



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on May 28, 2014

U.S. to Keep 9,800 Troops in Afghanistan After 2014

President Obama announced on May 27 that while most U.S. troops will be withdrawn from Afghanistan by the end of 2014, about 9,800 will remain. Half of those will be withdrawn over the course of 2015, with those remaining to be stationed mainly at the U.S. base at Bagram Airfield or the capital of Kabul. The plan calls for withdrawing the remaining forces by the end of 2016, leaving fewer than 1,000 behind to guard the U.S. Embassy staff in Kabul.



"We have now been in Afghanistan longer than many Americans expected," Obama said during an appearance in the White House Rose Garden. "Now we're finishing the job we've started."

The president said that after this year, U.S. troops would no longer patrol Afghan cities, towns, or valleys.

U.S. troops were sent to Afghanistan on October 7, 2001, in response to the September 11 terrorist attacks. The Taliban government that ruled Afghanistan at that time had provided a safe haven for Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda terrorist network and when the Taliban rejected a U.S. ultimatum that included delivering all of the leaders of al-Qaeda to the United States, U.S. forces invaded the nation. President Bush did not obtain a congressional declaration of war before launching the attack, but acted on a War Powers Resolution authorization.

"After all the sacrifices we've made, we want to preserve the gains that you have helped to win, and we're going to make sure that Afghanistan can never again, ever, be used again to launch an attack against our country," Obama declared.

The sacrifices have been substantial, with at least 2,181 members of the U.S. military dying in Afghanistan since 2001, according to an Associated Press count, as of May 27. Additionally, 19,772 U.S. service members have been wounded in hostile action, according to the Defense Department.

While the possibility of al-Qaeda launching an attack against the United States from Afghanistan is difficult to predict, the terrorist network is worldwide, and has operated in Iraq, Syria, Pakistan, Algeria, Yemen, Somalia, and other countries. Therefore, the president's words are far from reassuring.

Obama said that his plan was contingent on the Afghan government signing a Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with the United States. Outgoing Afghan President Hamid Karzai, who took office after the Taliban were ousted, has refused to sign a BSA. However, both of the candidates likely to succeed Karzai after the ongoing Afghan elections — Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah — have pledged to sign the agreement.

"We believe that the long-term solution for Afghan security is not U.S. forces, it's Afghan forces, and that we've trained and equipped an Afghan National Security Force that needs to be responsible for securing their country," CBS News quoted a senior administration official as saying ahead of the president's announcement. "This has never been a situation where the United States was signing on to provide security in Afghanistan indefinitely."



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The president made his announcement after a visit to U.S. troops in Afghanistan over the weekend. After taking off from Bagram Airfield (the largest U.S. base in Afghanistan), a senior administration official said to the press aboard Air Force One that “the president called President Karzai of Afghanistan because they weren’t able to see each other. They discussed progress that’s been made by the Afghan National Security Forces.”

When a reporter asked the official about the progress of the BSA, the official replied: “I think we saw good statements from both Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani in recent days about their interest in signing a BSA.”

Obama’s announcement of the troop draw-down drew immediate criticism from neoconservative Republican Senators John McCain (Ariz.) and Lindsey Graham (S.C.), who said in a joint statement, “The president’s decision to set an arbitrary date for the full withdrawal of U.S. troops in Afghanistan is a monumental mistake and a triumph of politics over strategy.”

In contrast, Obama’s statement sounded almost non-interventionist: “We have to recognize Afghanistan will not be a perfect place. And it is not America’s responsibility to make it one. The future of Afghanistan must be decided by Afghans.”

Of course, a true non-interventionist (former Rep. Ron Paul comes to mind) would have removed all troops from Afghanistan years ago.

While Paul initially supported going into Afghanistan to destroy those allegedly responsible for the 9/11 attacks, he did so reluctantly. He spoke on the floor of Congress, after supporting the resolution granting authorization for the attack against the Taliban:

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this resolution. Sadly, we find ourselves today dealing with a responsibility to provide national security under the most difficult of circumstances. To declare war against a group that is not a country makes the clear declaration of war more complex.

The best tool the framers of the Constitution provided under these circumstances was the power of Congress to grant letters of mark and reprisal in order to narrow the retaliation to only the guilty parties. The complexity of the issue, the vagueness of the enemy, and the political pressure to respond immediately limits our choices. The proposed resolution is the only option we are offered, and doing nothing is unthinkable.

One the Taliban regime had been removed, however, Paul was a strong voice in favor of bringing our troops home. He explained his views in an article in the *Ron Paul News* on June 23, 2013, in which he wrote, in part,

For years many of us had argued the need to get out of Afghanistan. To end the fighting, the dying, the destruction, the nation-building. To end the foolish fantasy that we were building a Western-style democracy there. We cannot leave, we were told for all those years. If we leave Afghanistan now, the Taliban will come back! Well guess what, after 12 years, trillions of dollars, more than 2,200 Americans killed, and perhaps more than 50,000 dead Afghan civilians and fighters, the Taliban is coming back anyway!

The former congressman and presidential candidate continued:

The long US war in Afghanistan never made any sense in the first place. The Taliban did not attack the US on 9/11. The Authorization for the use of force that we passed after the attacks of 9/11 said nothing about a decade-long occupation of Afghanistan. But unfortunately two US presidents have



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taken it to mean that they could make war anywhere at any time they please.

Most Americans will welcome the end of the U.S. presence in Afghanistan, as they welcomed the end of our presence in Iraq, and before that, Vietnam. But this homecoming, like the others, is likely to be a bittersweet experience. After a long presence there and with 58,286 Americans killed in action, all of Vietnam became Communist, and has remained so. A total of 4,486 U.S. soldiers were killed in Iraq between 2003 and 2012, after which there has been a resurgence of sectarian violence and an al-Qaeda presence in the country that had not existed under Saddam Hussein. Life for Christians there has been made unbearable. And, after 2,181 members of the U.S. military dying in Afghanistan since 2001, as Ron Paul noted, the Taliban is coming back anyway.

In each of these cases, the United States intervened militarily without a congressional declaration of war, a stated objective, or an end game plan. And, except for the initial objective of neutralizing the al-Qaeda terrorists responsible for 9/11 (which could have been accomplished by a small strike force), none of these operations served U.S. interests.

It is no wonder that such undeclared wars ultimately end in failure.

Photo of U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan

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