



US and UK call for civilian surge in Afghanistan

22 January, 2010, 19:05

British Foreign Minister David Miliband met with US senators ahead of next week's meeting in London on non-military strategies in Afghanistan.

American lawmakers are calling for a civilian surge in Afghanistan, asking for a larger civilian presence in the country as the United States prepares to deploy 30,000

more troops.

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"The civilian component of the multinational efforts in Afghanistan has been neglected somewhat as discussion of the way forward has centered around military resources," said US Senator Richard Lugar (R-Indiana), at a recent Senate hearing.

The hearing also provided an opportunity for lawmakers to meet with British Foreign Secretary David Miliband ahead of an international conference on the non-military strategy next week in London. Top priorities include building infrastructure in Afghanistan and developing a political strategy so that Afghans will support their government. Some senators, like John Kerry (D-Massachusetts) want to make sure the strategy focuses on improving the situation outside of Kabul.

Afghan government corruption remains a key concern for lawmakers despite an optimistic visit with Afghan President Hamid Karzai, but State Department Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke said at the hearing that he found recent developments encouraging.

Miliband said the UK is encouraged by U.S. President Barack Obama's July 2011 troop drawn down date.

"It has made real the commitment of the US and the wider international community to empower Afghans to run their own society. That is a good thing and not a bad date," said Miliband.

But critics say instead of investing further in a civilian strategy and coming together in London to form a political strategy, the US and its allies should be formulating a strategy to leave Afghanistan altogether.

"I think the US needs to begin lowering it's expectations for the region and begin a slow withdrawal," said Malou Innocent, a foreign policy analyst at the Cato Institute. "I think what you see right now is a classic case of mission creep, and this is a broader nation-building project that many Americans are not for."

Analysts who have been following the civilian effort on the ground say it has been marked by

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mismanagement and poor oversight. Although government officials may be calling for greater accountability, history may prove more convincing.

"Granted, I think there is a place for economic development and aid, however, it has been so dysfunctional and disorganized that I'm skeptical any recalibration will bring about the end state we hope to achieve," said Innocent.