



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on August 22, 2011

U.S., Afghanistan Close to Deal Keeping U.S. Forces There Through 2024

"America and Afghanistan are close to signing a strategic pact which would allow thousands of United States troops to remain in the country until at least 2024," the London newspaper reports. "The agreement would allow not only military trainers to stay to build up the Afghan army and police, but also American special forces soldiers and air power to remain." Both sides hope to seal the deal by December.



Some observers have commented that, in short, the American empire is not about to relinquish control over one of its satrapies. As former Indian diplomat [M.K. Bhadrakumar](#) observed, "The 'hidden agenda' of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan can no longer be disowned. Quite obviously, the U.S. intends to plunge into the 'great game' in Central Asia."

It is being helped in this process by Afghan President Hamid Karzai, a former CIA asset installed by Washington who knows that he doesn't stand a chance of retaining power — and, quite possibly, his own life — if the Americans go home. "Now that the U.S. drawdown has begun," Bhadrakumar notes, "Karzai comes face to face with the stark reality that the Afghan forces are a macabre joke and cannot assume responsibilities for security even for one month." He adds that despite the new more-or-less-official deadline of 2024 for U.S. withdrawal,

effectively, Karzai has conceded foreign occupation of his country on a permanent basis. Karzai is capitulating after beating war drums against the foreign presence for the past few years. He is left with no option and increasingly looks like a wounded hero from a Greek tragedy.

Acceding to American demands, however, poses its own dangers to the Karzai regime. For one thing, says the *Telegraph*, it "risks being rejected by the Taliban and derailing any attempt to coax them to the negotiating table, according to one senior member of Hamid Karzai's peace council." The Russian Ambassador to Kabul, Andrey Avetisyan, echoed these sentiments, telling the newspaper that "a complete withdrawal of foreign troops has been a precondition for any Taliban negotiations with Mr. Karzai's government and the deal would wreck the currently distant prospect of a negotiated peace."

External threats are also a concern. "The prospect of such a deal," the *Telegraph* states, "has already been met with anger among Afghanistan's neighbors including, publicly, Iran and, privately, Pakistan." Bhadrakumar notes that China, too, has expressed its opposition to the arrangement. All of this is entirely understandable, especially given that, according to the paper, "many analysts also believe the American military would like to retain a presence close to Pakistan, Iran and China." Some observers



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wonder if Americans would be comfortable with, say, Chinese troops stationed in Mexico, especially if China were routinely threatening the United States. U.S. officials, after all, are not shy about threatening military action against Iran, China, and Pakistan; and in Pakistan the U.S. military is already quite active, with or without the cooperation of Islamabad, as the raid that killed Osama bin Laden demonstrates.

American and Afghan officials are, as usual, relying on the now-standard bogeyman of terrorism to sell the deal to their respective populations and the world at large. Rangin Dadfar Spanta, Karzai's top security adviser, told the *Telegraph* that "a longer-term [American] presence was crucial not only to build Afghan forces, but also to fight terrorism." "We know we will be confronted with international terrorists," Spanta observed, adding that "2014 is not the end of international terrorist networks and we have a common commitment to fight them. For this purpose also, the U.S. needs facilities."

Avetisyan, whose government — the successor to that of the Soviet Union — might just know a thing or two about trying to tame Afghanistan, countered:

Afghanistan needs many other things apart from the permanent military presence of some countries. It needs economic help and it needs peace. Military bases are not a tool for peace.

I don't understand why such bases are needed. If the job is done, if terrorism is defeated and peace and stability is [sic] brought back, then why would you need bases?

If the job is not done, then several thousand troops, even special forces, will not be able to do the job that 150,000 troops couldn't do. It is not possible.

Indeed, if one were to follow Spanta's line of reasoning to its logical conclusion, the United States would have to maintain a military presence in every country in the world in perpetuity, because every nation will always face — however remotely — the threat of international terrorism. That simply is not possible, either logistically or financially.

One might, in fact, argue that the existence of U.S. troops in foreign countries actually increases the likelihood of terrorism against America and the countries where its troops are stationed. Certainly that is the opinion of Bhadrakumar, who averred: "Peace will continue to elude Afghanistan and Pakistan will continue to boil as long as U.S. troops remain in the region."

The Karzai regime isn't the only government with much to lose by signing an agreement keeping American forces in Afghanistan until 2024. The administration of President Barack Obama, which assumed office under the assurance that it would be less imperialist than its predecessor, faces growing discontent at home over its foreign policy as well as its domestic policy. [Press TV](#) reports that the latest Rasmussen Reports poll found that "59 percent [of Americans] want troops to come home [from Afghanistan] immediately or within a year," while a recent *Washington Post*/ABC News poll "showed that nearly two-thirds of Americans believe the war in Afghanistan is not worth fighting." With numbers such as these, coupled with dismal approval ratings, analysts note that Obama surely faces an uphill battle for reelection next year if he proceeds with the Afghan deal.

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