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additional troops we may send.

We Have Time

Some argue that we must decide on the full-up troop deployment now. The military's long lead times, the requirement to bring along our NATO allies, and the need to signal decisiveness and resolve are adduced as compelling reasons to announce the full troop request quickly. I disagree. We have the time we need*certainly into early next year. We must take that time to decide on the right course.

As serious as the security picture in Afghanistan is today, it is not so dire that we need to announce or commit ourselves to sweeping changes immediately, either in our military or civilian posture. For example, additional combat brigades could be designated for possible deployment and begin training without requiring an immediate decision on whether to send them all. They would be arriving in increments, in any case.

To show resolve, the President could announce that he was immediately ordering a smaller contingent of U.S. forces to mentor ANSF and to protect the population, while emphasizing that further deployments would be conditioned on specific steps by the Afghan government, such as a commitment and a plan to take full responsibility for national defense on a specific timeline. Afghans, allies and others in the region would see this not as indecision, but rather as seriousness of purpose.

Why We Must Take the Time

We have not yet conducted a comprehensive, interdisciplinary analysis of all our strategic options. Nor have we brought all the real-world variables to bear in testing the proposed counterinsurgency plan. We agree that more troops will yield more security wherever they deploy, for as long as they stay. But the last time we sent substantial additional forces*a deployment totaling 33,000 in 2008-2009*overall violence and instability in Afghanistan intensified. Also, neither ANSF nor the Afghan government has demonstrated the will or ability to take over lead security responsibility*much less governance--in any area cleared and held by NATO-ISAF. Experience with troop increases, therefore, offers scant reason to expect that further increases will permanently advance our strategic purposes; instead they will dig us in more deeply.

We also need time to work with President Karzai and his new team, many of whom may not be in place for several months, to test whether they are both able and committed to lead the counterinsurgency mission we are defining for them. In fact, Karzai explicitly rejected the &counterinsurgency8 basis

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and purpose of the COMISAF proposal when first briefed on it in detail two months ago, and he has not embraced it since then. Rather, in a PBS interview on November 7, Karzai sounded bizarrely cautionary notes about his willingness to address governance and corruption. This tracks with his record of inaction or grudging compliance in this area. We need an intense, high-level dialogue to judge whether we can gain enforceable commitments from the Afghan government to build their own capacity and to assume responsibility for security and governance in cleared areas. Absent such a judgment, we cannot presume that another large infusion of U.S. troops necessarily will give us leverage over them.
Recommendation

