

## 6 Fallacies of a Surge in Afghanistan

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General David Petraeus of CENTCOM, a handful of American foreign policy thinkers and politicians, and many NATO allies support a “surge” of military troops to stabilize Afghanistan and fight the neo-Taliban insurgency. They rightly argue that the U.S. and the West in general should help rebuild Afghanistan. They argue that increasing the number of troops similar to the surge in Iraq is the first step for providing relief. Yet, while a surge of military troops can provide short-term security, there are six fallacies commonly utilized to support the argument for a surge that should be evaluated more closely to ensure Afghanistan receives the attention it deserves.

### **Assertion 1: A Surge in Afghanistan Will Stabilize the Country**

Only partially. A large-scale surge of American troops will likely bolster the legitimacy of the insurgency based on their image as anti-occupation fighters. In fact, increasing troops may attract *jihadis* from the region just as the Soviet invasion did in the 1980s and provide incentives for foreign powers to funnel funding and weapons to the insurgents as a way to undermine the U.S. (just as Iran did in Iraq and just as the U.S. did during the Soviet invasion).

### **Assertion 2: An Army and Marine Corps Style-Surge is the Only Solution for Afghanistan**

Wrong. While U.S. Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency doctrine has come a long way, any new military strategy in Afghanistan should be based on Special Forces, intelligence operatives, and potentially constabulary forces from NATO allies. The American footprint should be lighter, not heavier, in Afghanistan. Strategists and policy planners should evaluate the British role in Oman as a useful case study.

### **Assertion 3: A Surge is Necessary to Provide Security for a Political Solution**

Poor assumption. The multitude of tribes, ethnic groups, and religious leaders in Afghanistan must be enticed or coaxed into a factionalized political federation to provide stability for the country. Insecurity due to Taliban attacks must be combated by the citizens of Afghanistan based on alliances between tribes. Moreover, Americans are delusional when it comes to nation building. It would take roughly 10 years of a heavy occupation force combined with economic and social development to even start to provide a foundation for transforming deeply rooted issues in Afghanistan. American domestic political sensibilities will not support such an intense and long-term effort nor will the deepening economic recession. American forces do not want to occupy

Afghanistan like they did in Germany, Japan, and South Korea -- the only largely successful nation building endeavors in modern U.S. history. American policy-makers must articulate more realistic expectations.

**Assertion 4: The Karzai Government Will Fall Apart Without a Surge**

False. Karzai already complained of civilian casualties resulting from U.S. airpower as a propaganda victory for insurgents. U.S. support for Karzai must remain behind the scenes so he can cultivate political will for a unified government. Karzai needs more support but less visible American presence.

**Assertion 5: The Taliban and Potentially Al Qaeda Will Re-Establish Themselves Without a Surge**

Partially true. But Afghan citizens must provide a response to the worldview of both the Taliban and Al Qaeda. Al Qaeda is largely discredited as a political movement in many parts of Iraq because of its inability to provide a more appealing system of governance. Afghans already know what life under the Taliban is like. Provide incentives and support for Afghans to take back their country but allow them to do it and take the credit for it.

**Assertion 6: A Surge Will Mitigate Insurgents Crossing Into Afghanistan From Pakistan**

Perhaps in the short-term. But the only long-term solution for the problem of radicalism in Afghanistan and Pakistan cannot be predicated on soldiers policing the vast border between the two countries. Pakistan must be enticed into dealing with the Pakistani Taliban through political, economic, and social tools. America cannot solve the problem of Islamic extremism in Afghanistan and Pakistan with more military force.

**Conclusion:**

The surge is not a panacea and may even be counterproductive in its current form. Many Western foreign policy thinkers, politicians, and military planners romantically believe that more force can stabilize and fix the country. The incoming Obama foreign and defense policy team must look far beyond the surge for solutions to the problems in Afghanistan.