

VFW Salutes New Strategy to Destroy Al Qaeda, Taliban

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WASHINGTON — The national commander of the country's largest combat veterans organization is saluting the president's new strategy to defeat al Qaeda and Taliban forces in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

"This is a good strategy that clearly focuses on victory and regional security, stability and growth," said Glen M. Gardner Jr., who leads the 2.2 million-member Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. and its Auxiliaries. "The surge in Iraq worked because it combined overwhelming military strength with a beefed up diplomatic and civilian nation-building presence. Now it's Afghanistan's turn."

Accompanied by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Defense Secretary Robert Gates, President Obama said today that the goal of the United States is to "disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future."

The president said it has been more than seven years since the Taliban was removed from power, yet the war continues as insurgents have made the border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan the most dangerous place in the world. He also pledged that America would do all it could to help Pakistan fight the terrorists who have also attempted to destabilize their country.

Along with the planned deployment of 17,000 more combat forces will be an additional 4,000 U.S. troops to train and organize an Afghan army and police force, as well as civilian nation-building experts, such as agricultural specialists, educators, engineers and lawyers. The president said helping an elected Afghan government to build a stable economy will create security, opportunity and justice, which will counter any Taliban attempt to retake control of the country.

Gardner, a Vietnam veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps, said victory in Afghanistan can only be achieved through the total destruction of al Qaeda and the Taliban.

"There is such a thing as true evil in this world, and right now it hides in the mountains

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between Afghanistan and Pakistan and goes by the name of al Qaeda and the Taliban," said Gardner. "They are as ruthless as they are unpredictable, and that makes them the most dangerous enemy on Earth. They must be destroyed — permanently."