



# VIEWER VOICES

## COMMENTS & ANSWERS TO FAREED'S QUESTION OF THE WEEK 12-13

(to remove your name or entire comment please [email](#) webmaster)

Last week we asked “Do you believe it was a mistake for the President to have clearly stated that he wants American troops to begin pulling out of Afghanistan in 18 months? Does it give the Taliban and Al Qaeda the chance to wait it out, hold their fire until the US is gone? Or is it necessary, to keep the war in Afghanistan from becoming an endless commitment?”

Overall, a large majority of our viewers believe that announcing a timeline was not a mistake.

[Here are some of your responses and comments:](#)

Yes. I don't believe anyone has ever won a conflict by defining when it will end, rather than how it must end. This initiative is either important (which it better be, considering the cost

in blood and treasure) or not. If it is important, then we must see it to the end.

[Roger Rohweder](#)  
Durham, NC

President Obama is right, and it is absolutely courageous of him to set a withdrawal date, irrespective of when that date is. The numerous reasons given by his critics are preposterous. Everybody knows a foreigner will go home one day, whether they are in Afghanistan or America. So the argument that the Taliban will know is empty. On the contrary, Afghans who want to work for their country will feel the urgency. They will then make hare while the sun shines.

[Emma Ozoemena](#)  
(Nagoya, Japan)

A political necessity, yet a strategic blunder. Although the announcement may have been necessary to re-gain the support of his domestic political base Pakistan is the key to our success in Afghanistan. Obama wanting to pull out troops in 18 months exacerbates Pakistani fears of India filling the power vacuum when we leave. This very real security threat for Pakistan lessens their willingness to tackle extremism and fight the Taliban within their own borders - which is key to our success in Afghanistan.

[Arun Narayanan](#)  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Pulling out troops out of Afghanistan in 18 months? He said they would "begin" pulling out troops in 18 months, and now the gov't is already backpedaling on that deadline. This is at least a five-year war effort. There's no way, shape or form the White House can sell this war to me.

The war on Communism was a way to justify our war machine spending in the '50s through '90s. Our war campaign against Al Qaeda and terrorism is just the 21st century manifestation of the same geo-political boogie men fear factor. Tom Friedman is right ! Nation building begins at home.

Keith Zimmerman  
Oakland, CA

Judging from the reaction to the question and the oft repeated refrain from the Obama Administration about this being "misunderstood" I would have to say that the statement was indeed a mistake. Any proposal to escalate a controversial war that has a statement that is "misunderstood" shows how poorly the statement was conceived. America's penchant for saying: "shape up or else" to leaders has become quite hollow. Better to have said nothing about withdrawal.

Phil Wyckoff  
Florida

Not entirely. Assuming that the President is trying to walk a middle road politically to support his Generals while following a path for withdrawal from Afghanistan, this statement makes sense. While I don't know if 18 months is long enough to achieve some measure of success, to announce the time table now gives the U.S. a graceful way of withdrawing from an untenable situation while maintaining face to previous commitments. For those who argue that the Taliban will just lay low until we leave, isn't that what we need them to do?

Gary  
Wallace, NC

Sending troops to Afghanistan is a big mistake. Bringing them home as soon as possible is the right thing to do

[Bela Szakacs](#)

You asked whether we were sending the wrong message to the Taliban. The message was for the current government and all that matters is whether they understand the consequences. The Taliban should be their problem to handle in 18 months.

[Lynn Harker](#)

[Idaho Falls, Idaho](#)

An exit strategy from Afghanistan is key not just for President Obama's success in striking a balance between domestic and foreign policy, but indeed for the success of the first term of his Presidency. A strict timeline will make it incumbent on the US to make a lot of progress in 2010 so that eventual disengagement can commence. 18 months is an achievable timeline although some troops are bound to stay on for a longer time.

[Shobhana Rana](#)

[Pristina, Kosovo](#)

Once again, Obama has chosen to go down the slippery slope just like all his predecessors for all the wrong reasons. And I had high hopes for this president. We have sacrificed our boys because of that American hubris -- that we will prevail, Americans always and must win -- regardless of reality. Robert McNamara knew in 1964 that we couldn't win in Vietnam, but still sent thousands of Americans to death. And for what? 18,000 more soldiers died after we knew we couldn't win.

Obama's rebuke of the Vietnam analogy is self-serving. Sure, no two wars are the same, but they are similar in one respect -- they're wars for which there is no definable victory.

John Tsao  
San Francisco

No, it was not a mistake to announce an 18 month goal for starting the next phase of the long term strategy. The mistake is on the part of the news commentators who try to take the 18 months too literally and try to pin down, and trap, the Administration.

Renny Bosch  
Costa Mesa, CA, USA

President Obama's timetable may be a mistake for military and diplomatic purposes, because it may discourage our allies and embolden our enemies, but it may have been a necessity for domestic political purposes, to prevent a revolt in the Democratic Party's base.

Professor Michael Waggoner  
University of Colorado

Signaling that the US will start pulling troops out of Afghanistan in 18 months is a good idea as it puts pressure on the leaders in the region to make needed changes. It also gives the military time to test out the effectiveness of the new strategy in selected parts of the country. Republican critics say the Taliban and Al Qaeda will back off their violence to wait until the withdrawal. If that happens, the US and the Afghans will have an important 18 month window with reduced violence. That's not bad news. It would be a real good opportunity to strengthen the security situation and rebuild infrastructure.

Respectfully,  
Dan Mayton, Ph.D.

## Professor of Psychology

I truly believe the best thing the Taliban could do is sit back and wait for the U.S. to withdraw in 2011. How else could we devote so much time training the Afghans to fend for themselves, without the pesky annoyances of the Taliban's constant attacks that they think might, in fact, be productive? When they stage their surge in 2011, they might be in for a surprise!

Richard Shuffleton  
Lebanon, Oregon

I do not feel Obama is experienced enough to be the US President, do not support him, and have always thought we should not be in Afghanistan. However, you can look at a tentative date to initiate withdrawal and say the Afghan people now know what is expected of them and how long they have to accomplish it. In that light, announcing the date for starting withdrawal is positive. The date may also buy President Obama time from the American people to accomplish his goal until the withdrawal date is reached.

Retired Lieutenant Colonel Steven D Donaldson, St Louis, Missouri

No, the President did not make a mistake in announcing a troop withdrawal date. It was to make the 80% of the American people who watch 30 minutes of news a week and have no concept of what is really going on in the Nation, much less the world, feel better about the reality of having to send more troops and spend more money in a country most of them can't find on a map. It will also give Fox News and a lot of CNN a chance to consult with an endless supply of experts about the pros and cons of the decision until something else comes along to get another endless supply of experts to talk about.

If it weren't for you and Amanpour, we would never get any real information about what is going on in the world. Keep up the outstanding work. There is just no substitute for knowing what you are talking about.

Hyatt E. Cayton  
Seminole, OK

No. The Republicans' continually unified stance on this particular issues such as this, is missing the point, as well as others. The Taliban aren't the foreign forces, and they will continue to live well past international forces in duration. The international forces don't have unlimited resources and they must set a concise achievable goal in order to stabilize the country. I believe that building an Afghanistan army that will exist long after international forces leave is vitally important for success in their own independence, and to keep all other extreme factions from coming back to Afghanistan once again. They, in the end, will be fighting the extreme factions of their on society--not the International forces.

Chaz  
NH, USA, currently living in Seoul, S.Korea

Do I believe a time line is a mistake?

Only if you believe D-Day was a mistake. Only in the movies are wars or even battles won as some kind of pointless adventure. Strategy is planning and planning depends on milestones and schedules.

D-Day and for that matter the Atom bomb were planned three years before the events and more or less occurred on a planned timeline, within a few months

at most. D-Day planning was launched in the spring of 1942.

Any student of history can see the stage by stage project planned nature of WWII. I'm sure this was obvious to Nazi and German intelligence. In the old days it was called "an inexorable conclusion". In fact, the attempts to overthrow axis governments were probably a realization by officers that the end was a final step in a process that was going according to schedule. The plan and achievement of the plan is also valuable psychologically, not a liability as some propose.

Wars without plans have been the most brutal and politically useless. WWI, Korea, Vietnam were all wars without plans. The civil war started as a war without a plan or a realistic time line. Once Grant and Sherman took over, it proceeded along a certain and conclusive path. The psychological impact of Sherman's march to the sea was precisely the schedule and the inexorable character of it.

Effective strategy requires marshalling of resources, plans based on holding positions just long enough for a next planned stage. This idea that planning is bad flies in the face of history. Nothing wrong with a "plan B". we had a Japanese invasion plan if the A-Bomb was a dud but make no mistake about it, WWII ended on schedule.

[Geoffrey Feldman](#)

[Lowell, MA](#)

I think the President's plan is deceptively simple. Surge the troops to create a plausible assertion of military success while pouring dollars into local and regional officials to create the illusion of relative peace and

functional government. Declare looming success and start the pullout in mid-2011 in preparation for the 2012 elections while continuing the greening of Afghanistan at whatever level is required to continue the illusion of stability.

Tony St. Amant  
Chico, CA

Tom Friedman's assessment is bang-on - as always. We should fight the war here in the U.S. - the job war.....

On the troop draw-down commencement date - it is the right message to send. If the Taliban go and hide waiting for the big date then it will be much easier for the Afghan Government to train soldiers and police with our help rather than us having to focus on fighting. If the government doesn't train enough they have been warned and we have every justification to just pull out.

More importantly is a comment Fareed made regarding Muslims living in European Countries. I agree with the Swiss and hopefully the rest of Europe will follow. If Muslims want to be residents or citizens of European Countries then they should have to adopt European Customs - to some degree. 10th Century clothing is not adopting and I strongly disagree with anything that happens that will promote them continuing to wear them. For Fareed to think the Swiss's decision only agravates the Muslims makes me think he must be one - because that makes no sense to me.

Larry Channing  
Winter Park, Florida

Afghanistan is a tar baby. It will be the same in 18 months, but our economy should be

strong enough by that time to absorb all these soldiers coming home. I think this surge, is a jobs program as much as it is a military strategy.

[Karen in Cleveland, Ohio](#)

One of the only ways President Obama was able to make his idea to add troops palpable to the American public was to soften it a bit with the drawing down date. I was against adding troops. I can now at least hope it is only for a short time.

[Jackie Lohrke](#)  
[Escondido, CA](#)

No...this is a tempest in a teapot!!

Unless Al Qaeda has been living under a big rock, very deep in a cave, they know there is a growing movement in our democracy to immediately bring our military home. If anything, Al Qaeda might be surprised the leader of the Democratic Party is willing to stay that long. Don't forget, they think we're a narcissistic, emotionally weak people who do not have the stomach for war. (They bomb us and we invade another country, add "stupid" to that list of adjectives.)

There is enough wiggle room in his position that he could do anything he thinks the situation requires in 18, 24, 36 or 60 months. No president will terminate the fight against terrorism, but at some point the major focus of this war will move from Afghanistan to other locations.

[Wyatt Nichols](#)  
[Memphis, TN](#)

I am generally disturbed that the US media announces our policies and Presidential plans to the world-wide audience. However, I think that announcing a date for withdrawing troops

from Afghanistan helps the American people accept prolonging the war. This has been a costly war both financially and in lives of young men and women.

If we bring the troops home and there are no jobs here, then we haven't accomplished anything positive. To add these people to the unemployment rolls is not a good use for them. So, I hope, that those who have to make the decisions consider leaving the troops in Afghanistan to do re-construction work there. You hear some newscasters say "this troop will be building roads, schools, homes, etc" but we don't really know if that is rebuilding a country or whether when they get there, the "job" will be something else.

[Ruth Willstead](#)  
[Goshen, Indiana](#)

It's a good idea. The first steps of any peace begin with perception by people who were previously for war, however justified, to come to believe that war no longer serves their best interests. Changes of opinion towards peace are far more difficult to achieve than to go to war. Total victory cannot happen; this isn't WWII. Perhaps setting an announced agenda might be a constructive means to have nations in dispute achieve consensus to rein in hostilities.

[Don May](#)  
[California](#)

No, it was exactly what the doctor (should have) ordered.

President Obama is like a physician consultant who has been asked to take care of a patient after the treatment has been thoroughly botched up by the earlier care givers. In Dr. Obama's judgment, this is no time to throw in the towel, and I agree with him. Dr. Obama has prescribed an aggressive course of treatment for a specified period of time after which the situation

will be re-evaluated - physician consultants do that all the time. The president was correct, both in the choice of treatment and the time for re-evaluation. As for not giving Taliban the idea that we will cut and run, who are we kidding? They already know that sooner or later we shall. I generally like Tom Friedman's columns, but in this analysis, he is trying to be too cute. ("Unemployed couple trying to adopt a baby!!!" This baby was adopted 8 years ago, and has been dying of starvation in the couple's lap ever since.)

[Javed Aslam, MD](#)  
[Houston, TX](#)

We should start pulling out of Afghanistan and Pakistan now. We have no compelling interests in the area. Al-Qaeda does not need that real estate or any other. Al-Qaeda is international. Armies need bases; terrorists do not. The 9/11 terrorists trained in the United States. And we have no hope of success.

[David Coyne](#)  
[Goshen, Indiana](#)

No, the announcement is not a mistake. The Taliban will not wait it out because the American troops along with NATO allies will be training troops and building a police force. They will be enabling more girls to attend schools, allowing old men to cut their beards, etc. If the Taliban did wait, they would be defeated by a new enemy, the taste of peace and freedom. When people get a taste of a semblance of normalcy, they will be more inclined to resist the Taliban.

[Jackie](#)  
[Los Angeles, CA](#)

The first blunder was adding troops in Afghanistan, instead of quickly withdrawing all troops. A fast draw down is now the best alternative and the sooner the better. Either way this is a failed venture in my opinion. The problems are too massive and America is broke. I would like to sit down with the Chinese and ask them if they would like to be The Super Power for the rest of the 21st century. We simply cannot afford the honor any longer.

Regards,

Jay Freeman

Fareed: as a former military officer and student of international relations, I was concerned that President Obama announced an exit date from Afghanistan without clear strategic exit objectives. It seems we have put the cart well before the horse. I applaud his support of the recommendations made by his advisors and senior military officers to increase troop deployment but am concerned that the Taliban and Al Qqeda can seep across the permeable border into Pakistan and hold their breath for eighteen months...much worse, use that opportunity to organize and plot terrorist activities against the U.s. snf our allies during this time.

Grace Olson

Seattle, Washington

I believe that it is a good idea to let EVERYONE know when we are planning to start a withdrawal. It can help the American people come to terms with our increased presence for 18 months and the Afghani people can react accordingly to what we plan to do by stepping up to the plate and governing their own country. If they choose to be run by the Taliban or another type of government, it is their sovereign right.

I agree with Tom Friedman about what our priorities should be. We are NOT who we think

we are and we need to build OUR country. We are in deep trouble in many areas. We need to be strong within or nothing we do in any country will help us in the long run. We will be weak, undereducated and unprotected on our own soil.

Thank you.

Lyn Martin  
Richmond Hill, GA

Obama did just the right thing,- if he had escalated the war without a deadline to withdraw, he would have been criticized for not having an exit strategy. But at the same time, he gives the generals a little wiggle room, in not stating what the ramp down time should be. he is essentially saying, 30,000 more troops and no more! And if this doesn't work, we'll try something else.. as my boss used to say "Always have a plan, but don't stick to it!"

Prof. John Connolly  
University of Kentucky

I think the decision to announce troop withdrawal was a good one. It gives the Afghan government incentive to get its own house in order and not continue to rely on the US and NATO. It is also economically desirable to reduce the expenditure in the military and improve the domestic situation. I wish Obama would use the war as a reason to increase taxes in the next few years while it is being fought.

F. R. Cook  
Spokane, WA

Having memories of the Korean War and then living through the Vietnam War up to today's situation I am extremely concerned about remaining in Afghanistan. I can see no situation that would result in our achieving objectives that are truly meaningful; the longer our presence in the

Middle East the more unstable the Middle East becomes. It is time to withdraw from Iraq and Afghanistan and let these countries control their own destinies; this includes Iran, Pakistan, India, etc. Where nuclear weapons are involved the US should continue to work with nations around the world to safeguard their existence and ensure that they are not used and remain under the control of stable governments.

As for Al-Qaeda, it seems to me that they have achieved far more than they could have imagined after 9/11; the continued instability of the Middle East and the undermining of the American Culture. Finally, the continued presence in Afghanistan continues to help undermine the US ability to recover from the financial collapse of our economy and thus further enhances Al-Qaeda's victory. The American People will continue to suffer more and more while we remain in what is essentially folly.

James J Catchpole  
Brooklyn NY

18 months, 18 days, 18 years? The question can only be answered intelligently if the more important prior questions are asked and answered: why are we there and what are we there to achieve? Are these goals achievable and are they worth the investment of American lives and capital? Only then may we begin to answer when is the right time to begin to scale back.

D. Shea  
Leesburg, VA

If you think the Jihadists will 'wait' for the U.S. to pull out in 2011 you forget that the last 8

years is nothing to these people. They've been fighting someone or another since the middle ages and don't care if we pull out now or in 100 years. The only way to defeat their ideology is through education of the average person so understanding and opportunity will marginalize the religious fanatics, much like we do here.

Athony Walker  
Vancouver BC

Yes, it is always a mistake to tip your hand to your enemies about your exit plans. By being overly concerned about domestic preferences, he has given the enemies an unnecessary strategic advantage to factor into their overall plans, and denied himself the most important component of a plan--flexibility to take advantage of changing conditions. The plan is a typical logical construct that nevertheless lacks the essential commitment to WIN. Too much logic, not enough blood and guts.

Sylva Apelian

One of the arguments for announcing a deadline, and I think a valid one, is that the people of Afghanistan will be relieved that the US will not be an occupier for years to come, thereby offering a light at the end of the tunnel and helping to win the hearts and minds of the people. Hopefully it will also place urgency on the Afghan government to get its house in order. If, indeed, the Taliban do respond as a "wait it out" strategy, this might be more to their undoing, as both the US and Afghan forces will simply establish a stronger foothold, allow space to educate the people and turn them to alternative means for agriculture, and create jobs, making it more difficult for the Taliban to retrench. In fact, many of the "soft" Taliban will no doubt see the benefit of moving to the "right" side.

Ron Bradley  
Adjunct Faculty, World Learning and SIT