Washington Post: " **Wavering on Afghanistan?** "

It's hard to see, however, how Mr. Obama can refute the analysis he offered last March. "If the Afghan government falls to the Taliban or allows al-Qaeda to go unchallenged," he said then, "that country will again be a base for terrorists who want to kill as many of our people as they possibly can." Afghanistan, he continued, "is inextricably linked to the future of its neighbor, Pakistan," where al-Qaeda and the Taliban now aim at seizing control of a state that possesses nuclear weapons. Moreover, Mr. Obama said, "a return to Taliban rule would condemn their country to brutal governance . . . and the denial of basic human rights to the Afghan people -- especially women and girls."

"To succeed, we and our friends and allies must reverse the Taliban's gains, and promote a more capable and accountable Afghan government," Mr. Obama concluded. As Gen. McChrystal's report makes very clear, keeping faith with that goal will require more troops, more resources and years of patience. Yet to break with it would both dishonor and endanger this country. As the president put it, "the world cannot afford the price that will come due if Afghanistan slides back into chaos."

Washington Times: " **Obama Goes Wobbly On Afghanistan** "

It astonishes us how quickly Afghanistan is moving from being a "war of necessity" to "too tough to do." President Obama's comments over the weekend gave the clearest signal yet that his administration is seeking an exit strategy from a conflict he described in August as "not only a war worth fighting" but "fundamental to the defense of our people." Commitment to that fundamental defense is eroding.

The president is being foiled by complex terrain, by which we mean the Congress. The Democratic leadership has indicated it would not look favorably on requests for more troops, which most analysts believe are necessary to stabilize the situation.

An Aug. 30 initial review by Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, U.S. commander in Afghanistan, concluded that more troops are necessary to provide a "bridge capability" until Afghan forces

have been adequately trained to take on the task. This increase of force is vital. "Resources will not win this war," the report states, "but under-resourcing could lose it."

Rather than follow the conclusions of the most comprehensive review of the Afghan situation to date, the White House is trying to redefine the mission. "You don't make decisions about resources," Mr. Obama warned, "before you have the strategy right."

Leslie Gelb in the *Wall Street Journal*: " **Obama's Befuddling Afghan Policy** "

Not quite eight months ago, Mr. Obama pledged to "defeat" al Qaeda in Afghanistan by transforming that country's political and economic infrastructure, training Afghan forces and adding 21,000 U.S. forces for starters. He proclaimed Afghanistan's strategic centrality to prevent Muslim extremism from taking over Pakistan-an even more vital nation because of its nuclear weapons. And a mere three weeks ago, he punctuated his commitments by proclaiming that Afghanistan is a "war of necessity," not one of choice. White House spokesmen reinforced this by promising that the president would "fully resource" the war.

Yet less than one week ago, Mr. Obama said the following about troop increases: "I'm going to take a very deliberate process in making those decisions. There is no immediate decision pending on resources, because one of the things that I'm absolutely clear about is you have to get the strategy right and then make a determination about resources." He repeated that on Sunday's talk shows.

Are we now to understand that he made all those previous declarations and decisions without a strategy he was committed to? Prior to his recent statements, it seemed clear that the president and his advisers had adopted a strategy already-the counterinsurgency one-and that Gen. Stanley McChrystal was tapped precisely because he would implement that plan. The idea, to repeat, was to deploy forces sufficient to clear territory of Taliban threats, hold that territory, and build up the sinews of the country behind that.

Nothing significant has changed to account for the shift from Mr. Obama's confident policy proclamations to his temporizing statements of recent days. The president certainly understood before last week that the situation in Afghanistan was deteriorating. And he knew when he was inaugurated and when he first uttered his colorful "war of necessity" phrase that his party, and

the public generally, were increasingly opposed to the war.

Americans are now confused and caught somewhere between remembering the president's insistence on Afghanistan's importance to U.S. security and rapidly rising pressure from his party to bring the troops home.

What is to be done? Even though I strongly believe that the United States does not have vital interests in Afghanistan, I also believe that Mr. Obama can't simply walk away from the war. A lot of Democrats don't seem to fathom this. At a minimum, the president has got to give Afghan allies a fighting chance to hold their own and prepare the ground to blunt the Taliban and al Qaeda. That will take time.

Congressman Pence **has voiced his support** for President Obama's policy on Afghanistan insofar as it fully resources a counterinsurgency strategy that will succeed:

"Now is not the time for defeatism or withdrawal, but perseverance in the face of adversity to ensure a safe future, free from the threats of the Taliban and al Qaeda.

"As our men and women in uniform continue to serve with distinction in Afghanistan, I hope the President will continue to give them the support they need, and rally the country to their side in this crucial front in the war on terror."