



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on December 9, 2013

## U.S. Pressure Won't Move Karzai on Security Pact, Aide Says

An aide to Afghan President Hamid Karzai has accused the United States of trying to pressure the Kabul government into signing the Biliateral Security Agreement that would keep U.S. and other NATO forces in Afghanistan for 10 or more years beyond the deadline for withdrawal of combat units by the end of next year.

“There is no doubt that certain elements within the Afghan government are facing pressure from the U.S.” to get Karzai to sign the BSA, Aimal Faizi, a spokesman for the Afghan president, [wrote in an e-mail](#) to the Reuters news service on Friday. “However, this will not achieve anything,” he added.



There are 47,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan, down from a peak of 100,000 in 2010. The Obama administration has been negotiating with Afghan officials over maintaining a residual force of about 8,000 to train, equip, and provide logistical support for the Afghan army and police in their battle against insurgent Taliban forces. The agreement would, according to its text, “remain in force until [the end of 2024 and beyond.](#)”

The pact has been approved by the assembly of tribal elders convened by the president, but Karzai wants to add conditions limiting the role of foreign troops outside their bases and banning American counterterrorism raids in Afghan homes and villages. He is also reported to be asking for the freeing of several prisoners held by the United States at the U.S. Navy base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Karzai has also said he might not sign the agreement until after his successor is elected in April, further frustrating U.S. officials, who say they need to have the agreement made final by the end of this year to allow for the military planning necessary for the new role for the forces that will remain after the end of the NATO combat mission in December 2014.

The impasse is similar to what occurred between the United States and Iraq at the end of 2011, when Washington and Baghdad were unable to come to terms on the extension of the [Status of Forces Agreement](#) for the continued presence in Iraq of U.S. and coalition combat units. The agreement expired when the Iraqi government would not agree to the U.S. condition of immunity from Iraqi prosecution of U.S. personnel accused of committing crimes in that country. The last of the U.S. combat units left Iraq in December, 2011, though a residual force has remained to train and assist Iraq's security forces.

In the case of Afghanistan, U.S. and NATO officials have said that lack of an agreement soon could result in the “zero option,” or the withdrawal of all foreign troops after 2014, leaving Afghan forces to confront the Taliban on their own. It could also jeopardize the annual \$8 billion in international military and development aid planned for Afghanistan.



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Without the BLA, “there can be no deployment and the planned assistance will be put at risk,” NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen asserted last week before the start of an annual meeting of diplomats and security officials.

Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., the senior NATO and American commander in Afghanistan, [said late Saturday](#) that unless an agreement on the continued training and assistance of Afghan forces is signed by the end of this month, he would have to begin “more detailed planning on some other reality.” That type of talk leaves the Afghan president unmoved, his spokesman said.

“We believe there’s no deadline,” Faizi said. “It’s more a tactical maneuver to put pressure on President Karzai to sign it as soon as possible.”

Karzai is said to have reacted angrily to statements last week by Rasmussen and U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry that an official other than the president could sign the agreement for Afghanistan. In Brussels for the NATO meeting on Tuesday, Kerry said the Afghan “minister of defense can sign it, the government can sign it. Somebody can accept responsibility for this.” U.S. officials later qualified that by saying only someone to whom Karzai had delegated the authority could sign for Afghanistan, the AP [reported](#).

Kerry, National Security Advisor Susan Rice, and James Dobbins, Washington’s top diplomat for Afghanistan and Pakistan, have all visited Kabul recently to urge Karzai to sign the security pact. [U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel](#) arrived in the country Saturday and met with Afghanistan’s defense minister and deputy interior ministers, but said he had no plans to meet with the president.

“I never asked for a meeting with President Karzai,” Hagel said. “I never received an invitation to meet with him. I didn’t expect a meeting with him. This trip is about the troops.” The secretary said he didn’t think he could add anything to what Kerry, Rice, and other U.S. officials had already told Karzai.

“I don’t think pressure coming from the United States, or more pressure, is going to be helpful in persuading President Karzai to sign a bilateral security agreement,” Hagel said. Defense Minister Bismillah Mohammad Khan had expressed enthusiastic support for the agreement and predicted it “would be signed, and would be signed in a timely manner,” Hagel said.

In an indication of possible differences between the United States and Afghanistan on how to end the 12-year war, Karzai’s spokesman said the Kabul government is looking for American help in getting the nation “launched on the peace process” by arranging meetings between government and Taliban officials. Karzai is also seeking the freedom of Taliban leader Mullah Muhammad Omar, captured in Pakistan by a joint Pakistani and U.S. force. “We believe that on both these conditions the United States can deliver,” Faizi [told](#) the *New York Times*.

A statement posted on the website of the [Afghanistan embassy](#) in Washington, D.C. refers to a recent phone conversation between the Afghan president and the U.S. secretary of state. “President Karzai clarified to Secretary Kerry, it was impossible for the people of Afghanistan to be pleased with signing of the security agreement while violence and war continue in the country,” the embassy statement said. It also described Karzai’s briefing of his government’s cabinet about that conversation:

The President said to the Cabinet meeting that the security agreement, if signed without the return of peace and with continuation of violence and bombings, means that the people of Afghanistan would continue to suffer every day from blasts, terrorist attacks and foreign invasions.

“We cannot allow business as usual for the U.S. after the signing of the BSA,” Faizi said. “It simply



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cannot be another ten-year chapter of raids on Afghan homes, civilian casualties and seeking peace in Afghanistan.”

Photo of Hamid Karzai (right) and Anders Fogh Rasmussen



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