

VFW National Commander Urges Decisive Action in Afghanistan

Oct 15, 2009

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. is concerned that the intense debate in Washington over the assessments and recommendations by the U.S. military commander in Afghanistan is posing a direct threat to troops as well as to the nation's defense.

In a statement, Thomas J. Tradewell Sr., a Vietnam veteran from Sussex, Wis., said, "In battle, weaknesses are exploited and attacked, which proved to be the case during the Vietnam War. North Vietnam correctly perceived that the United States government did not possess the political will to complete the mission, and that perception became reality. Their strategy revolved around the fact that U.S. political interests trumped important military decisions, which resulted in a lengthened war and more U.S. casualties.

"In Afghanistan, the extremists are sensing weakness and indecision within the U.S. government, which plays into their hands, as evidenced by the increased attacks in Afghanistan as well as Pakistan. I fear that an emboldened enemy will now intensify their efforts to kill more U.S. soldiers.

"President Obama's primary responsibility is that of Commander-in-Chief, and he has a obligation to ensure his commander's advice takes precedence over opinion polls and politics. When the president addressed VFW delegates during its 110th National Convention in August, he was very specific when he stated, *'This is not a war of choice. This is a war of necessity. Those who attacked America on 9/11 are plotting to do so again. If left unchecked, the Taliban insurgency will mean an even larger safe haven from which al Qaeda would plot to kill more Americans. So this is not only a war worth fighting. This is fundamental to the defense of our people.'*

"When the president directed more troops into Afghanistan in March, he issued a statement that said, *'This increase is necessary to stabilize a deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, which has not received the strategic attention, direction and resources it urgently requires. The Taliban is resurgent in Afghanistan, and al Qaeda supports the insurgency and threatens America from its safe haven along the Pakistani border.'*

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"In other words, President Obama identified Afghanistan as a counterinsurgency operation requiring appropriate planning, which means our commanders are the experts in this regard, not our politicians.

"In addition to the deployments that have occurred, Army Gen. Stanley McChrystal also requested 40,000 additional troops he says are necessary to prevent the country from falling into the hands of the Taliban. That request has provoked opposition in Washington from some administration officials as well as congressional members who do not want to further escalate a war that so far has been under resourced and undermanned.

"I urge the president to heed the assessment and advice of his military leaders who have provided a clear path forward for achieving success against al Qaeda and its allies. I ask that he be decisive during this critical juncture. Time is not a luxury when our magnificent men and women in uniform are in harm's way," concluded Tradewell.

Thomas J. Tradewell Sr., was elected national commander of the 2.1 million-member Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. and its Auxiliaries in August 2009. He served as an Army demolition specialist with the Americal Division in South Vietnam from 1967-1968.

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