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Nov 29 2009, 9:13 pm by [Marc Ambinder](#)

A Last-Minute Meeting On Afghanistan

President Obama convened a last-minute meeting of his national security team tonight to discuss the language that his administration will use to describe its new strategy for Afghanistan. Two administration sources confirmed that the meeting, which began at 5:00 pm, included cabinet officials like Defense Secretary Robert Gates. The officials would not describe the meeting and said that no other news organizations were being given any background briefing. That suggests that the meeting was akin to a pre-game rally session by the commander-in-chief: he wants to get everyone from Gates to Gen. Stanley McChrystal to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on the same page before the president's Tuesday speech.

Before young officers at West Point, Obama will announce his decision about Afghanistan to an increasingly skeptical nation and a Democratic Congress that is threatening to condition its budgeting on identifiable off-ramps and timeframes. Obama is expected to announce that he'll order several Army combat brigades to Afghanistan -- about 30,000 troops in all, most of them to be tasked with more rapidly standing up Afghanistan's indigenous army. His speech, as described in broad terms by advisers last week, will be short and serious. His challenge is to persuade Americans that the war in Afghanistan is winnable, as Americans tend to give their presidents significant leeway so long as they believe that the president is confident in his strategy. Officials said last week that while he would outline a clear exit strategy, he would not tie troop withdrawals to any specific political developments in Afghanistan, which might run into opposition from Democrats in Congress, who are demanding benchmarks. Nor is the President likely to impose direct conditions on Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai. An official said that Obama plans to try explain the interconnection between the the stability of Pakistan and the nexus of terror in Afghanistan. An explanation that the American people would accept has proven elusive.

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