



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on September 21, 2012

McCain Wants Faster Withdrawal as Option in Afghanistan

Things are going so badly in the war in Afghanistan that even John McCain, one of the Senate's foremost hawks, has said an accelerated withdrawal of American forces has to be considered among the available options, the D.C. publication *The Hill* [reported](#).

"I think all options ought to be considered, including whether we have to just withdraw early, rather than have a continued bloodletting that won't succeed," McCain said Wednesday. The Arizona senator and 2008 Republican presidential candidate has long been a champion of the U.S. war efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq and was a vocal opponent of setting a timeline for the withdrawal of troops. But the 2014 date set by President Obama is based on a transition of responsibility to the Afghan armed forces, which would be ready to defend the government on their own from attacks by the Taliban and other insurgents. But a rash of "insider" attacks on American and NATO forces by Afghan soldiers and police has thrown off track the training and support of the government forces.



A recent surge of such attacks has brought to 51 the number of Americans killed this year by the Afghan troops they have been training and fighting alongside. Last month coalition forces halted the training of new recruits for the Afghan military and police while the vetting process for weeding out Taliban or other insurgents is under review. Last week, the U.S.-led coalition temporarily suspended joint operations with Afghan units because of the insider attacks.

"Any rational viewer that has any knowledge of the military knows that the whole program has to be re-evaluated, because the process that they said would lead to that withdrawal has been an abject and total failure," McCain said. Still, he was not calling for an accelerated withdrawal, but only saying it should be considered as an option. Other members of Congress are past considering the options in the 11-year-old war and have decided that American fighting units have been in Afghanistan either long enough or too long. Rep. Bill Young (R-Fla.), chairman of the House Appropriations Defense subcommittee, is among them.

"I think we should remove ourselves from Afghanistan as quickly as we can," Young said in an [interview](#) Monday with the *Tampa Bay Times*. "I just think we're killing kids that don't need to die." Young has previously opposed resolutions for withdrawal or setting a timetable for withdrawal.



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Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney said he agrees with President Obama's timeline for having all combat units out of the Afghanistan by 2014, with some U.S. military personnel remaining beyond that date to continue to assist in the training and equipping of the Afghan forces. Romney has, however, criticized the current withdrawal of the roughly 33,000 troops Obama sent to the country in the surge of forces in 2009. The withdrawal will leave about 68,000 American troops in Afghanistan through 2014.

At last month's Republican National Convention in Tampa, film star Clint Eastwood [ridiculed](#) Obama's schedule for troop withdrawal, claiming Romney's response was, "Why not just bring them home tomorrow morning?" That was never Romney's position, but the line drew applause from the delegates.

The [Authorization of the Use of Military Force](#), passed by Congress three days after the September 11 attacks, authorized the president to take military action against "those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons." The United States and allied forces deposed the Taliban government of Afghanistan shortly after initiating hostilities with that country in the fall of 2001. Two years ago Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta estimated there were no more than 50 to 100 al-Qaeda left in the country. Some critics of the mission in Afghanistan say it has gone beyond what was authorized by the AUMF and that the U.S. military has been involved in nation building in a land that has had little history of nationhood and a long legacy of tribal warfare.

Sen Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), who rarely disagrees with McCain on foreign policy and military issues, believes an earlier withdrawal from Afghanistan would be disastrous. "What happens when you leave? Tell me a scenario where we're safer by pulling the plug on Afghanistan," Graham said to reporters Wednesday. "I can't envision a scenario that doesn't lead to holy hell ... and I can't envision a scenario where another 9/11 doesn't come about."

Senate Armed Service Committee Chairman Carl Levin (D-Mich.) said the administration should always be reevaluating policy on Afghanistan. As Levin sees it, the question is whether the United States should continue the withdrawal of forces there or stop the drawdown for a while.

"That's the issue that the administration is going to be facing," he said.

Photo of Afghan troops: AP Images



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