

# Obama rules out troop drawdown in Afghanistan

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President Barack Obama will not consider any reduction in the US military commitment in Afghanistan, White House and congressional officials declared after a three-hour meeting at the White House Tuesday between Obama and more than 30 congressmen and senators, both Republicans and Democrats.

The meeting included proponents of an escalation of the ground war in Afghanistan, such as Senator John McCain, the 2008 Republican presidential candidate, and Democratic congressman Ike Skelton, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee. Also attending were those like House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senator John Kerry who have been more skeptical about the prospects for a military victory.

After the meeting, Democratic Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid pledged the full support of Congress for whatever decision Obama made, issuing what amounts to a blank check for military options ranging from the dispatch of tens of thousands more troops to a major escalation of cross-border attacks into Pakistan, using both missiles and special forces.

The White House clearly hoped to retain the maximum tactical flexibility while enrolling the entire congressional leadership behind the goal of maintaining US domination of Afghanistan and using that country as a base of operations for projecting American power more broadly throughout Central, South and Southwest Asia.

An unidentified “senior administration official” was widely quoted in the press declaring that Obama would adopt a policy midway between the various

congressional positions. The meeting was “a chance for the president to identify what is and is not on the table” and to “dispense with the straw man argument that this is about either doubling down or leaving Afghanistan.”

Given that it is virtually impossible to double the US troop presence in Afghanistan any time soon, because of the lack of available manpower, this formulation means that Obama, in the guise of adopting the “middle ground,” was using the meeting with the bipartisan congressional delegation to rule out any withdrawal of US troops.

The Obama administration is openly defying the sentiments of a large majority of the American people, who oppose escalation of the war and want the troops to begin coming home. Opposition to the war in Afghanistan has been growing steadily since Obama took office and began expanding the conflict. The latest Associated Press opinion poll found that only 40 percent of those interviewed still supported the war, down from 44 percent in July.

Press reports Wednesday confirmed that Obama has now received the request for reinforcements submitted by Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the top US commander in Afghanistan, whom Obama appointed in the spring with a mandate to review US policies in the war. A Pentagon spokesman said that copies of the request were distributed to top administration officials on Monday. Obama would decide on how many additional troops to send—McChrystal has asked for as many as 40,000—within a month, a White House spokesman said.

Whatever the specific decisions made as a result of

the ongoing White House policy review, the ultimate outcome of the process is not in doubt. The United States will become more deeply involved in a colonial-style war in a country whose people have fought fiercely against such foreign interventions for nearly two centuries.

The measures proposed by the Democratic opponents of McChrystal's counterinsurgency plan—such as the “counterterrorism” option favored by Vice President Joseph Biden—have nothing to do with the antiwar feelings of the masses of Americans. They are merely plans for escalation of the violence by other means, with greater reliance on drones, assassinations and bombs to kill insurgents and terrify civilians. On Wednesday, the media carried reports stating categorically that the Biden option did not envision a reduction of current troop levels in Afghanistan.

Each of the policy options being considered at the White House has potentially catastrophic implications, further destabilizing the region, fueling conflicts between neighboring countries such as Pakistan, India and China, and leading to a wider conflagration.

Obama postured as an antiwar candidate during the presidential election campaign, particularly in the Democratic primary contest with Hillary Clinton, who had voted for the Iraq war resolution in 2002. But he also promised to shift forces from the war in Iraq to the war in Afghanistan—one of the few election pledges that he has actually kept.

The decision to escalate the war in Afghanistan is of enormous historical significance. Some liberal commentators have cautioned the White House that Obama risks following in the footsteps of Lyndon Johnson, whose domestic policy initiatives—the so-called “war on poverty”—were ultimately scrapped to pay for the escalation of the war in Vietnam.

Historical analogy has its uses, and Afghanistan certainly has become “Obama's war,” just as the Vietnam War was identified with Johnson, McNamara and later Nixon and Kissinger. But in this case the differences outweigh the similarities.

Johnson's program of limited social reform at home was overtaken by his policy of waging imperialist war abroad. In the case of Obama, however, the administration is pursuing a program of outright reaction in both domestic policy and foreign policy.

The Obama administration is continuing and deepening the policies of the Bush administration. Abroad, it is continuing the war in Iraq and escalating the war in Afghanistan and Pakistan. At home, it is attacking democratic rights and slashing the living standards of working people, while it empties the public treasury to bail out the banks.

Tens of millions of working people either voted for Obama or were affected by the illusions in him spread by the media. These illusions will increasingly be shattered by the bitter experiences of depression at home and war abroad, in which this government is revealed as the instrument of the Wall Street oligarchy.

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