

## Troop buildup is puzzling

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THE POINT — President Obama commits forces to another futile challenge.

Somehow, this move by the Obama administration to dispatch 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan over the next few months defies logic. After all, this was the presidential candidate who campaigned that he would get U.S. forces out of Iraq.

Now, after almost a year in office, he turns around and commits to another war in a neighboring country. His reasons for doing so sound strangely like those given by George W. Bush in his Iraq strategy.

Obama says Afghanistan is important to fighting terrorism. Yes, the Taliban is still a significant force in that nation, but our focus has been on al-Qaida, which is strongest in Pakistan.

And, as Christopher Preble, the director of foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute and the author of “The Power Problem: How American Military Dominance Makes Us Less Safe, Less Prosperous and Less Free,” puts it, it all looks like an extension of Bush policies.

He writes, “The real problem is that over the past eight years, the U.S. mission has shifted far beyond the original goal of degrading al-Qaeda’s ability to cause harm. Our troops are now chasing after an extremely broad set of objectives, including: promoting ‘a more capable, accountable and effective’ government; cracking down on the cultivation of illegal narcotics; and providing economic assistance in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. What we have seen over the past eight years is a classic case of mission creep. And that mission has a name: nation-building.”

In fact, this has all the aspects of yet another quagmire for American troops. Obama mentioned a timetable, but we all know how nebulous such parameters can be.

We agree with Preble’s assessment of the troop buildup when he writes: “The U.S. need not maintain more than 100,000 troops in Afghanistan in order to keep Americans reasonably safe and secure. Committing more troops in one particularly inhospitable place harms our best interests by pulling us deeper into a bloody guerrilla war with no end in sight.”

Do we never learn from past mistakes?