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INSTANT VIEW - Obama plan for withdrawing troops for Afghanistan

Thu, Jun 23 2011

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - President Barack Obama announced a plan on Wednesday to begin withdrawing 10,000 troops from Afghanistan by year's end, followed by about 23,000 more by the end of next summer.

The following is reaction to Obama's plan:

HOUSE SPEAKER JOHN BOEHNER:

I am pleased the president recognizes that success in Afghanistan is paramount. Continuing to degrade al Qaeda's capabilities in Afghanistan and the surrounding region must take priority over any calendar dates. It's important that we retain the flexibility necessary to reconsider troop levels and respond to changes in the security environment should circumstances on the ground warrant. It is my hope that the President will continue to listen to our commanders on the ground as we move forward.

JEFF DRESSLER, A MILITARY ANALYST AT THE INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF WAR:

My sense is that the military in general was in favour of a much smaller withdrawal. Something they could have lived with was a couple thousand troops. But the fact is the conditions on the ground don't merit any sort of withdrawal -- it's not time to be pulling out a substantive amount of troops.

There's a lot that has to be done in the east and you're not out of the woods in the south yet.

LAWRENCE KORB, SENIOR FELLOW, CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS AND FORMER ASSISTANT DEFENSE SECRETARY:

I think it's also important that you send a signal to the government of Afghanistan that they are going to have to step up and take over. ... You're also balancing this against other U.S. interests. If the United States doesn't have any money, we're not going to be able to protect our interest in other areas. It's obviously going to save some money.

CHRISTOPHER PREBLE, DIRECTOR OF FOREIGN POLICY STUDIES, CATO INSTITUTE

Despite reports that the president's decision signals a move toward a narrowly focused counterterrorism mission, the fact is nearly 70,000 troops will remain in Afghanistan after this drawdown.

Such a force is unnecessary, and a far less costly alternative is available to us. We could keep pressure on the Taliban, and deny al Qaeda a sanctuary, with perhaps as few as 10,000 troops in Afghanistan. We should be moving rapidly in that direction. President Obama hasn't been, and this announcement suggests that he won't.

SENATOR RICHARD LUGAR, SENIOR REPUBLICAN ON SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE:

No rational review would commit nearly 100,000 troops and \$100 billion a year to Afghanistan.

The country does not hold that level of strategic value for us, especially at a time when our nation is confronting a debt crisis and our armed forces are being strained by repeated combat deployments.

REPRESENTATIVE JIM MCGOVERN, MASSACHUSETTS DEMOCRAT, AUTHOR OF VARIOUS RESOLUTIONS CALLING FOR A PLAN TO LEAVE AFGHANISTAN:

The president is right that we need to shift our strategy in Afghanistan. But a counter-terrorism strategy doesn't need 70,000 boots on the ground, any more than it needed 100,000 boots on the ground. What the president needs to tell us is how -- and when -- he's going to bring all the troops home.

TODD HARRISON, SENIOR FELLOW, CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND BUDGETARY ASSESSMENTS:

With the faster drawdown that is being proposed, they (the administration) will actually save about \$17 billion in 'FY12 compared to what they had requested. That will bring the war budget down by about 15 percent, so that's a significant reduction in war funding. Relative to the overall DOD (Department of Defense), it's not that much of a reduction and relative to the overall federal budget and the deficit, this does not make much of a difference.

(Compiled by JoAnne Allen; Editing by Peter Cooney)



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