



Written by on September 22, 2010

Woodward Book Explores Obama Afghanistan Exit Strategy

On September 22, Voice of America and other media outlets cited material from Obama's Wars — a new book by Washington, D.C.-based journalist Bob Woodward — stating: "Key members of the Obama administration were divided about the president's Afghan war strategy, with some top national security advisors doubting Mr. Obama's plan will work."



Woodward is best known as half of a two-man investigative journalism team, along with Carl Bernstein, credited with exposing the Watergate scandal that ultimately led to the resignation of former president Richard Nixon. Their role in uncovering the scandal was made into a 1976 movie entitled *All the President's Men* in which Robert Redford starred as Woodward.

VOA noted that both Woodward's *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* published excerpts from the book, which is scheduled to be released on September 27.

The cited material revealed that military leaders continued to press Obama for more resources after he announced that he would send an additional 30,000 troops to Afghanistan. The book includes a transcript of a six-page presidential memo in which Obama explicitly outlined the objectives of the troop strategy so the military would not reinterpret his decision.

The [Christian Science Monitor](#) also ran the story on September 22, noting:

Excerpts published in the *Washington Post* this morning show Gen. David Petraeus demonstrating the kind of contempt for his civilian bosses that cost former chief of the Afghan war, Gen. Stanley McChrystal, his job. It shows a President Obama deeply leery of an open-ended commitment to war in a country referred to since the 19th century as the graveyard of empires.

Excerpts also show a military establishment pushing for more control over war policy, with senior officers favoring a long-term commitment to a population-centered counterinsurgency strategy, rather than a mission more narrowly focused on Al Qaeda.

One of the more dramatic quotes quoted from Woodward's book is President Obama's statement in an October 2009 meeting about his planned duration for the war in Afghanistan, a statement directed at Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton: "I'm not doing 10 years," said Obama. "I'm not doing long-term nation-building. I am not spending a trillion dollars."

An AFP report on the book's contents quotes additional statements from the president:

"Everything we're doing has to be focused on how we're going to get to the point where we can



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reduce our footprint.”... “It’s in our national security interest. There cannot be any wiggle room.”... “This needs to be a plan about how we’re going to hand it off and get out of Afghanistan.”

Also interesting were statements Obama made to Republican Senator Lindsey Graham when asked about the July 2011 date he had promised for beginning to withdraw troops from Afghanistan. His answer indicated that he had offered the withdrawal date in order to firm up support from members of his own party:

“I have to say that,” Obama told Graham. “I can’t let this be a war without end, and I can’t lose the whole Democratic Party.”

New York’s [Daily News](#) cited NBC’s White House correspondent Chuck Todd, who said that the Obama administration is trying to downplay the book and the divisions about the war within his administration. Todd said administration officials are saying, in effect: “These policy divisions were well known at the time. This is the way the president operates. He wants different points of views.”

Will the war in Afghanistan have the same effect on Obama as Vietnam did on President Lyndon Johnson? A summary of that time period in a [Wikipedia](#) essay notes:

As the war dragged on, Johnson’s popularity as President steadily declined. After the 1966 mid-term Congressional elections, his re-election bid in the 1968 United States presidential election collapsed as a result of turmoil within the Democratic Party related to opposition to the Vietnam War. He withdrew from the race amid growing opposition to his policy on the Vietnam War and a worse-than-expected showing in the New Hampshire primary.

Wars are never popular, but if the public perceives one as necessary for the nation’s security, it generally rallies around the man in the White House as it supported Franklin Roosevelt during World War II. However, the public has much less tolerance for “no-win wars” such as Vietnam and Afghanistan, and it appears that the public has lost its patience with the latter effort. An article in the New York [Daily News](#) for September 22 notes:

Nearly six in 10 Americans are against the nine-year-old war in Afghanistan, according to a new poll.

The Associated Press-GfK poll finds that only 38% of respondents support President Obama’s decision to expand the war effort, lower than the 46% who said they did in March.

Only 19% believe the situation will improve in Afghanistan over the next year, while 29% think it will get worse. And 49% believe the conditions will remain the same.

Photo: Journalists Carl Bernstein, left, and Bob Woodward, right, talk with reporters after attending a memorial service for W. Mark Felt, the former associate director of the FBI who was known as “Deep Throat” in Santa Rosa, Calif., Jan. 16, 2009: AP Images



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