

RELEASE IN FULL

**From:** Mills, Cheryl D <MillsCD@state.gov>  
**Sent:** Thursday, June 23, 2011 9:25 AM  
**To:** H  
**Subject:** FW: Biden trumps Petraeus on Afghan decision?

**From:** Tolv, Nora F  
**Sent:** Thursday, June 23, 2011 9:14 AM  
**To:** Mills, Cheryl D  
**Subject:** Biden trumps Petraeus on Afghan decision?

## Biden trumps Petraeus on Afghan decision?

▪ **Wednesday, June 22, 2011 - 4:21 PM** ▪

What a difference 18 months can make. When **President Obama** decided to withdraw 10,000 troops from Afghanistan this year and 33,000 troops by next September, he apparently took the advice of Vice President **Joseph Biden** and rejected the advice of ISAF Commander -- soon-to-be CIA director -- Gen. **David Petraeus**.

In December, 2009, when Obama made the decision to surge 33,000 troops to Afghanistan in the first place, the move was widely seen as a victory for the military and civilian leaders at the Pentagon, joined by Secretary of State **Hillary Clinton**, over the lighter footprint advocated by Biden. Biden and Petraeus have often been seen to be on opposite sides of the debate over how to fight in Afghanistan, although the vice president has always been supportive of Obama's policy decisions once they were made.

But when Obama announces his decision in a speech from the White House tonight, he will cement a shift in power and influence over the Afghanistan decision making process, away from the general who is in charge of the war, according to the New York Times:

Mr. Obama's decision is a victory for Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr., who has long argued for curtailing the American military engagement in Afghanistan. But it is a setback for his top commander in Afghanistan, Gen. David H. Petraeus, who helped write the Army's field book on counterinsurgency policy, and who is returning to Washington to head the Central Intelligence Agency.

Two administration officials said General Petraeus did not endorse the decision, though both Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates, who is retiring, and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton reluctantly accepted it. General Petraeus had recommended limiting initial withdrawals and leaving in place as many combat forces for as long as possible, to hold on to fragile gains made in recent combat.

Petraeus will leave Afghanistan to head the CIA in September and Defense Secretary **Robert Gates**, who has often called for a "modest" reduction of troops, retires next week. Administration officials have been quick to say that Petraeus presented Obama with a "range of options," but Obama's decision to withdraw troops faster

than what Petraeus and Gates would prefer is a stark departure from his decision-making process last time around.

Conservative pundits are already seizing on the *Times'* reporting to criticize Obama's decision. "This is an amazing decision to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory," wrote the American Enterprise Institute's **Danielle Pletka**. "Those in the field believe that lower numbers will result in higher U.S. casualties, reduce the chance of success in stabilizing Afghanistan, and concede territory to the enemy."