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## Poll: Public backs surge, not pullout deadline

**By: [Julie Mason](#)****Examiner White House Correspondent****December 11, 2009**

A new poll showing strong support for President Obama's Afghan surge policy but stronger resistance to a deadline for troop withdrawal underscores public confusion about the mission, experts said.

Obama was heading to Oslo, Norway, to collect the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize when the CBS News/New York Times poll was released. In a speech, the president described himself as "filled with difficult questions about the relationship between war and peace."

Americans also appear to be asking some of the same difficult questions, judging by the poll, which found 51 percent approve of escalating troops in Afghanistan, while 55 percent oppose Obama's plan to begin pulling out all U.S. forces beginning in 18 months.

"I think many Americans are thinking it's all in or all out in Afghanistan," said Malou Innocent, an expert on the region at the Cato Institute.

"I think the poll shows the American public still somewhat confused about the true nature of this war and it shows we lack clearly defined and achievable objective," Innocent said.

The president has said that eradicating al Qaeda and the influence of the Taliban, shoring up the Afghan government and civil institutions, and addressing extremist threats in neighboring Pakistan are among his goals in the region.

In a speech last week at West Point, Obama said he would add 30,000 more troops to the 70,000 already there, and then, "after 18 months, our troops will begin to come home."

The withdrawal, sought by liberals in his own party, was widely criticized by some Republicans, who said the timing of withdrawal should best be dictated by conditions in Afghanistan, and not an arbitrary timetable.

Respondents in the CBS News/New York Times poll agreed. Fifty-five percent called the withdrawal a bad idea.

Soon after Obama announced the strategy, members of his administration appeared to hedge slightly, saying there was no way of knowing now how long U.S. troops would remain in Afghanistan.

"The date of July, 2011 to begin transferring security responsibility, and thinning our troops and bringing them home, is firm," Defense Secretary Robert Gates told CBS. "What is conditions-based is the pacing at which our troops will come home."

The administration's rhetoric, which was viewed by some lawmakers as fudging on the withdrawal, suggested their internal polling found similar public resistance to the timetable for pulling out.

"The American people want to win and they saw that a surge can be effective, they saw it in Iraq," said Matt Mackowiak, a Republican strategist and former Senate staffer. "I suspect the specificity on the pullout was a rhetorical device to appease the left wing."


The poll found 30 percent believe the war is going well for the United States, while 60 percent said it's going badly.

Better news for the president: 48 percent said they approve of his handling of the war, a 10 percentage point increase from November -- indicating his West Point speech, which garnered mixed reviews from pundits, was better received outside of Washington.

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