



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on January 3, 2015

## “End” of Afghan War Means Another Decade — or More — of Fighting

U.S. military engagements in the decades since World War II have often been characterized by their expansive nature, a development commonly called “mission creep.” But the already expanded role of the new mission in Afghanistan — the training and support mission that follows “the end of combat operations” in that country — might better be described as “mission morph” or “mission mutation.”



More than a month before the December 28 ceremony in Kabul marking the end of the U.S. and NATO combat operations, the *New York Times* [reported](#) on November 21 that President Obama had quietly issued an order expanding the role of the support operation to which the Obama administration has committed U.S. military and economic resources for an indefinite number of years. The president has authorized American forces to carry out missions against the Taliban and other militant groups threatening American troops or the Afghan government, a broader mission than the president described to the public earlier this year the *Times* reported, according to information provided about the otherwise secret plan by unnamed “administration, military and congressional officials.”

Apparently President Obama, who once promised the nation the “most transparent administration” in American history, sees no need for the the American public to to know how their president is using the nation’s armed forces and taxpayer dollars in a war that has already lasted more than 13 years and has cost, along with the lives of more than 2,300 Americans, a reported \$1 trillion, in addition to \$100 billion in reconstruction projects.

At a White House Rose Garden event in May of last year, the president said the American military would not be involved in combat operations in 2015 and that the mission for the roughly 10,000 troops remaining in the country would be limited to training Afghan forces and eliminating the “remnants of al Qaeda.” It has been four and a half years since Leon Panetta, then the U.S. secretary of defense, announced in the summer of 2010 that there were no more than 50 to 100 al-Qaeda left in Afghanistan. U.S. and NATO allies have been fighting mainly the Taliban forces that threaten to recapture the government that was controlled by the Taliban until the United States invaded in October of 2001 to eliminate the regime that had given safe haven to elements of al-Qaeda believed responsible for the September 11 attacks on the United States. Since then, the Taliban have been insurgents against the Kabul government, now headed by President Ashraf Ghani, who last year succeeded Hamid Karzai, the first post-Taliban president.

Karzai in recent years had ordered restrictions on U.S. airstrikes and joint raids with Afghan forces and had refused to sign an extension of the Status of Forces agreement authorizing the U.S. and NATO military presence in the country. But Ghani has agreed to the extension and has asked the United States to continue fighting the Taliban and not just al-Qaeda, Afghan officials told the *Times*.

Obama’s recent broadening of the U.S. mission for 2015 and beyond authorizes the use of American



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jets, bombers, and drones in support of Afghan troops in combat missions. The [Bilateral Security Agreement](#) the United States and Afghanistan signed last September guarantees the U.S. military access to nine major land and air bases, including the huge airfields at Bagram, Jalalabad, and Kandahar. The bases have been staging areas for operations in Afghanistan and for U.S. drone strikes in Pakistan. The agreement also authorizes a continued American military presence in Afghanistan “until 2024 and beyond.”

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg issued a statement saying the coalition’s war against the insurgents “made our own nations safer, by denying safe haven to international terrorists. We have made Afghanistan stronger, by building up from scratch strong security forces.” Yet the Voice of America reported that the 350,000-man Afghan army as “a relatively under-trained Afghan national security force” now left to “fight the deadly Taliban insurgency largely on its own.”

The ceremony in Kabul marking the end of the combat missions was arranged in secret, Agence France-Presse reported, “due to the threat of Taliban strikes in the Afghan capital, which has been hit by repeated suicide bombings and gun attacks over recent years.” U.S. Army General John Campbell, commander of the International Security Assistance Force, told the assembled NATO leaders the joint effort has “lifted the Afghan people out of the darkness of despair and given them hope for the future.... You’ve made Afghanistan stronger and our countries safer.” There will be “no turning back to the dark days of the past,” the general said. “Insurgents are losing, they are desperate,” he said. “It is time for the enemy to heed President Ghani’s call, lay down their arms, come to the peace table and help to rebuild the Afghan nation,” he said. The insurgents, on the other hand, appear to have a different assessment of what the transition means.

“ISAF [International Security Assistance Force] rolled up its flag in an atmosphere of failure and disappointment without having achieved anything substantial or tangible,” declared Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid, predicting “the demoralized American-built forces will constantly be dealt defeats just like their masters.” The Taliban made 2014 one of the deadliest years of the 14-year war, killing nearly 3,200 Afghan civilians and more than 4,600 Afghan army and police. The international coalition of forces fighting the insurgents in Afghanistan had reached as high as 140,000 troops from 50 countries.

“Our new resolute mission means we will continue to invest in Afghanistan’s future, our commitment to Afghanistan endures,” General Campbell said. Considering the limited success achieved in securing the Afghan government against attacks by the insurgents and the strain on American military and economic resources from the years of fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States might find better investments than a continued — and seemingly endless — military role in Afghanistan. The \$1.1 trillion spent on “Operation Enduring Freedom” has produced little in the way of any freedom likely to endure and much in the way of death, destruction, and debt. For the same amount or less, our nation could have repaired a lot of roads and bridges in what is often described as our “crumbling infrastructure.”

“Afghanistan remains a dangerous place, and the Afghan people and their security forces continue to make tremendous sacrifices in defense of their country,” President Obama said. For the nearly seven decades since World War II, the American people have been required to make considerable sacrifices in lives and treasure in defense of other countries. “Our personnel will continue to face risks, but this reflects the enduring commitment of the United States to the Afghan people and to a united, secure and sovereign Afghanistan that is never again used as a source of attacks against our nation,” Obama said in an obvious reference to the September 11 attacks. While it is true al-Qaeda had training bases in



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Afghanistan under the Taliban regime, planning of the 9/11 attacks took place in Germany and elsewhere, and 15 of the 19 perpetrators were Saudi nationals.

Perhaps it's time to consider an "enduring commitment" to both the military and economic security of the American people, who will be shouldering the burdens of our war debt for generations to come. During the past year, the world observed the 100th anniversary of the beginning of World War I. That war, and the peace settlement that followed, planted the seeds of future wars and insurrections. But at least that war, unlike our Afghanistan adventure, had an end. When America's doughboys set sail for France, a popular song declared, "We won't come back 'til it's over over there."

In America's Middle East wars, it's never "over over there."

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