



Written by on March 29, 2010

President Obama Visits Afghanistan

Voice of America reported on March 29 that President Barack Obama had returned to Washington from a brief, unannounced trip to Afghanistan, during which he pressed Afghan President Hamid Karzai to crack down on corruption and make his government more effective.

Obama's visit to Kabul lasted six-hours, beginning on the evening of March 28 with talks at the presidential palace. While the U.S. president praised efforts by Karzai and his cabinet to secure the country, he also said that Afghan officials need to crack down on corruption and expand the rule of law.



While in Afghanistan, Obama also met with U.S. military commanders and troops at Bagram air base north of Kabul. VOA cited the President's statement that the U.S. mission in Afghanistan is clear: to disrupt, dismantle, defeat, and destroy al Qaeda and its extremist allies. Obama emphasized the importance of the troops' mission, and said it is essential to U.S. security. He said U.S. lives would be at risk if the Taliban regains control of Afghanistan.

VOA, which is an official U.S. government operated new agency, reported:

Since he became president last year, Mr. Obama has shifted attention from the war in Iraq, where the United States is reducing its presence, to Afghanistan, ordering the deployment of 30,000 additional troops there. Relations between the U.S. and Mr. Karzai's government have been strained at times since the Afghan leader won re-election in a controversial ballot marred by widespread fraud.

The White House Office of the Press Secretary released a transcript on March 28 headed: "[Remarks by the President to the Troops: Clamshell, Bagram Airfield](#)"

In his remarks, the President acknowledged U.S. Ambassador Karl Eikenberry and General Stanley McChrystal, the commander of the 43-nation coalition. Interestingly, both men are members of the internationalist policy group, the Council on Foreign Relations.

Obama emphasized the international nature of the military operation in Afghanistan when he said: "We're also joined by troops from some of our coalition partners, because this is not simply an American mission or even just a NATO mission. Al Qaeda and their extremist allies are a threat to the people of Afghanistan and a threat to the people of America, but they're also a threat to people all around the world, and that's why we're so proud to have our coalition partners here with us."

In his salute to the the members of the Afghan National Army, Obama referred to his statement to President Karzai that "the United States is a partner but our intent is to make sure that the Afghans have the capacity to provide for their own security. That is core to our mission, and we are proud of the work that they are doing and the continuing increased capacity that we're seeing out of Afghan national security forces."



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The President's statement "to the troops" might have been encouraging to a member of the military serving overseas, but lacks factual credibility:

I know it's not easy. You're far away from home. You miss your kids. You miss your spouses, your family, your friends. Some of you, this is your second or your third or your fourth tour of duty. I'll tell you right now the same thing that I said at West Point last December. *If I thought for a minute that America's vital interests were not served, were not at stake here in Afghanistan, I would order all of you home right away.* [Emphasis added.]

Obama also resurrected the old George W. Bush rationale for being in Afghanistan. The "change" he spoke of in his campaign apparently doesn't pertain to the war:

We can't forget why we're here. We did not choose this war. This was not an act of America wanting to expand its influence; of us wanting to meddle in somebody else's business. We were attacked viciously on 9/11. Thousands of our fellow countrymen and women were killed. And this is the region where the perpetrators of that crime, al Qaeda, still base their leadership. Plots against our homeland, plots against our allies, plots against the Afghan and Pakistani people are taking place as we speak right here. And if this region slides backwards, if the Taliban retakes this country and al Qaeda can operate with impunity, then more American lives will be at stake. The Afghan people will lose their chance at progress and prosperity. And the world will be significantly less secure.

Our broad mission is clear: We are going to disrupt and dismantle, defeat and destroy al Qaeda and its extremist allies. That is our mission. And to accomplish that goal, our objectives here in Afghanistan are also clear: We're going to deny al Qaeda safe haven. We're going to reverse the Taliban's momentum. We're going to strengthen the capacity of Afghan security forces and the Afghan government so that they can begin taking responsibility and gain confidence of the Afghan people.

As we noted in our article of March 22, "[Afghanistan's Karzai Meets with Insurgents](#)," we noted:

Anyone considering the sequence of events occurring in Afghanistan since the U.S.-led invasion in 2001 must surely scratch his head in puzzlement. That invasion, launched in response to the 9/11 attacks masterminded by al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden (who once received covert U.S. support to fight the Soviet occupiers of Afghanistan) was waged for the expressed purpose of removing the Taliban government that had provided bin Laden with a safe haven and base of operations.

After the UN-established International Security Assistance Force (IAAF) comprised mostly of U.S. troops succeeded in ousting the Taliban from Kabul, the nation's capital, and other centers of power, the coalition helped Hamid Karzai assume power. The U.S. and the West has helped prop up Karzai ever since, sending an ever-growing number of troops to help prevent the Taliban from re-asserting control.

Curiously, however, Karzai issued an appeal during his acceptance speech last November 3 to "to bring peace to this soil" and said that Afghans should "ask our Taliban brothers and others to return and embrace their own land."

The president's statement "We're going to deny al Qaeda safe haven," also assumes that al Qaeda can operate only from Afghanistan, which is quite simply absurd. Al Qaeda has outposts and cells in several nations throughout the Middle East and can certainly operate from anywhere. If major financial corporations could move their operations from the World Trade Center across the river to Jersey City after 9/11, then the much leaner al Qaeda can certainly pack its bags and set up shop almost anywhere



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on the planet.

Security against al Qaeda (and other potential terrorists) should begin at home, with better control over who enters our country and what they are doing once they arrive.

Photo of President Obama in Afghanistan: AP Images



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