



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on October 17, 2012

U.S. Negotiating to Keep Troops in Afghanistan Past 2014

“We are leaving [Afghanistan],” Vice President [Joe Biden](#) said during the October 11 vice presidential debate. “We are leaving in 2014, period.”

Biden might want to run that by the commander in chief. The evidence continues to mount that President Barack Obama has no intention of withdrawing all U.S. troops from Afghanistan in 2014, if ever.

The most recent indication that the U.S. military may well be in Afghanistan to stay comes from Marc Grossman, the State Department’s special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. Appearing on a panel at the annual meeting of the International Stability Operations Association in Washington on October 16, Grossman said that “the State Department is about to begin formal negotiations over the extension of U.S. troops past 2014,” according to [Josh Rogin](#) of *Foreign Policy* magazine.

“Last week,” writes Rogin, “U.S. and Afghan negotiators met in Kabul to talk about the Bilateral Security Agreement that will govern the extension of U.S. troops past 2014, when President Barack Obama said the combat mission in Afghanistan will end and the U.S. will complete the transition of the entire country to Afghan government control.”

These negotiations are a follow-up to the Strategic Partnership Agreement that Obama and Afghan President Hamid Karzai inked in May. That pact “promised an ongoing U.S. commitment to Afghanistan through 2024,” Rogin notes.

The Bilateral Security Agreement, which must be completed within one year of the start of formal negotiations (thus far only preliminary discussions have occurred), will flesh out the details of that commitment. Rogin reports that according to Grossman, whose deputy, James Warlick, will be the lead U.S. negotiator for the agreement, “the point of the upcoming negotiations is to agree on an extension of the U.S. troop presence well past 2014, for the purposes of conducting counterterrorism operations and training and advising the Afghan security forces.”

How many troops might remain in Afghanistan for another decade? According to [NPR](#):

American military officials say that the planning figure is 25,000 troops, commanded by a three-star general. They would include trainers as well as thousands of Green Berets and other special operations troops who would work with Afghans on counter-terror missions. NATO would be asked to contribute troops, but it’s likely that the U.S. would contribute the bulk of those forces.





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NATO has, in fact, just announced that “it will also keep international troops in Afghanistan past 2014 alongside U.S. troops, not for combat but strictly for the mission of training and advising the Afghans,” Rogin writes. (Grossman “insisted” that the figure of 25,000 U.S. troops is “speculative,” he adds.)

Why would so many troops be needed in Afghanistan if, as Biden said in the debate, “the primary objective [of the war] is almost completed” and “all we’re doing is putting the Kabul government in a position to be able to maintain their own security”?

“Some U.S. policymakers assume that Afghanistan will serve as hub for special operations raids and drone strikes into Pakistan,” reports [Micah Zenko](#) of the Council on Foreign Relations. In other words, the “graveyard of empires” will be a forward base in the United States’ ever-expanding military empire.

It is clear, therefore, that Biden was not being entirely honest when he said that U.S. troops would be leaving Afghanistan in 2014. Indeed, as Zenko observed, “The full withdrawal of all U.S. troops out of Afghanistan is not the current position of the Obama administration.” Or as Undersecretary of Defense for Policy [Michele Fluornoy](#) put it, “2014 is not a withdrawal date — it’s an inflection point.”

None of this should come as a surprise. For all his talk about having withdrawn from Iraq, Obama did his level best to prevent that withdrawal, negotiated under George W. Bush, from occurring. Moreover, writes Antiwar.com’s [John Glaser](#):

But even that aside, the claim that “we left” is not true. As Zenko writes, “The United States currently has 225 troops, 530 security assistance team members, and over 4,000 contractors to equip and train Iraqi security forces.” And it’s worth remembering these Iraqi security forces we’re training have essentially been used as a secret police force for the increasingly authoritarian [Iraq Prime Minister Nouri al-]Maliki to [attack, detain, and torture his political opponents](#) and crack down harshly on public dissent.

Given that Obama worked so hard to forestall an end to a war he famously opposed, how much more likely is he to try to drag out one that he supported? Afghans may be forgiven for believing that then-Defense Secretary Robert Gates was speaking for the entire administration when, according to [Bob Woodward](#), he told those assembled at a 2010 dinner hosted by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton: “We’re not leaving Afghanistan prematurely. In fact, we’re not ever leaving at all.”

Photo of a U.S. Lt. Col. and an Afghan Lt. Col. walking together in Afghanistan: AP Images



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