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West Word Web Exclusives



School community reacts to Afghan troop escalation

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“I think [the war in Afghanistan] is a waste of time and money because the war is going nowhere,” junior Kim Mercado said.

Mercado was referring to President Obama’s announcement at the U.S. Military Academy in West Point, NY, on Tuesday, Dec. 1, regarding troop escalation in Afghanistan. Obama plans to send 30,000 additional U.S. troops to Afghanistan over the next six months, bringing the number of U.S. soldiers and Marines in Afghanistan to 100,000, with plans to begin withdrawing forces in July 2011.

English teacher Tamara Jaffe-Notier feels that Obama’s withdrawal plan is too far in the future.

“The United States needs to find a way to withdraw troops in Afghanistan without upsetting the balance of power even more,” she reasoned. “The longer that we commit troops to Afghanistan, the greater the potential for complete collapse of that country.”

During his speech, Obama said that the main mission of this strategy is to “reverse the Taliban’s momentum and deny it the ability to overthrow the government,” as well as to stabilize and provide long-term security for Afghanistan’s government.

Senior Flo Lee understands the president’s decision, but also realizes the necessity of troops in Afghanistan.

“I do not believe that [Obama] will be able to complete his promise of taking the troops out [of Afghanistan],” she said. “However, I understand that the situation has called for the need of more troops, and it is the only way to temporarily weigh down the Taliban.”

English teacher Dana DesJardins believes that although she is opposed to continuing the war, she believes the president is well-advised.

“He set an 18-month timetable and I am absolutely going to hold him to it,” she added. “If we are not making plans to withdraw in 18 months, I am going to be in the streets.”

Obama emphasized in his speech that although he will deploy the largest amount of U.S. troops since the 2003 invasion of Iraq, there is a time limit to end the war. However, his speech did not include a concrete deadline for ending withdrawal.

“We were supposed to end the war in June 2001, and it is 2009,” sophomore Paulina Graca said. “It is wasting all of our money, and we are in a recession right now.”

DesJardins agrees that the cost of the war is a significant concern.

“They say it will cost \$1 million per soldier per year [to send troops to Afghanistan],” she said. “With three billion dollars, you could build a lot of schools and hospitals.”

Some students compare Obama’s escalation of the war to George Bush’s decision to invade Iraq in 2003.

“[Obama], who publicly opposed the surge in Iraq, is now committing to a surge in Afghanistan,” senior Antonio Mladenov said. “Our president lacks the ability to win a victory in Afghanistan, which at this point, judging from his Dec. 1 speech, he has no intention on doing.”

Others support Obama’s intentions with Afghanistan.

“It feels nice that [Obama] is being positive and ending the war, because he is helping out,” sophomore Warda Chaudhary said.

According to www.cnn.com, many anti-war groups are continuing to protest the president’s decision, but Obama feels this strategy will lead to the most efficient end to the war possible.

“Our friends have fought and bled and died alongside us in Afghanistan,” Obama said on Dec. 1. “Now, we must come together to end this war successfully.”



Brigadier General Larry Dudney (right) shares a laugh with Sergeant Ellis Leary during a holiday party on Dec. 25 at Camp Phoenix in Afghanistan. President Barack Obama has committed an additional 30,000 troops to the region. Photo courtesy MCT Campus.