



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on May 17, 2011

Military Plans for 'Modest' Withdrawal From Afghanistan

Later the President said our "commitment in Afghanistan cannot be open-ended — because the nation I'm most interested in building is our own." That statement, however, was from a different President, of a different party. It was made by Barack Obama on December 1, 2009, while announcing the second of his "surges" in force levels in Afghanistan.



"Afghanistan was supposed to be the campaign promise that President Barack Obama actually kept," wrote David Swanson in the British publication the [Guardian](#) last Thursday. "He said he would escalate that war, and sure enough he did." As Swanson recalled, the President in that same December 2009 speech said our troops "will begin to come home" in another 18 months

"Taken together, these additional American and international troops will allow us to accelerate handing over responsibility to Afghan forces, and allow us to begin the transfer of our forces out of Afghanistan in July of 2011," the President said in December 2009. On April 15 of this year, Obama said: "I'm confident that the withdrawal will be significant. People will say this is a real process of transition; this is not just a token gesture." Vice President Joe Biden, in typical robust certitude, said it was a sure thing: "In July of 2011, you're going to see a whole lot of people moving out, bet on it," Biden said.

The number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan more than doubled in Obama's first year as President, from 33,700 at the end of 2008 to 68,000 in 2009, Swanson noted. By the end of 2010, Department of Defense figures showed 96,000 U.S. troops and 87,483 civilian contractors in Afghanistan. There are also an undetermined number of CIA personnel, foreign mercenaries and troops from other nations in the country. By December of 2014, Afghanistan, occupied by American and allied armies since late 2001, is supposed to achieve "sovereignty." But July of this year is still the date when the President will "begin" to withdraw American troops. It remains to be seen, however, how much of a reduction will follow from the President's assurance of an accelerated withdrawal and the Vice President's claim that we would see "a whole lot of people moving out of there."

According to a report in the [Wall Street Journal](#) of May 10, "U.S. military officers in Afghanistan have drawn up preliminary proposals to withdraw as many as 5,000 troops from the country in July and as many as 5,000 more by the year's end, the first phase of a U.S. pullout promised by President Barack Obama, officials say." The plans, drawn up by staff officers in Kabul, "are likely to be the subject of fierce internal debate in the White House, State Department and Pentagon," the *Journal* said, with the discussion "influenced by calculations about how Osama bin Laden's death will affect the Afghan battlefield." The plans were drafted before bin Laden was killed and "have yet to be formally presented to General David Petraeus, the commander of US forces in Afghanistan, who must then seek White



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House approval for a withdrawal," the *Journal* said, noting the initial reduction would be "modest" and would allow the military command in Afghanistan to "preserve combat power through this summer's fighting season. Some of the troops that leave in July will be combat troops but commanders hope to minimize the impact by culling support staff as well."

While the numbers have been floated as an apparent trial balloon, Congressman Dennis Kucinich, Democrat of Ohio, was quick to fire at it, charging: "The announcement of such a paltry troop withdrawal is an Orwellian attempt to appear to drawdown the war without actually ending the war." At that pace, Kucinich said, Americans could be fighting in Afghanistan for another decade.

Polls taken in the weeks and months prior to the killing of bin Laden in Pakistan showed heavy majorities of the American public in favor of accelerating the anticipated withdrawals from Afghanistan. Some Americans with long memories may recall when Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, between troop surges, [predicted](#) that American combat forces would be out of Vietnam by Christmas, 1965.

His prediction fell short by 10 Christmases, 10 Passovers, and 10 Easter Sundays.



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