



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on December 2, 2009

Obama Escalates War in Afghanistan

President Obama announced December 1 he would immediately begin deploying an additional 30,000 U.S. soldiers to Afghanistan, an escalation that would be complete by mid-2010 and begin a draw-down 18 months later.

“As Commander-in-Chief,” Obama [stated](#) in a nationally televised address from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, “I have determined 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. These are the resources that we need to seize the initiative, while building the Afghan capacity that can allow for a responsible transition of our forces out of Afghanistan.”



The extra 30,000 soldiers would supplement the [71,000](#) already there and is less than the 40,000 additional soldiers that the U.S. military commander in Afghanistan, [Gen. Stanley McChrystal, asked for](#) several months ago. McChrystal had laid out three scenarios for the eight-year conflict. No additional troops would lead to failure, he [concluded](#). A “medium risk” scenario included 40,000 additional soldiers and a “low risk” of failure option included 80,000 additional combat soldiers.

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President Obama also [explained](#) the history of how the Taliban had harbored al Qaeda terrorists as the reason for the initial attack on Afghanistan:

I am convinced that our security is at stake in Afghanistan and Pakistan. This is the epicenter of the violent extremism practiced by al Qaeda. It is from here that we were attacked on 9/11, and it is from here that new attacks are being plotted as I speak. This is no idle danger; no hypothetical threat. In the last few months alone, we have apprehended extremists within our borders who were sent here from the border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan to commit new acts of terror.

What President Obama didn't explain in any detail was why — if American national security was genuinely at stake in the Afghan fight — he was splitting between failure and “moderate risk” in McChrystal's request.

On the other side of the issue, Obama offered no specifics of how al Qaeda has anything to do with Afghanistan today. Though Obama [claimed](#) that “we have apprehended extremists within our borders who were sent here from the border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan to commit new acts of terror,” none of the recent arrests on terrorist cases have come from Afghanistan. Only by using the weasel-words “border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan” is he able to claim that he has apprehended “extremists” from that location. One terror suspect, [Najibullah Zazi](#), hails from Pakistan but does not have any connection to Taliban-era Afghanistan (though he was born there and emigrated to Pakistan



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when he was seven years old). Terrorism suspects David Coleman Headley and Tahawwur Hussain Rana of Chicago also visited Pakistan, but were more heavily tied to terror sites in India than Pakistan.

Obama seems to have engaged in the same kind of alarmism that the Bush administration used to mislead the American public into accepting the Iraq war. President Obama even stole a line of argument from former Vice President Dick Cheney by hinting in carefully juxtaposed sentences that failure to escalate in Afghanistan could lead to nuclear destruction of American cities.

“The stakes are even higher within a nuclear-armed Pakistan,” Obama [said](#), “because we know that al Qaeda and other extremists seek nuclear weapons, and we have every reason to believe that they would use them. They will increase our ability to train competent Afghan Security Forces, and to partner with them so that more Afghans can get into the fight. And they will help create the conditions for the United States to transfer responsibility to the Afghans.” Note that Obama didn’t say that loss of Afghanistan would lead to nuclear incineration of American cities, and neither did leaders of the Bush administration. All Cheney did was [discuss nuclear attacks in between sentences describing Iraq](#).

Obama [added](#) in his address: “We will have to take away the tools of mass destruction. That is why I have made it a central pillar of my foreign policy to secure loose nuclear materials from terrorists; to stop the spread of nuclear weapons; and to pursue the goal of a world without them.”

Even Obama’s announced strategy to win in Iraq sounds a lot like the “surge” strategy the Bush administration pursued, with its [“as Iraqis stand up, we will stand down” rhetoric](#).

“Just as we have done in Iraq,” Obama [told](#) West Point cadets, “we will execute this transition responsibly, taking into account conditions on the ground.” This involves a strategy where “we need to seize the initiative, while building the Afghan capacity that can allow for a responsible transition of our forces out of Afghanistan.”

Obama noted that “the three core elements of our strategy [are] a military effort to create the conditions for a transition; a civilian surge that reinforces positive action; and an effective partnership with Pakistan.” But the civilian “surge” — another term borrowed from the Bush administration — is simply another word for the “nation-building” that the Bush administration attempted in Iraq (after criticizing the same policies by the Clinton administration in the Balkans).

President Obama lashed out at critics who likened the Afghan war to Vietnam. “Unlike Vietnam,” Obama [claimed](#), “we are joined by a broad coalition of 43 nations that recognizes the legitimacy of our action.” (Note: The United States had [many allies fighting alongside American G.I.’s in Vietnam](#), including soldiers from Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, Canada, South Korea, and the Philippines.)

This was a bit more eloquent than [President Bush’s remarks in his 2004 presidential debate against John Kerry](#), who had criticized Iraq as a war where the United States had gone it alone: “Well, actually, he [Kerry] forgot Poland. And now there’s 30 nations involved, standing side by side with our American troops.” But the two statements share a striking similarity, as does the Vietnam War analogy, since American soldiers have done most of the fighting and the dying in all three wars.

“Unlike Vietnam,” Obama [added](#), “we are not facing a broad-based popular insurgency.” And yet the President admits that the government “has been hampered by corruption, the drug trade, an under-developed economy, and insufficient Security Forces.” Moreover, rebels he labels as “Taliban” have “begun to take control over swaths of Afghanistan.” With a corrupt, drug-addicted government and the opposition controlling “swaths” of territory, can a popular insurgency be far off?



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“And most importantly, unlike Vietnam,” Obama [argued](#) finally, “the American people were viciously attacked from Afghanistan, and remain a target for those same extremists who are plotting along its border.” But as already demonstrated above, recent terrorist suspects have come from Pakistan and India, and not from Afghanistan.

President Obama did make [one clear statement](#) to the West Point cadets that all Americans can agree upon. “As cadets, you volunteered for service during this time of danger. Some of you have fought in Afghanistan. Many will deploy there. As your Commander-in-Chief, I owe you a mission that is clearly defined, and worthy of your service.” And on that count, Obama clearly failed in his December 1 address to both West Point cadets and the nation.

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