. I have traveled through roughly half of Afghanistan's provinces and have seen de-mining teams hard at work, beautiful bridges and paved roads that put the ones I drive on in Boston to shame, laughing school children (including girls! See [here](#) and [here](#)) studying in U.S.-built schools, a bustling capital seemingly with more cell phones per person than we have in the U.S., and women tentatively going about without burqas on for the first time in years. In the majority of the country a new generation is growing up without war and more than two thirds of Afghanistan is experiencing peace, according to U.S. maps I saw over the summer in Afghanistan.

This is because the insurgency is largely located in the tribal belt of the ethnic Pashtuns (the Taliban are almost all Pashtuns, though not all Pashtuns are Taliban of course). The other ethnic groups who make up the majority, such as the Hazaras, Uzbeks, Tajiks, Turkmen, and Aimaqs, belonged to the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance and want the United States there. Over and over again during my travels through their lands, and even in the Pashtun tribal lands, Afghans told me to tell my fellow Americans not to abandon Afghanistan. If we left, the Afghans I met feared the Taliban thugs would come back throwing acid in un-veiled women's faces, burning schools, amputating hands, and stoning women for adultery (i.e. being caught out on the street with a male who was not family or husband). All we have achieved at a cost in blood and gold would be overturned and the Afghans would be right where we left them back in 1991 when they fell prey to the extremists.

The peace and stability that we have brought to some two-thirds of Afghanistan is fragile and takes a military presence to maintain. We need time to train the tens of thousands of Afghan police and military to keep the peace and fight the Taliban insurgents in the Pashtun south. The Afghans desperately need breathing room.

History Isn't Against Us Cont'd

[http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/10/16/
three_reasons_for_democrats_to_support_more_troops_in_afghanistan](http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/10/16/three_reasons_for_democrats_to_support_more_troops_in_afghanistan)

Foreign Policy

Three reasons Democrats should support more troops in Afghanistan

Fri, 10/16/2009 - 11:34am

Even in the tribal south the U.S. has kept the Taliban out of the Pashtuns' spiritual capital of Kandahar and prevented them from reestablishing their harsh laws in Afghanistan's second largest city. For this the Kandaharis are grateful. In fact repeated polls have shown that majority of Afghans want the U.S. and NATO there. As they watch Indian soap operas on televisions the Taliban once smashed, send their girls to school, and drive on newly paved roads, millions of Afghans are experiencing the direct benefits of the U.S. presence in their country. This is the work we could have been doing in 1991 and, for all its obvious flaws, it is a tentative sign of progress in the long journey to rebuild civil society in this long suffering land. In other words, compassionate, global-minded Democrats who supported President Bill Clinton's humanitarian interventions in places like Kosovo, Bosnia, Haiti and Somalia owe it to the Afghan people to be patient and do the same for Afghanistan.

Brian Glyn Williams is an associate professor of Islamic history at the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth.

Taliban and Al Qaeda are One

http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/10/16/three_reasons_for_democrats_to_support_more_troops_in_afghanistan

Foreign Policy

Three reasons Democrats should support more troops in Afghanistan

Fri, 10/16/2009 - 11:34am

1. Al Qaeda and the Taliban are one.

In the past few weeks Vice President Joe Biden has offered an alternative plan for Afghanistan that could be summarized as "fight terrorists not insurgents." Instead of sending McChrystal the 40,000 troops he has reportedly requested to wage a full blown counterinsurgency against the Taliban, this "limited" strategy calls for waging a counterterrorism campaign against al Qaeda. Rather than slug it out with the local Taliban, we should focus on the al Qaeda terrorists who attacked the U.S. on 9/11, and since al Qaeda is in Pakistan, American forces should simply rely on unmanned aerial drones to kill them there, according to this argument.

Republican writer and strategist George Will summed up this strategy by stating American forces should be "substantially reduced to serve a comprehensively revised policy: America should do only what can be done from offshore, using intelligence, drones, cruise missiles, air strikes and small, potent Special Forces units, concentrating on the porous 1,500-mile border with Pakistan, a nation that actually matters."

Putting aside the absurd assertion that Afghanistan somehow does not "matter," this call for monitoring a 1,500 mile "porous" border using fewer than 200 Predator and Reaper drones overlooks the logistical limitations of such a campaign. If America cannot stop Mexicans from entering America in the millions, how can it monitor the mountainous border between Afghanistan and Pakistan from afar ... using only drones? Most importantly, how can we look the Pakistanis in the eye after calling on them to go after the Taliban and al Qaeda on their own side of the border when we talk of withdrawing "offshore" to fight them on our side of the border? For the hammer (the U.S. in Afghanistan) and anvil (the Pakistani army) approach to work to prevent cross border raids the U.S.-led coalition needs to hit the Taliban from the Afghan side of the border while our Pakistani allies pressure them from the other side.

But the biggest flaw with calls for waging a more limited counterterrorism campaign (as opposed to a counterinsurgency), is that it rests upon the flawed assertion that there is somehow daylight between the Taliban and al Qaeda. Those in support of the limited approach have begun to retroactively argue that the Taliban are a local outfit that we should not be fighting since they did not attack America on 9/11. This theory posits that the Taliban are unlikely to stand by the al Qaeda lightning rod which caused the overthrow of their regime in 2001.

Taliban and Al Qaeda are One Cont'd

[http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/10/16/
three reasons for democrats to support more troops in afghanistan](http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/10/16/three_reasons_for_democrats_to_support_more_troops_in_afghanistan)

Foreign Policy

Three reasons Democrats should support more troops in Afghanistan

Fri, 10/16/2009 - 11:34am

But that is exactly what the Taliban have done so far. When President Bush called upon the Taliban to turn over Bin Laden and dismantle al Qaeda's terrorist camps in Afghanistan after 9/11, Taliban leader Mullah Omar drew a line in the sand and dared the Americans to come and meet their fate in the killing mountains of Afghanistan. Did the Taliban learn their lesson and subsequently break their ties with their dangerous allies?

On the contrary. In 2001 al Qaeda fled to the Pashtun-dominated tribal provinces of Pakistan and there they were offered sanctuary by the Taliban. A series of Taliban commanders such as Nek Muhammad, Mullah Dadullah, Baitullah Mehsud, Jalaluddin Haqqani, and Hakimullah Mehsud not only protected al Qaeda but actively worked to disseminate their brand of terrorism throughout Pakistan and Afghanistan. Under al Qaeda's influence, the down-but-not-out Taliban began to radicalize. By 2006 the Taliban had become the world's second most pervasive users of suicide terrorism after the Iraqis. They had also begun to behead their victims on video and to assassinate their enemies. It was the Taliban that were blamed for killing former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and who tried killing Afghan President Hamid Karzai and Pakistani leader Pervez Musharraf. Al Qaeda amirs (commanders) sit in on the Taliban shuras (councils) in Quetta and Waziristan, they fight alongside the Taliban insurgents, and they fund and train their Taliban allies. The Taliban and al Qaeda have essentially morphed into one since 2001. Under al Qaeda influence the Taliban have threatened to attack the West on numerous occasions. For those who seek to de-link the Taliban from Al Qaeda in order to rationalize a more limited war, al Qaeda has a response. In a recent al Qaeda internet posting, a spokesman emphatically states:

Taliban and Al Qaeda are One Cont'd

[http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/10/16/
three_reasons_for_democrats_to_support_more_troops_in_afghanistan](http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/10/16/three_reasons_for_democrats_to_support_more_troops_in_afghanistan)

Foreign Policy

Three reasons Democrats should support more troops in Afghanistan

Fri, 10/16/2009 - 11:34am

All praise is for Allah, al Qaeda and Taliban all are Muslims and we are united by the brotherhood of Islam. We do not see any difference between Taliban and al Qaeda, for we all belong to the religion of Islam. Sheikh Osama has pledged allegiance to Amir Al-Mumineen (Mullah Muhammad Omar) and has reassured his leadership again and again. There is no difference between us, for we are united by Islam and the Shari'a governs us. Just as the infidels are one people, so are the Muslims, and they will never succeed in disuniting the Mujahideen, saying that there is al Qaeda and Taliban, and that al Qaeda are terrorists and extremists. They use many such words, but by the Grace of Allah, it will not affect our brotherly relationship. There is a reason why no one has been able to get the \$25 million bounties on Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda number two Ayman al Zawahiri, and that is because the Taliban protect them. There is nothing to indicate that this would change if the Americans withdrew from the counterinsurgency and let the Taliban sweep back across southern Afghanistan. Far from it. Recent history would indicate that the Taliban would continue to offer sanctuary to the terrorists who attacked London, Madrid, Istanbul, New York, Bali and Washington from their Taliban-protected bases in Pakistan and Afghanistan. If the Taliban are allowed to regroup they will be more radical than they were in 2001, more distrustful of the Americans who toppled them, and filled with arrogance over their perceived victory. From such a position of strength, why would they suddenly change and turn on their al Qaeda allies/sponsors?

Afghan People Pro West

http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2009/1118_afghanistan_ohanlon.aspx

Brookings Institution

Vision for Victory in Afghanistan - Part I

The Washington Times

NOVEMBER 18, 2009

The Afghan people remain much more pro-Western and pro-American than generally portrayed. Arguments that Afghans are allergic to foreigners and xenophobic in outlook are much more wrong than right.

This is evident in public opinion polling, where recent polling has put U.S. and NATO popularity at more than 50 percent. It is also evident in the zones of relative safety that American, British, Canadian and other NATO soldiers have established of late in the south of the country. For example, Helmand province looks a great deal like al Anbar in Iraq, with desolate desert broken only by a fertile river valley where the preponderance of the population resides. But there is a big difference - Iraqi Sunnis along the Euphrates River were generally extremely anti-American, whereas Afghans seem to relish the frequent Marine foot patrols through their villages and markets. Elders sometimes even ask if anyone knows, by name, the individual Americans who helped build their irrigation canals in the 1950s and whom they remember fondly to this day.

Admittedly, not all is well. But those who resent us - and they are admittedly a larger number than before - criticize our failed performance over the last eight years much more than our presence. In other words, they don't mind being "occupied" so much as being occupied incompetently.

While poverty remains rampant and the opium economy predominates in much of the country, Afghans nonetheless appreciate the impressive gains registered so far this decade in education, health care, access to cell phones and electronic media, and other quality of life measures. If we can arrest the downward spiral of violence and lawlessness, we will win many converts fairly quickly.

Institutions can be Built in Afghan Government

http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2009/1118_afghanistan_ohanlon.aspx

Brookings Institution

Vision for Victory in Afghanistan - Part I

The Washington Times

NOVEMBER 18, 2009

The relative success of the Afghan army shows that institutions can be built in this country. It is not a land lacking national cohesion or identity. While illiteracy is widespread, and tribal identities do remain strong for some, there are many individuals committed to building their nation. The Afghan army is generally regarded as dependable by its citizens. For example, truck drivers bringing supplies to Marines in Helmand province report few if any cases of being asked to pay bribes at army checkpoints in the south.

Surge Brings All Forces Together

http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2009/1118_afghanistan_ohanlon.aspx

Brookings Institution

Vision for Victory in Afghanistan - Part I

The Washington Times

NOVEMBER 18, 2009

We finally have the "A team" deployed to this mission, as one general remarked to me in Kandahar. Not only the United States, but Great Britain, is quite committed to the effort. Other allies like Canada, the Netherlands, Denmark, Australia and France are fighting hard, too.

The "civilian surge" has begun; I was extremely impressed by the quality, commitment, and growing presence of American diplomats and development workers - not only in the embassy in Kabul, but in their dusty plywood offices and on the streets of Kandahar and Helmand. We had only a handful of American civilians in southern Afghanistan a year ago; now the number is 80, and will exceed 100 early in 2010. They also have money to spend, a key to success here. Finally, they also display a growing understanding of tribal identities and dynamics that eluded foreign forces in earlier periods of the war.

So how do these general assets translate into a vision for victory? Success in Afghanistan should be defined realistically - as weakening the insurgency rather than defeating it outright, while providing Afghans the tools to continue the fight primarily on their own. Achieving this goal requires neither complete eradication of opium, nor a thriving economy, nor a political class free from corruption. But it does require better security, as well as a government able to deliver some basic services to its people.

If Surge Doesn't Work then Changes Will be Made

<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1209/30548.html>

Politico

12/13/09 7:48 PM EST

[Obama said it would be clear by the end of next year whether the surge of 30,000 American troops into Afghanistan had been effective in securing the country and bolstering its security forces.

“And if the approach that’s been recommended doesn’t work, then yes, we’re going to be changing approaches,” Obama explained.

Con Evidence

U.S. Security Not Threatened by Afghanistan

http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=11027

The Cato Institute.

December 2, 2009

Our security is not at stake in Afghanistan. As the president's national security adviser, General James Jones, noted in October, "the al Qaeda presence [in Afghanistan] is very diminished. The maximum estimate is less than 100 operating in the country, no bases, no ability to launch attacks on either us or our allies." We don't need 130,000 soldiers to chase down 100 al Qaeda fighters. And as Paul Pillar, the National Intelligence Office for the Middle East between 2000 and 2005 notes, the preparations most important to the September 11, 2001 attacks "took place not in training camps in Afghanistan but, rather, in apartments in Germany, hotel rooms in Spain and flight schools in the United States."

Not only is remaining in Afghanistan not a precondition for keeping America safe, but prolonging our occupation is likely to tarnish America's reputation, undermine its security, and erode its economic well-being more than would a cost-effective policy limited to targeting al Qaeda. We must ask ourselves: How many more U.S. and NATO soldiers will lose their lives for Afghanistan's unpopular and ineffectual central government? How many hundreds of billions of dollars of borrowed treasure will American taxpayers be asked to spend? What is the real strategic goal of remaining in Afghanistan? And are policymakers being honest when they say that this is for the people of Afghanistan or the need to defeat al Qaeda? Given the ever diminishing justifications for continuing the war, it really makes you wonder.

The U.S. Should Not be Nation Building

http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=11023

The Cato Institute

December 2, 2009

The real problem is that over the past eight years, the U.S. mission has shifted far beyond the original goal of degrading al-Qaeda's ability to cause harm. Our troops are now chasing after an extremely broad set of objectives, including: promoting "a more capable, accountable and effective" government; cracking down on the cultivation of illegal narcotics; and providing economic assistance in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. What we have seen over the past eight years is a classic case of mission creep. And that mission has a name: nation-building.

The U.S. should have gotten out of the nation-building business a long time ago. Most such projects fail. The prospects in Afghanistan — a country notoriously suspicious of outsiders and lacking central authority — are worse.

The president contends that the mission isn't open-ended, but his objectives do not lend themselves to an early exit — or, indeed, any exit. Obama's escalation places the burdens of police work, governance and economic development on the backs of U.S. troops and taxpayers, when Washington should be forcing Afghans to take the lead by drawing down our military presence there.

Our social-engineering project in Afghanistan is a costly folly, one we could have avoided by heeding the proper lessons from the disastrous wars in Vietnam and Iraq. The president's decision to double-down in Afghanistan parallels the Bush's administration's notion that unstable areas such as Afghanistan must be made "safe for democracy" or they will inevitably threaten U.S. national security.

U.S. Cannot Set Up a Successful Government

http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=11027

The Cato Institute.

December 2, 2009

As for the issue at hand, the aimless mission in Afghanistan, Carlo Ungaro, a former Italian diplomat who spent sixteen years serving in Afghanistan, questions whether a centralized presidential republic is a feasible system for the country. But the diplomat also brings up several more interesting observations:

"As I observed over my 16 years in the country, the Afghans are a patient people: it took almost ninety years for them to convince the British that any attempt permanently to occupy the country would be futile, and they also fought the Soviet invasion for almost a decade...Whether or not there were also covert reasons to encourage the United States and at least some of its NATO allies into extending the Afghan operation from a simple surgical strike against Al Qaida [sic] into a 'regime change' venture is open to conjecture, and constitutes one of those subjects seldom approached by international commentators [emphasis mine]."

War Should End Now

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/elections/chi-dem-senate-afghanistan-21-dec21,0,1793877.story>

Chicago Tribune

December 21, 2009

"It is time to take care of America again and time to bring our troops home," said Democratic Senate contender Cheryle Jackson, a former president of the Chicago Urban League. "Until we stop spending hundreds of billions on wars, we will not have the focus or money to solve the challenges we face at home."

Jackson's call for an end to the war was joined by Democratic contender Robert Marshall. But Democrat David Hoffman, a former Chicago inspector general, was skeptical of Obama's troop buildup.

"My concern is that the mission of securing all of Afghanistan is very broad, expands our core mission of protecting us from [al-Qaida](#), is a potentially open-ended mission, and is likely to be very costly in lives and dollars," Hoffman said.

No Need For More Troops

http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=11023

The Cato Institute

December 2, 2009

With his latest escalation, President Obama will more than double the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan compared with when he took office. The president is saying, in effect, that a large-scale counterinsurgency campaign there is necessary to keep Americans safe from terrorism. This is a dubious proposition at best. As Obama's national security adviser, Gen. James Jones, noted in October, "The al-Qaeda presence (in Afghanistan) is very diminished. The maximum estimate is less than 100 operating in the country, no bases, no ability to launch attacks on either us or our allies." We don't need 100,000 soldiers in Afghanistan chasing down 100 al-Qaeda fighters.

The U.S. need not maintain more than 100,000 troops in Afghanistan in order to keep Americans reasonably safe and secure. Committing more troops in one particularly inhospitable place harms our best interests by pulling us deeper into a bloody guerilla war with no end in sight. We should be looking for ways to leave Afghanistan, not excuses to dig a deeper hole. U.S.

Cannot Afford to Send More Troops

http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=11027

The Cato Institute.

December 2, 2009

But these critics also recognize, in lieu of the current economic recession, that the Taliban and al Qaeda cannot destroy the United States, but our own reckless spending can. As the Independent Forum notes:

"The US is running a \$1.4 trillion budget deficit...US national debt has now surpassed the \$12 trillion mark...The Afghanistan War has already cost about \$250 billion and is steadily climbing...[and] since Obama was elected, the US Dollar has lost about 10% of its value, and is approaching its all-time record low set back in early 2008. Since 2002, the US Dollar has plummeted by about 37%."

Issues Need to Be Resolved with Pakistan

http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=11027

The Cato Institute.

December 2, 2009

The mistake made in Vietnam — as in Afghanistan — is the erroneous assumption proffered by our political and military elite that these countries constitute a vital U.S. national security interest. Policymakers forget that al Qaeda attacked America on 9/11, and unless Pakistan makes a corresponding effort to go after the al Qaeda sanctuary on their side of the border then America's massive and tremendously costly nation-building campaign in Afghanistan is pointless.

After all, in Pakistan's latest offensive in South Waziristan it is clear that their military has no intention of going after the original Afghan Taliban, much less al Qaeda. Pakistan has very different objectives in Afghanistan. This means stability in Afghanistan and Pakistan — however it is defined — will not be achieved until Islamabad realizes that its future security does not lie in covertly funding Islamist proxies. This is an issue that must be resolved diplomatically, not militarily. And any dialogue would have to address India's increasing influence in Afghanistan, which Pakistan has always viewed as its backyard. It appears (at least to this author) that U.S. policymakers cannot offer any array of inducements sufficient enough to persuade Pakistan to relinquish support for proxies with whom they have associated for the past 30 years. We should be asking "Why should they?" at least according to their own decision making calculus. Moreover, while U.S. drone strikes in Pakistan's restive tribal areas have killed a number of high-value al Qaeda operatives, they have also reinforced al Qaeda's Pashtun base of support and further radicalized the very jihadist forces America seeks to defeat.

Fighting the Wrong Enemy

http://www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/why_we_should_leave_afghanistan_tYtXBFPkHSbkCNgMXFDpJM/0

New York Post

Why we should leave Afghanistan

November 22, 2009

At first, Matthew Hoh didn't think he was doing anything that consequential — maybe he'd attract some attention for the first day or two before becoming, as he puts it, a “footnote.”

But since news broke, a little less than a month ago, of his resignation from the [State Department](#) over the US war in Afghanistan — he is the first US official to publicly quit in protest — Hoh has swiftly become an influential voice, both within and outside the government. The timing of his resignation, dated Sept. 10, 2009, was fortuitous, he says: “People want to understand this.” This week, as [President Obama](#) announced that he will soon decide how to proceed in Afghanistan and whether to escalate US troop levels, Matthew Hoh, former Senior Civilian Representative in Zabul Province, has been taking meetings on Capitol Hill and with administration officials. He was recently invited to speak with the Vice-President's national security adviser, Tony Blinken. “It was a good conversation — they were very open and interested in what I had to say,” Hoh says. “Very inquisitive.”

From his colleagues, both military and civilian, Hoh says he has received overwhelming support. “My State Department counterparts and a lot of military officers feel the same way,” he says. “I did not have a Eureka moment. Nothing in that [resignation] letter is novel or unique.” Public opinion sways similarly: Over the past few weeks, several polls have shown that support for the war in Afghanistan has reached its lowest point ever. A [CBS News](#) poll released this week shows 69% of Americans view the war as “going badly,” with the sharpest decline among [Republicans](#) and independents.

Hoh, now 36, served as an officer in the Marines in Iraq in 2006. He saw a good friend die, drowning after their helicopter crashed in Anbar province. He says the trauma he suffered in combat has not affected his decision to resign and go public: “I made my peace with that a long time ago.”

From the time Hoh was young, he says, he wanted to serve his country. He grew up working-class in New Jersey; his father was a “dirt poor” high-school dropout and teenage dad who worked hard, went to night school, “did everything he could for his family and did it well.” Hoh has also worked at [the Pentagon](#), and at the Department of Defense in Iraq. He was assigned to Afghanistan in May; five months later, he drafted his resignation letter.

Fighting the Wrong Enemy Cont'd

http://www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/why_we_should_leave_afghanistan_tYtXBFPkHSbkCNgMXFDpJM/0

New York Post

Why we should leave Afghanistan

November 22, 2009

“I have doubts and reservations about our current strategy and planned future strategy, but my resignation is based not upon how we are pursuing this war, but why and to what end,” he wrote. “To put simply: I fail to see the value or the worth in continued US casualties or expenditures of resources in support of the Afghan government in what is, truly, a 35-year-old civil war.”

US ambassador to Afghanistan Karl W. Eikenberry — himself the author a leaked memo arguing for no further increase in troop levels — and [Richard Holbrooke](#), US envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, met with Hoh and tried to keep him from quitting. (Holbrooke has conceded that he largely agrees with Hoh’s assessment.) Hoh, swayed by the old argument that one can effect more change by working within the system, agreed to stay. He lasted a week.

“Seeing the kind of stuff I did — I didn’t want to participate in this,” he says.

Our top priorities, says Hoh, should be destroying al Qaeda, killing [Osama bin Laden](#), and stabilizing Pakistan. “Al Qaeda has not been in Afghanistan since 2001,” when the US first invaded, he says. (Last month, Gen. [Jim Jones](#), the president’s national security adviser, said that there were less than 100 al Qaeda in Afghanistan.) “Another 60,000 troops in Afghanistan won’t make a difference,” Hoh says. “But you’ll have hundreds more dead Americans.”

Further, he says, al Qaeda is an elastic, amorphous entity, one based not geographically but ideologically. Hoh points to the logistician for the attacks of Sept. 11, who coordinated everything from a small apartment in Hamburg, Germany. Al Qaeda’s largest attacks since then have occurred in Madrid, London and Indonesia.

“Al Qaeda is a collection of ideas, of independent, autonomous cells,” Hoh says. “They don’t need a lot of funding. They need an apartment with an Internet connection.”

Hoh is also deeply troubled by the conflation of the [Taliban](#) in Afghanistan with al Qaeda; the two, he says, are unrelated. “Al Qaeda is a worldwide organization with an apocalyptic vision to establish an Islamic caliphate throughout the world,” he says. “The Taliban’s views are very local.” Though the Taliban gave shelter to al Qaeda in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks, it is offering to renounce the organization should they be represented in a coalition government. “That’s something we should look at,” Hoh says. “But whether the Taliban were complicit in or lead any of the attacks — no. They are not in cahoots. They have separate goals.”

Fighting the Wrong Enemy Cont'd

http://www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/why_we_should_leave_afghanistan_tYtXBFPkHSbkCNgMXFDpJM/0

New York Post

Why we should leave Afghanistan

November 22, 2009

The shadow of Vietnam, to which this war has often been compared, is long. “People [in power] are taking that seriously,” he says. “There are parallels. The idea that we’re supporting the corrupt and illegitimate [Karzai] regime — I think that troubles a lot of people. Is that an honorable thing to do, to ask our young men and women to die? For this regime?”

As with Vietnam, US forces in Afghanistan, Hoh says, are attacked only because we are there, and so it follows that an insurgency abhors a vacuum. He talks about having visited Korengal — “the deadliest area for US troops” — and the primitiveness of the inhabitants, maybe 10,000 in all, speaking their own language, living off a timber-based economy. He recalls asking the commanding officer what would happen if he pulled his troops out.

“Nothing.”

“So why are we still here?”

“Because we were here before.”

“And that goes on so much,” says Hoh, with more sadness than anger. “It’s this mindset we have: ‘We’ve been here eight years, so we need to be here a ninth.’ To borrow a phrase, it’s the march of folly.”

That said, Hoh is not advocating for a sudden and complete withdrawal. He thinks the US needs to take a far harder approach to Karzai, force him to negotiate with Pakistan by threatening to cut off funds. He thinks the US should end combat in valleys and villages, work only at the lowest levels politically, and aim to be gone within a year.

And then, he says, the US should focus on Pakistan (a state [Hillary Clinton](#) recently criticized for harboring terrorists; Osama bin Laden is believed to be in hiding there) and destroying al Qaeda. Hoh does concede that Pakistan is an imminent danger to the US and the West, but says the notion that the bulk of al Qaeda operatives are recruited and trained in that nation alone is false. “We need a much more serious approach, using intelligence and law-enforcement,” he says. “If we go down this rabbit hole that al Qaeda is tied to a political or geographical boundary, we are never going to defeat them. We have to acknowledge them for what they are, not what we’d like them to be.”

Not Enough Time to Be Effective

<http://hotair.com/archives/2009/12/02/a-few-more-thoughts-on-obamas-afghanistan-speech/>

HotAir.com

A few more thoughts on Obama's Afghanistan speech

December 2, 2009 by Ed Morrissey

In defining our mission's expiration date as 18 months, Obama has undermined whatever good the counterinsurgency strategy will do. For COIN to work, forces have to "flood the zone," but they also have to build trust with locals and encourage better intel. The only way to do that is to impress on locals the notion that we're sticking around. No one will cooperate with American troops if they know we're bugging out in 18 months. They're going to decide to cut the best deals they can with the Taliban, who will simply decide to outlast us.

That doesn't mean we stick around forever, but it does mean that we don't tip our hand on our own timetable. A President can order troops to withdraw at any time, with or without "off-ramps". Those decisions about resources, goals, and American resolve aren't made once but *constantly* during wars, especially foreign wars. Having an 18-month timetable may or may not be a mistake, but *announcing* one is a terrible blunder in wartime.

The only sense of real mission I get from this speech is that we're going to send 30,000 more troops now so we can start evacuating all of them in the summer of 2011. It sounds like a slow-motion Dunkirk, and it recalls what Winston Churchill had to say after being congratulated for rescuing the entire British Army and a good portion of the French Army in 1940 from that massive cross-Channel evacuation: "Wars are not won by evacuations." And apparently Obama agrees, since he didn't bother to talk about victory at all, but instead treated it as a massive responsibility that he reluctantly will fulfill.

That's no way to fight a war. Under these circumstances, it would be better to start the evacuation now, rather than have any more of our ground troops targeted by the Taliban for a country they'll soon be running again anyway.

Taliban Will Plan for When the U.S. Leaves

http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2009/1202_afghanistan_felbabbrown.aspx

President Obama's New Strategy in Afghanistan: Questions and Answers

The Brookings Institution

DECEMBER 02, 2009

On the other hand, setting such a timeline creates a real possibility that the Taliban will lay relatively low for the next 18 months and quietly prepare for the big push when the United States starts drawing down; that the United States will not manage to reassure the Afghan government and people that they will not be abandoned once again, thus failing to strengthen their resolve to undertake difficult and frequently personally risky decisions to resist the Taliban; and that Afghan leaders—government officials and unofficial powerbrokers—will lack the incentives to move beyond short-term narrow horizons of profit and power maximization for the sake of long-term good of their people and countries.

<http://www.heritage.org/Research/AsiaandthePacific/wm2713.cfm>

The Heritage Foundation

December 2, 2009

President Obama's Afghanistan Speech: An Uncertain Message

Moreover, Obama indicated that U.S. troops will begin to withdraw in 18 months--an unrealistically brief timeframe in which to accomplish their mission. The announcement of a withdrawal date also provides a psychological advantage to the Taliban who will convince their recruits that America has lost its will and thus they can just "wait us out." Instead of acting as a decisive commander-in-chief firmly committed to success, President Obama came across as an uncertain political leader eager to split the differences within his divided Administration to implement an exit strategy, despite the likely disastrous consequences of such a plan.

The President's awkward effort to square the circle of his Afghanistan policy led him to state that "it is in our vital national interest to send an additional 30,000 U.S. troops to Afghanistan. After 18 months, our troops will begin to come home." The close juxtaposition of his statement to send more troops with that of a pledge to begin withdrawing them after 18 months will be confusing to the American public, America's NATO allies, and most unfortunately, to Afghans and Pakistanis, who are all too familiar with the U.S.'s history of turning its back on this volatile region. Also left unsaid was why such a vital national interest would change after 18 months. Or why the Obama Administration failed to fully grant the request of its handpicked commander in Afghanistan, General McChrystal, for at least 40,000 more troops. (McChrystal's lowest risk option reportedly called for 60,000 to 80,000 more troops.)

30,000 Troops Less than Necessary

<http://www.heritage.org/Research/AsiaandthePacific/wm2713.cfm>

The Heritage Foundation

December 2, 2009

President Obama's Afghanistan Speech: An Uncertain Message

President Obama has adopted a "McChrystal Light" strategy that embraces the new counterinsurgency plan announced by the Administration last March but fails to give McChrystal all the troops that he deemed necessary to succeed with a low level of risk. It also remains to be seen whether the troop surge can be successful in such a short period of time.

Given his clarity about the threat posed to U.S. national security by a Taliban-dominated Afghanistan, it is difficult to comprehend why Obama would have designated such an early date to begin withdrawing U.S. forces--particularly since most observers acknowledge that it will take at least three to four years to fully train and equip the Afghan National Army to a level sufficient to engage the Taliban. If the U.S. departs the region before the situation in Afghanistan is stabilized, it would likely result in a downward spiral of decreasing security in Afghanistan, including:

- A resurgent Taliban,
- Eventual collapse of the Afghan government,
- An even bloodier civil war,
- Renewed humanitarian crisis, and A refugee exodus.

Moreover, the Taliban will not only bring back their ally al-Qaeda, but it will also provide sanctuary to almost every major Islamist insurgent movement in the world today: the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Pakistani Taliban, Chechen militants, etc. This would be a disastrous outcome not only for Americans and Afghans but for Pakistan, India, and the nations of Europe--all of whom are targets of Islamist terrorists.

Stick to McChrystal's Strategy

The basic concept of the McChrystal strategy is sound: U.S. troops must increase the focus on protecting Afghan civilians to reduce the space in which the Taliban can operate freely and help build the capacity of the Afghan government to serve and protect the people. A major part of this effort must be a "civilian surge" to help build the capacity of the Afghans to govern, fight corruption, restore the rule of law, and revitalize the Afghan economy.

But security must come first. The rapid deployment of 30,000 additional U.S. troops to Afghanistan is certainly welcome, but President Obama needlessly provided a psychological boost to the enemy by signaling a lack of long-term U.S. commitment to the mission by emphasizing a near-term date for beginning a U.S. withdrawal process.

Americans Against More Troops

http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=11027

The Cato Institute.

December 2, 2009

Whether the rationale for prolonging the operation is to expunge al Qaeda, gain greater ease of access to Central Asia's energy reserves, or improve the fate of the Afghan people, Americans don't seem to buy it. A substantial portion of the American public is against sending more troops, the overwhelming majority of Democrats in Congress are against sending more troops, and a number of prominent conservatives are against sending more troops. Why? Partly because these patriotic Americans realize that our brave and highly-dedicated soldiers are not trained to be nation builders or policemen.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of our present war, aside from the lack of clearly defined and achievable objectives, is the lack of public support at home. As General Fred Weyand, the last U.S. commander in Vietnam, told Pulitzer prize-winning author Stanley Karnow: "The American army is really a people's army in the sense that it belongs to the American people. ... When the army is committed the American people are committed; when the American people lose their commitment, it is futile to try to keep the army committed."

Morale within the all-volunteer military will decline if public support at home continues to wane. Unlike some analysts in Washington, D.C., I vehemently disagreed with those who called Afghanistan "Obama's War." But today I can no longer defend that position. If Obama's second surge into Afghanistan is similar to the one made in Iraq — that is, a rapid infusion of U.S. troops followed by a painfully slow withdrawal — then, as the young John Kerry alluded to more than thirty years ago, our president is asking thousands of young men and women in uniform to sacrifice their lives for an occupation that not even he fully accepts and has already labeled a mistake.

Exit Plan is a Sign of Weakness

<http://www.heritage.org/Research/AsiaandthePacific/wm2713.cfm>

The Heritage Foundation

December 2, 2009

President Obama's Afghanistan Speech: An Uncertain Message

Exit Plans Create Doubts

In addition to stinting on troop reinforcements, the Administration has mishandled the Afghanistan policy review by engaging in an agonizing public second-guessing of its own strategy.

Earlier this year, the Administration raised expectations of a forthcoming decision only to postpone and drag out the decision-making process to an unprecedented degree. This has led to a proliferation of damaging leaks as contending factions within the Administration sought to sway the President's decision.

The public equivocation and intense hand-wringing fostered uncertainty about U.S. commitment to the Afghanistan mission among America's NATO allies and other allies and partners in the region. As a result, it will be difficult to convince NATO allies to pony up the additional 5,000-7,000 troops Obama is counting on to provide the manpower necessary for McChrystal's counterinsurgency strategy to be a success.

This uncertainty now has been further amplified by the President's addition of a timeline for withdrawing U.S. combat forces, which was not included in the Administration's original strategy last March.

Last night, President Obama said that "just as we have done in Iraq, we will execute this transition responsibly, taking into account conditions on the ground." But in Iraq, President Bush ordered the surge without placing artificial timelines for withdrawing the troops. Only after conditions on the ground improved did the Bush Administration reach an agreement with the Iraqi government for the gradual withdrawal of U.S. forces. By establishing a timeline for withdrawal before the troops have even been deployed, the Obama Administration has placed the horse before the cart.

Such indications of wavering commitment will be interpreted in Afghanistan and Pakistan as a sign of weakness. This perceived weakness will in turn undermine the Afghan government, encourage many Afghans to hedge their bets by cultivating better ties with the Taliban, and undermine Pakistan's resolve to confront the Afghan Taliban leadership that finds sanctuary within its borders.

Timetable bad

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nation-and-world/la-fg-congress-afghan3-2009dec03,0,5988071.story>

LA Times

December 3, 2009

Administration officials have also struggled to explain the policy. David Axelrod, a senior White House advisor, said Tuesday: "I'm not putting . . . an end, you know, a timetable. But . . . the president made clear, this is an action that has an end to it."

Gates, under questioning by Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich), chairman of the Armed Services Committee, at Wednesday's hearing, explained that the troop drawdown would begin in July 2011, no matter the situation in Afghanistan. When pressed by McCain, however, Gates portrayed the July 2011 date as less definite, asserting that the president may change his plans as needed.

"The president has indicated that we will have a thorough review of how we're doing in December of 2010, and I think we will be in a position then to evaluate whether or not we can begin that transition in July," Gates said. Later, Gates conceded that it is possible for Obama to alter the July 2011 date for beginning withdrawals, if conditions require. "I think the president, as commander in chief, always has the option to adjust his decisions," Gates told Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.). The complicated message was interpreted in different ways by different audiences. For instance, Clinton testified that though the decision to withdraw was not irrevocable, the administration had no interest in occupying the country.

In a broadcast interview later, Graham focused on the first part of her answer: "Secretary of State Clinton said we're not locked into withdrawing, which is music to my ears and I think will be bad news for the enemy. I hope that's the final answer." Administration officials say -- and some outside analysts agree -- that they will know by mid-2011 whether the "extended surge" strategy has begun to reverse the Taliban's gains. But critics have argued against waging war by a time clock because it enables the insurgents to simply wait out the foreign troops' departure. The plan may have political advantages, allowing Obama to approach the start of his expected 2012 reelection campaign by arguing that the military mission in Afghanistan is on the downslope, even though few troops will have returned home by then. M. Ashraf Haidari, political counselor at the Afghan Embassy in Washington, praised the plan for its signs of commitment, saying the administration will not withdraw troops if they are needed in the fight. Haidari said he does not expect the United States to "prematurely disengage from Afghanistan . . . that would be a recipe for disaster."

2011 Near Impossible

<http://www.gastongazette.com/articles/escalate-41546-exit-maybe.html>

December 15, 2009

Obama's dual-pronged plan is not crazy in principle, but it looks to be short one prong. When he says we'll escalate now and draw down later, we can believe the first part. Betting on a substantial withdrawal in 2011 is like betting that Tiger Woods will become monogamous. Nothing is impossible, but...

There are more reasons to think the strategy will fail than to believe it will work. The first is that you never get a second chance to make a good first impression. American forces arrived in Afghanistan with the advantage of not being the Taliban — whose oppressive policies had alienated the populace. But today, the locals associate us with eight years of disappointment.

It's not easy for a culturally alien outside power to win the support of a people with a long history of resistance to foreign invaders. It's even harder to win that support after we've spent the better part of a decade proving we don't deserve it.

More U.S. troops are supposed to enhance security for ordinary Afghans, as well as facilitating civilian improvements that will win their allegiance. But more U.S. troops also mean more deaths for innocent Afghan bystanders, not to mention a greater daily irritant to nationalist sensibilities.

The people we aim to help, keep in mind, have no powerful reasons to like or trust us. A lot of Americans feel a visceral aversion to our national government — regarding it as incompetent, dishonest and overly powerful. So imagine how it looks to Afghans who see our soldiers in their streets. It's no great asset that our chief ally is a regime that had to rig elections to stay in office.

Another obstacle is that the biggest threat to our security and the stability of South Asia lies beyond our reach, in Pakistan. It's hard to battle a foe that can find sanctuary just over the border, where we are constrained in pursuing them. And the harder we fight the Taliban in Afghanistan, the more likely we are to push them into Pakistan, and the more likely they are to assist Pakistan's own insurgency, which is not exactly helpful to our interests.

Getting out of Afghanistan sooner might have consequences we'd prefer to avoid. But escalation offers only slim hopes of averting those repercussions. If we're likely to fail, we can do it after we sacrifice a lot more lives and money. Or we can do it before.

Americans Oppose Timetable

http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2009-12-03-poll-afghan-strategy_N.htm

USA Today

December 3, 2009

By nearly 3-1, Americans worry that the costs of the war will make it more difficult to deal with problems close to home.

There is also concern that withdrawing troops might make the nation more vulnerable to terrorist attacks, but the 55%-43% margin isn't as wide.

The survey of 1,005 adults has a margin of error of +/-4 percentage points. Among its findings:

- Thirty-eight percent call the decision to deploy 30,000 more troops "about the right number." Nearly as many say the number is too high; 18% say it's too low.
- Just one in five agree with the timetable to begin withdrawing forces in 2011. Nearly half say it's too soon to set a timetable, and one in four say troops should begin coming home earlier.

Timetable Doubtful

<http://staugustine.com/opinions/2009-12-11/letter-obamas-afghanistan-timetable-doubtful>

St Augustine

December 11, 2009

Is it possible to secure or win the war with 100,000 soldiers? After 10 years, 500,000 Russian troops occupying Afghanistan just went home. The largest Pashton tribes have been fighting in Afghanistan for almost four decades. It is doubtful we can convince them that we are not another foreign occupier. America poured tons of money and sacrificed young men and women in Afghanistan but what do we have? President Karzai is corrupt, unpopular and cheated in his election.

Troops will barely get there before the December reassessment

http://voices.washingtonpost.com/postpartisan/2009/12/not_much_time_for_good_decisio.html

Washington Post
December 14, 2009

Kabul, Afghanistan --The speedy surge into Afghanistan isn't going to be quite as rapid as the White House recently suggested -- further complicating President Obama's hopes for a quick in-and-out fix.

As one of the selling points of the plan to send an additional 30,000 troops into Afghanistan, rather than the full 40,000 troops Gen. Stanley McChrystal requested, the president's aides touted the idea that the extra forces would be sent in the next six months, rather than over the full year that McChrystal originally thought necessary.

But a top military planner says the actual timetable will be closer to what McChrystal proposed.

I asked Lt Gen. David Rodriguez, the No. 2 US commander here, in a briefing tonight how long the deployment of the extra 30,000 would take. He answered that "it will happen between nine and eleven months," starting in January 2010. Which means that some troops might not arrive until November 2010.

The next month after that, December 2010, is when Obama plans to assess how well the troops are doing -- so he can decide how many to pull out when the withdrawal begins in July 2011. That doesn't give him much time to make good decisions.

Might not be able to get troops there that fast

http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/12/01/obama.afghanistan/index.html?eref=rss_world

CNN

December 1, 2009

[Obama](#), whom Republicans had accused of "dithering" over the decision, concluded the deployment needs to be accelerated to knock back the Taliban, the senior officials said.

The push for a speedy deployment is surprising because White House officials who defended Obama's slow pace of coming to a decision had said the Pentagon wouldn't be able to get new troops to Afghanistan that quickly.

A Pentagon official noted that, under the new strategy, Obama is "trying to do it faster" than the 12-month timeline initially requested by Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Military/2009/1214/Afghanistan-troops-timeline-gets-its-first-revision>

Christian Science Monitor

By *Gordon Lubold* Staff Writer / December 14, 2009

The full complement of American forces deploying to Afghanistan under President Obama's new strategy will not arrive until November, a top commander here said.

The new, more gradual timeline means it will take longer for Mr. Obama's surge of forces to arrive, thus potentially blunting their impact in the surge's initial phases and leading to a slower drawdown of forces after July 2011. It comes as the military confronts the realities of deploying such a large force into a landlocked country with little in the way of infrastructure.

Originally, the Obama administration had hoped to accelerate the deployment of the 30,000 additional forces in its get-in-and-get-out approach. The idea was to deploy new forces quickly and then begin a gradual withdrawal in July 2011. Senior administration officials said Dec. 1, the day Obama announced his new strategy, that it would take six months for all 30,000 troops to arrive.

But in subsequent testimony on Capitol Hill, Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the bulk of the forces would deploy in the summer and "finish out by fall." But the commander for day-to-day operations here said Monday it will probably take a bit longer.

"It will happen between nine and 11 months by the time you get it all done," Lt. Gen. David Rodriguez, commander of the International Security Assistance Force's (ISAF) Joint Command, told reporters in Kabul Monday.

Karzai is an Unreliable Partner

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/11/20/pelosi-hamid-karzai-is-an_n_365655.html

The Huffington Post

11-20-09

In an interview with NPR Friday, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi [slammed](#) Afghan President Hamid Karzai, calling him an "unworthy partner" who wasn't deserving of U.S. support in either the form of troops or aid. "How can we ask the American people to pay a big price in lives and limbs and also in dollars if we don't have a connection to a reliable partner?" Pelosi said.

While sharp rebukes such as Pelosi's are nothing new among Western leaders when it comes to Karzai, the Washington Post [reports](#) that U.S. diplomats are looking to dramatically adjust the tenor of their approach. With Karzai having just been sworn in for a second five-year term, top U.S. diplomats and generals are looking to adopt a more accommodating tone toward Karzai, with one official describing the U.S.'s efforts as tantamount to a "reset" of their relationship, the Post reported. This comes after a period of criticism toward Karzai from the West that had been "unusually harsh - and public," as the [AP](#) put it.

The feeling is that by turning up the pressure so relentlessly on Karzai to reform, who has generally been seen as an ineffective leader by many in the administration, the U.S. may have ended up pushing the Afghan leader further in the direction of rampant corruption and cronyism, according to the Post.

[Obama's] top diplomats and generals are abandoning for now their get-tough tactics with Karzai and attempting to forge a far warmer relationship. They recognize that their initial strategy may have done more harm than good, fueling stress and anger in a beleaguered, conspiracy-minded leader whom the U.S. government needs as a partner.

Karzai, for his part, [tried](#) to strike the right tone Thursday in terms of the types of reforms that Western leaders hope to see.

"We have to learn from the mistakes and shortcomings of the past eight years," Karzai said. "It is through this self-evaluation that we can better respond to the aspirations and expectations of our people."

Karzai also spoke of his desire to have Afghan forces take charge of the country's security within five years.

War in Afghanistan Helps Recruiting for Taliban

http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2009/1203_afghanistan_riedel.aspx

Brookings Institution

President Obama's Afghan Gamble

YaleGlobal Online

DECEMBER 03, 2009

At the end of the message he appeals to the entire Islamic community to join in the jihad against America. He lauds the mujahedeen fighters in Iraq, Palestine and other countries fighting America, thus associating himself with the global Islamic jihad movement. He has done this in previous messages but more forcefully than ever this year. This message is designed to portray the Taliban as both an anti-colonial nationalist movement and part of the larger jihad against the Crusader Americans. This may be a response to criticisms of an earlier message this fall that seemed more nationalist than jihadist. Omar is saying he is both. He is appealing to the broadest base he can. But, in fact, the Taliban is seen by Afghans as a Pashtun movement, which is a critical weakness since a majority of Afghans are not Pashtuns. The Taliban can win only by intimidating the non-Pashtun majority as it did in the 1990s when the United States abandoned Afghanistan.

Plan will further destabilize region

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nation-and-world/la-fg-congress-afghan3-2009dec03,0,5988071.story>

LA Times

December 3, 2009

"We cannot support your decision to prolong and expand a risky and unsustainable strategy in the region," wrote Sen. Russell D. Feingold (D-Wis.) and two House members in a letter to Obama. "There is a serious danger that the ongoing, large-scale U.S. military presence will continue to provoke greater militancy in the region and further destabilize both Afghanistan and nuclear-armed Pakistan."

U.S. Inability to Recruit Afghans

<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2009/1211/In-Afghanistan-war-marines-struggle-to-recruit-locals-could-delay-US-exit>

Christian Science Monitor

In Afghanistan war, marines' struggle to recruit locals could delay US exit

December 11, 2009

The challenges with recruiting and training Afghan security forces in unstable parts of the country calls into question the ability to draw down international forces in 18 months. Those Afghans willing to step forward to join are often constrained by outsider status, illiteracy, drug use, as well as lure of higher Taliban salaries and the fear of attacks on their families. Attracting a better breed of recruit – particularly those native to troubled regions – may require intensive efforts by international troops to improve security.

That's the effort being undertaken in Helmand, a frontline province where the Marines have committed 10,000 troops to take – and stay in – Afghan towns and villages. Now they are just beginning to recruit and train residents of newly protected areas in the hope of producing more durable and independent forces.

Drug testing doesn't go well

Months of training and trust-building went down the tubes when the marines drug-tested their Afghan police partners. Eleven of the 19 police tested positive for opium, including a promising leader named Sgt. Anwar.

After the test, given three weeks ago, Anwar riled up his men against the marines, who all live inside an ancient castle here. The police threw rocks; the marines seized their guns. In the end, the marines sent the whole batch up to the provincial police headquarters and started over with fresh recruits.

Because of their recent arrival, the marines in Helmand have only 300 police, 1,300 Afghan National Army troops, and 500 border police, leaving them with the lowest ratio of Afghan to coalition forces in the country.

“The ratio we'd like to be at is 1-to-1,” says Lt. Col. Mark Winn, who heads up the development of Afghan security forces for the marines in Helmand. “I don't think we will be at a 1-to-1 ratio in the next couple of years.”

More troops help, he says. “With the introduction of more [international] troops, we are able to expand the security that lends itself to development of Afghan security forces.”

U.S. Inability to Recruit Afghans Cont'd

<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2009/1211/In-Afghanistan-war-marines-struggle-to-recruit-locals-could-delay-US-exit>

Christian Science Monitor

In Afghanistan war, marines' struggle to recruit locals could delay US exit

December 11, 2009

Nationwide, the Afghan military and police total about 170,000. But Gen. Stanley McChrystal supports an expansion to 400,000. Only 43 of the 123 military units can operate independently, and just 24 of the 559 police units can do so, according to SIGAR, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction.

“It’s an alarmingly low figure of ANA that are actually deployable, given the numbers and the training to date,” says Andrew Wilder, an Afghanistan expert at Tufts University in Medford, Mass. “I think it raises serious questions about an exit strategy based on Afghan [forces] taking over – unless we do have a political settlement so the security forces are there to maintain peace and protect the border, rather than to defeat a major insurgency.”

Low motivation, low prestige

Progress has been so slow partly because both the pool of recruits and their long-term motivation have been at rock bottom due to the dangers of the job and its low pay and prestige.

In the short-term, Afghan security forces have seen a jump in recruitment thanks partly to the recent increase in salaries. Pay for Afghan forces is now “almost at parity” with the Taliban, McChrystal testified this week.

Raising salaries, however, commits Afghanistan to budgets it cannot hope to sustain alone. On Tuesday, President Hamid Karzai said that his country would be unable to pay for its own security until at least 2024.