



Written by on December 11, 2008

Additional U.S. Troops to Head for Afghanistan

According to Reuters, Gen. McKiernan said Afghanistan was at a "tipping point" and the additional troops were needed to secure the south.

"There are areas where we are, at best, in a stalemate," McKiernan was quoted by British newspapers in their December 11 editions. "We still have a tough fight in the south and the southwest and we simply do not have enough security forces there."

Secretary Gates and General McKiernan said that there would be a "sustained commitment" of U.S. troops in Afghanistan for the next three to four years. Gates said that the increase in U.S. troop strength in Afghanistan would be made possible by the planned withdrawal of some troops from Iraq in January. However, Gates was also critical of NATO for allowing the United States to shoulder a disproportionate share of the burden in Afghanistan. Of the 65,000 foreign troops in Afghanistan, about 31,000 are from the United States.



"NATO is a military alliance, not a talk shop," Mr. Gates was quoted by the *New York Times* as saying. "But I have not heard anybody talking about forces beyond those that General McKiernan has already requested. And I think that's a discussion that the new administration will have as we look to the future."

After referring to the unsuccessful Soviet experience in Afghanistan and noting that the experience of foreign forces in that nation "has not been a happy one," Gates noted: "I think we're going to be in this struggle for quite a long time, and I think we have to make sure we've got some of the basics right."

On the way to Afghanistan, the defense secretary's plane made a brief stop at Manas Air Base in Kyrgyzstan, the base from which U.S. flights into Afghanistan are dispatched. While at the base, Gates told U.S. troops: "The final decision will be made by the next president, but a consensus has emerged that more troops are needed." Gates also warned that "success in Afghanistan will not come easily or quickly."

President-elect Obama has asked Gates to stay on as secretary of defense in the new administration.

Gates also signaled a need to work more cooperatively with Afghan military forces. "Making sure the Afghans are out in front is a key element, but also figuring out how many foreign troops is too many in terms of being successful," Gates told reporters. "I think that is still an unanswered question."

The BBC reported that Gates indicated a review of Afghan strategy made by the Bush administration



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would be quietly passed on to the Obama administration, rather than widely publicized. Gates also said that United Nations Special Representative Kai Eide had not been given the support in terms of money and personnel to fulfill his mandate of coordinating international efforts in Afghanistan. The fact that a UN official should be fulfilling that role serves to underscore the role of the UN in the ongoing conflict.

Like many key officials in both the outgoing Bush and incoming Obama administrations, Secretary Gates is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, a New York-based organization that has promoted internationalism and the ceding of U.S. power to the UN, NATO, and other multinational bodies. UN authority was instrumental in waging the wars in Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq.

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