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**Obama Has It All Backward on Afghanistan  
By Phyllis Bennis and Farrah Hassen  
BlackCommentator.com Guest Commentators**

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Obama has already announced plans to escalate the war by sending 17,000 more U.S. troops to Afghanistan. But in his address to Congress, he acknowledged he was still working to "forge a new and comprehensive strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan."

It would have been much more sensible to devise the strategy before deploying the troops.

As Sen. John Kerry, (D-MA) said, "If we just put troops, plunk them down, another 20-30,000 in Afghanistan ... we're on the wrong track."

Afghanistan is known as the "graveyard of empires." The British, Russians and Soviets learned the hard way during the 19th and 20th centuries - they were each driven out long before they could claim "mission accomplished." Why do we think the American attempt will be any different?

Developments in Afghanistan certainly don't make a case for escalation. Eight years after U.S.-led forces drove the Taliban from Kabul, the group is on the rise again, not least because of local outrage over the killing of more Afghans by U.S. forces. The United States and its allies directly killed 828 people - ordinary people, children, women and old men, according to a new U.N. survey. Last July, just one U.S. air strike killed at least 47 civilians, including 39 women and children, as they were traveling to a wedding in eastern Nuristan province.

Afghan anger toward the foreign troops is rising. A recent BBC/ABC News survey found that notwithstanding 90 percent opposition to the Taliban, less than half of Afghans

hold a favorable view of the United States.

There are 56,000 NATO troops (including 18,000 Americans), and 19,000 other U.S. troops in Afghanistan. They were supposed to stabilize Afghanistan. But their presence has led to more Afghans being killed, not fewer. It's unlikely that another 17,000 pairs of boots escalating the war, still without a strategy, will somehow succeed.

Instead of more troops, what's needed is a negotiated, diplomatic settlement bringing together all parties in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the region - yes, including the Taliban.

As Ibrahim Khan, a cargo driver, told *The Washington Post* on Feb. 22, "Bringing in another foreign army is not going to help. They always come here for their own interests, and they always lose. Better to let everyone sit down with the elders and find a way for peace."

Khan knows his country's history. The Obama administration should listen.


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