



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on August 24, 2017

In Huge Reversal, Trump Announces Expanded, Unlimited War in Afghanistan

After years of decrying America's 16-year war in Afghanistan as expensive and unwinnable, President Donald Trump announced Monday that he would continue and expand the war.

Speaking at the Fort Myer, Virginia military base, Trump [argued](#) that his reversal, while against his "original instinct," was necessary because of what he has learned "behind the desk in the Oval Office." Consultations with his "cabinet and generals," he said, convinced him that the United States could not simply withdraw from Afghanistan.



Trump gave three reasons that, in his opinion, the United States must broaden its Afghanistan operations, all of which, the *American Conservative's* [Daniel Larison](#) observed, are based on "very familiar and clichéd assumptions."

"First," Trump said, "our nation must seek an honorable and enduring outcome worthy of the tremendous sacrifices that have been made." This, Larison pointed out, "ignore[s] that throwing away more lives on a failed war is far worse than cutting our losses."

Second, Trump asserted that "a hasty withdrawal would create a vacuum that terrorists ... would instantly fill." Despite Trump's later claim that "no place is beyond the reach of American might and American arms," it is impossible for the United States to occupy every last corner of the world to prevent terrorism from cropping up. There will always be places where terrorists can hide, and adventures like the one in Afghanistan tend to breed more terrorism rather than destroy it.

Third, Trump said "the security threats we face in Afghanistan and the broader region are immense," citing "20 U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organizations ... in Afghanistan and Pakistan — the highest concentration in any region anywhere in the world." Left unexplored was the possibility that those groups are in that region largely in response to the U.S. presence there.

The president announced an increase in the number of troops in Afghanistan, though he didn't specify how many. Congressional officials told the [Washington Post](#) the number is likely to be about 4,000, a nearly 50-percent increase over current levels.

In fact, although Trump defined victory as "attacking our enemies, obliterating ISIS, crushing al Qaeda, preventing the Taliban from taking over Afghanistan, and stopping mass terror attacks against America before they emerge," he was pointedly nonspecific about the details of how this expansive victory will be achieved short of permanent war. "We will not talk about numbers of troops or our plans for further military activities," he said, adding that "conditions on the ground — not arbitrary timetables — will guide our strategy from now on."

Trump's about-face, naturally, won him plaudits among neoconservatives. Senator John McCain (R-



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Ariz.) [said](#) Trump had taken “a big step in the right direction.” Senator Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) [said](#), “I think there’ll be a lot of bipartisan support in Congress for this proposal.” And former George W. Bush speechwriter Marc Thiessen noted that he could have written parts of Trump’s address.

Trump’s base and other noninterventionists, on the other hand, excoriated him for his reversal. “We didn’t win with 100K troops,” tweeted [Laura Ingraham](#). “How will we win with 4,000 more?” Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky.) said in a [statement](#), “The mission in Afghanistan has lost its purpose, and I think it is a terrible idea to send any more troops into that war.” His father, former congressman Ron Paul — whose contention that the Afghan war was a waste of money was once [seconded](#) by Trump — issued a steady stream of tweets condemning the new policy. [Pat Buchanan](#) wrote that while Trump “was elected to end America’s involvement in Middle East wars,” he will instead “likely end up sacrificing his presidency, trying to rescue the failures of those who worked hardest to keep him out of the White House.”

Indeed, as the [Daily Beast](#) observed, “In the seven months since taking office, Trump has expanded military operations in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Somalia, Libya and, now, Afghanistan.” Trump’s speech, the website noted, “was ‘America First’ rhetoric plastered atop a military-oriented interventionist policy.”

And so the march of the American empire, to the beat of the military-industrial complex, continues apace, constitutional strictures on presidential war-making notwithstanding. As the *American Conservative’s* [Rod Dreher](#) put it, “Everybody who voted for Donald Trump hoping that he would reduce the US military’s involvement in foreign wars has been made a fool of.”

Photo of soldiers: [U.S. Army](#)



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