



Written by on November 12, 2009

Obama to Consider Four Afghan Troop Options

On November 11, President Obama held his eighth Situation Room meeting in the last two months to discuss the ongoing war in Afghanistan. Administration officials announced afterwards that the President rejected all four war options placed before him and asked that they be revised.



An AP report said that among the options Obama is considering is a plan to add 30,000 or more U.S. troops to counter the Taliban in select areas of Afghanistan to buy time for Afghan government forces to take over the defense of the nation. The other three options reportedly being considered present a variable number of troop increases, ranging from a relatively small number to the roughly 40,000 that General Stanley McChrystal, commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), would like.

During a press conference aboard Air Force One on November 10 en route to Fort Hood, Texas, a reporter asked White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs if President Obama was upset that reports about the number of troops he might send to Afghanistan kept leaking out. He also asked if Obama had made a decision about the troops. Gibbs replied:

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The President will have an opportunity to discuss four options with his national security team [on November 11]. Anybody that tells you that the President has made a decision or — what was the artfully used term last night, "tentatively agreed to" — doesn't have, in all honesty, the slightest idea what they're talking about. The President has yet to make a decision.

I would counsel you all to — I got asked on Saturday about a story of approving 34,000 troops, only to be asked yesterday about a story of approving nearly 40,000 troops — this all two weeks after being asked about whether or not we were coalescing around an entirely different option. I don't know that it's annoying as much as it is generally amusing to watch somebody or some group of people decide they know what only the President knows.

That same day, retired General James Jones, U.S. national security adviser, said in a statement quoted by AFP: "Reports that President Obama has made a decision about Afghanistan are absolutely false. He has not received final options for his consideration, he has not reviewed those options with his national security team, and he has not made any decisions about resources. Any reports to the contrary are completely untrue and come from uninformed sources."

Interestingly, despite Jones's statement that any reports about Obama having come to a decision about Afghanistan are "completely untrue" and despite Press Secretary Gibbs' statement that those making



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similar statements hadn't "the slightest idea what they're talking about," and despite the fact that Gibbs said he found such speculation "generally amusing," Defense Secretary Robert Gates apparently is not amused.

Speaking to reporters en route to an armored vehicle factory in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, on November 12, Gates said — "in an unusually feisty tone," according to an AFP report — that it "doesn't serve the country" and was not in the military's interest for military-related information to be leaked to the press. "I have been appalled by the amount of leaking that has been going on," Gates told reporters.

Gates was "appalled" not only by reports concerning President Obama's long-awaited decision about how many troops (if any) should be sent to Afghanistan, but also by details of the military's probe into the shootings at Fort Hood, Texas.

"Everybody ought to shut up," he said.

While it is true that sensitive or secret military data should be safeguarded, Gates's frustration at being unable to stem the flow of leaks seems to indicate a serious failure in the military's intelligence operations, for which he has ultimate responsibility. But if, as both Jones and Gibbs have asserted, the leaked information is completely *false*, then it seems the false information would only serve to confuse, rather than enlighten, America's enemies. Therefore, why all the excitement?

As Gates fumes about leaks, whether accurate or not, the nation's media continues to speculate about the President's impending decision: To increase, or not increase, that is the question.

An AP report quoted by MSNBC noted:

President Barack Obama won't accept any of the Afghanistan war options before him without changes, a senior administration official said, as concerns soar over the ability of the Afghan government to secure its own country one day. Obama's stance comes as his own ambassador in Afghanistan, Karl Eikenberry, is voicing strong dissent about a U.S. troop increase, according to a second administration official.

The *Washington Post* reported that Eikenberry "sent two classified cables to Washington in the past week expressing deep concerns about sending more U.S. troops to Afghanistan until President Hamid Karzai's government demonstrates that it is willing to tackle the corruption and mismanagement that has fueled the Taliban's rise. Eikenberry's memos, sent as President Obama enters the final stages of his deliberations over a new Afghanistan strategy, illustrated both the difficulty of the decision and the deepening divisions within the administration's national security team."

And a *New York Times* report noted: "Mr. Obama asked General Eikenberry about his concerns during the meeting on Wednesday, officials said, and raised questions about each of the four military options and how they might be tinkered with or changed. A central focus of Mr. Obama's questions, officials said, was how long it would take to see results and be able to withdraw. 'He wants to know where the off-ramps are,' one official said."

Another report in the *Washington Post* almost makes the reader feel sorry for President Obama, as he tries to weigh the advice from his many advisors:

War and tragedy are putting President Obama through the most wrenching period of his young administration. Visibly thinner, admittedly skipping meals, he is learning every day the challenges of a wartime presidency. Health-care reform, climate-change legislation, the broken economy — all are cerebral exercises compared with the grim responsibility of being the commander in chief.



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Perhaps if our Presidents and Members of Congress stuck to the mandate outlined in the Constitution, the decision-making might be somewhat easier. Healthcare reform, climate-change legislation, and the economy (except for staying out of the free market's way) are not part of the President's job description. Being the commander-in-chief is. (Article II, Section 2 of the Constitution)

For this reason, no one should aspire to the office of President who is not qualified to exercise the responsibilities of commander-in-chief, a factor that might have raised questions about Obama's fitness for the job even if he had *not* been an advocate of far-left policies. After all, his military experience was non-existent and his foreign policy experience was negligible.

Such speculation, however, is predicated on the belief that modern presidents exercise a great deal more independence of thinking than they typically have, and that they are beholden to no vested interests. And by vested interests, we do not mean the usual lobbyists and campaign contributors, but America's foreign policy establishment — as is commonly represented by members of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), who have dominated our State Department since the Roosevelt-Truman administrations.

In just today's news, alone, CFR members have figured prominently, including Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry, and ISAF commander, General Stanley McChrystal.

And membership in the elite, New York-based group is not limited to the President's supporters, either, even some of his critics — such as former Vice President Dick Cheney (who recently accused Obama of "dithering" in his troop decision) and Senator John McCain, Obama's opponent in the race for the White House, who said last week that he was disappointed and angry that the President has delayed his Afghanistan decision — are CFR members.

One might well ask, if the CFR is such a forcefully influential body when it comes to U.S. foreign policy, why its members do not exert a universal position when trying to influence the President.

The answer may well be, *that is the point*. As in Vietnam, the goal is not decisiveness and victory, but indecision, distraction, and delay — and years more of pointless, no-win warfare.

Photo of President Obama at Arlington National Cemetery: AP Images



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