



Obama Advisers Differ on Afghanistan

President Barack Obama's top advisers differ on what course of action to take with the war in Afghanistan, the New York Times reported on September 3.

The differences emerged since General Stanley McChrystal submitted a new strategic assessment of the Afghanistan situation on August 31. In June, General McChrystal assumed command of the American and NATO forces stationed there. U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates sent the general's assessment to President Obama, and while the general has not yet made any specific recommendations regarding troop strength, he is expected to do so in the near future.



Gates fears that increasing the number of American troops may make the United States look like it is out to occupy the country, though he appeared to be open to the idea at a September 3 news conference. Vice President Joseph Biden, Jr. believes that an increased military presence in Afghanistan may hurt the goal of stabilizing Pakistan, which he thinks is more urgent.

Richard Holbrooke, the special representative to the region, is also concerned about Pakistan, but he thinks a larger number of troops is essential to undermine the Taliban and al-Qaeda and to keep Afghan civilians safe. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton has been supportive of increasing troop strength and can be expected to continue doing so.

A military strategist who has advised General McChrystal said the general might put forth three choices. What would be called the high-risk option would be a small reinforcement of 10,000 to 15,000 troops. The medium-risk option would call for at least 25,000 more troops, and the low-risk option would send in about 45,000 additional troops.

Geoff Morrell, the Pentagon press secretary, said all of this was merely guesswork: "Anyone who tells you that they know how many troops the commander is going to ask for and the options he may or may not present doesn't know what he's talking about, because that has not been determined yet." Morrell also emphasized that Gates, the key adviser in the matter, has not yet decided what he would suggest to the president.

In addition to the 40,000 NATO troops in Afghanistan, President Obama has already ordered in 21,000 more U.S. troops, bringing American strength to 68,000. Admiral Mike Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has voiced concern about how a further buildup would put even more stress on America's already overstretched military.

Admiral Mullen has a point. Consider: America, the world's greatest military superpower, has already been fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan longer than it took to win World War II, and there is still no end in sight. America fought around the globe, from snowy European forests to steamy Pacific islands,



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defeating the combined might of Germany and Japan in less time. It just does not make sense to keep American soldiers in harm's way for such a long time with no definitive objectives and then say that the *only* choice is to put more soldiers into combat.

The best answer is to bring home from around the world *all* American forces not engaged in a constitutional, congressionally declared war. If a foreign nation threatens America, only then should a declared war should be waged to eliminate that threat, a war that would have the definite objective of complete and total victory, and that would result in America's armed forces coming home as soon as possible.

Photo of Adm. Mike Mullen: Department of Defense



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