



Written by on August 11, 2010

## Military Building Case to Delay Afghan Troop Pullout

The New York Times reported on August 11 that U.S. military officials are building a case to reduce the planned withdrawal of some troops from Afghanistan, scheduled to begin next July. The article explained that the case is geared toward countering pressure being exerted on President Obama from within his own party to proceed quickly with the process of winding down the war.

Military officials have asked for more time for counterinsurgency strategies to produce results and turn the war around.

“Their argument,” the *Times* quoted a senior Obama administration official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, “is that while we’ve been in Afghanistan for 9 years, only in the past 12 months or so have we started doing this right, and we need to give it some time and think about what our *long-term presence* in Afghanistan should look like.” (Emphasis added.)

The report noted that Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates signaled the military’s position when he said recently that the troop withdrawals next summer “will be of fairly limited numbers.”

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Part of the military’s case-building blitz will begin on Sunday, August 15, when Gen. David H. Petraeus, the commander of U.S. and ISAF forces in Afghanistan, will appear on NBC’s *Meet the Press*. During that interview, Petraeus is expected to emphasize that the last of the 30,000 additional troops Obama ordered to Afghanistan last December will not arrive until later this month, and that the counterinsurgency strategy has not been given enough time to succeed.

“These are both long-term objectives that won’t get solved in the next year or maybe not in the next decade,” the *Times* quoted a senior U.S. officer. “But if the public perception is that the [Afghan] government is moving toward more legitimacy, that supports the short-term counterinsurgency” objectives of having greater confidence in a civilian-led Afghan government than in the Taliban.

In a rather unusual set of circumstances for an incumbent President, Republican members of Congress have been more supportive of the Obama administration’s military operations in Afghanistan than have member’s of the President’s own party. When last month’s vote in the House to fund the war was taken, 102 Democrats voted against the measure.

Even Obama’s own Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, has been pushing for prompt withdrawal of U.S. troops, starting next July. “The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have come at tremendous cost to the American people,” the *Times* quoted the Speaker. “Members of Congress and the administration will





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have to assess whether the sacrifices of our men and women in uniform and the resources we must invest to continue these efforts are the best way to protect our national security.”

The maxim: “Even a stopped clock tells the right time twice a day” comes to mind.

The same might be said of Rep. Steve Kagen, the Democrat from Appleton, Wisconsin, where *The New American* magazine is published. Kagen received an anemic 20 percent on the magazine’s last “Freedom Index,” a measure of how often members of Congress vote according to the Constitution.

However, the August 9 issue of the *Green Bay Press Gazette* carried an article citing Kagen’s statement that Afghanistan is starting to look like Vietnam all over again. The article noted:

Kagen said today that after a trip to the war-torn country last week, he continues to believe the United States military should pull out. He says similar to Vietnam, he does not believe the U.S. will be able to reach a point where victory can be declared.

The article also reported: “Kagen said the U.S. can’t afford to keep the military in Afghanistan without making drastic reductions to the standard of living at home.”

Afghanistan represents just a portion of U.S. troops stationed overseas, however. A March 31, 2008 [report](#) issued by the Department of Defense showed 84,488 U.S. military personnel in Europe, 70,719 in the East Asia/Pacific region (most of those in South Korea and Japan), and 7,850 in North Africa the Near East, and South Asia. In total, the report showed that U.S. armed forces were stationed at more than 820 installations in at least 135 countries.

In an 1821 [speech](#) summarizing the ideal U.S. foreign policy, Secretary of States (and future President) John Quincy Adams observed:

[America] has abstained from interference in the concerns of others, even when conflict has been for principles to which she clings, as to the last vital drop that visits the heart.

She has seen that probably for centuries to come, all the contests of that Aceldama the European world, will be contests of inveterate power, and emerging right.

Wherever the standard of freedom and Independence has been or shall be unfurled, there will her heart, her benedictions and her prayers be.

But she goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy.

She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all.

She is the champion and vindicator only of her own.

It would seem that, with the exception of those guarding U.S. embassies, the number of troops sent abroad to maintain a foreign policy such as Adams described should be: *zero*.

*Photo: U.S. Gen. David Petraeus, commander of the NATO and U.S. forces in Afghanistan, speaks at the Ghazi Military Training Center in Kabul, Afghanistan on July 15, 2010: AP Images*



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