



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on November 17, 2010

British Defense Chief: 30 to 40 Years of Afghanistan Occupation Ahead

The foreign policy bait-and-switch continues. First, President Barack Obama declared the end of combat in Iraq, withdrawing some U.S. troops but leaving many others behind, possibly for decades, and redefining their role as “advise and assist” — whereupon they continued engaging in combat. Now, with Obama having publicly stated his intent to begin withdrawing troops from Afghanistan next July, both Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Gen. David Petraeus are arguing for a long-term, if not permanent, U.S. presence in Afghanistan.



On top of that, British Defense Chief Gen. Sir David Richards, echoing their sentiments, has stated that “Nato now needs to plan for a 30 or 40 year role to help the Afghan armed forces hold their country against the militants,” [according to the Daily Mail](#), though he “stuck to the government’s plans to withdraw combat troops by 2014 but made clear that thousands of troops will be needed long after that date.”

In an interview on November 14, Richards said, “Everyone is clear that we will have to remain [sic] a lot longer than” four to five years. “The plans,” he added, “are now in place to do that” and will be made “rather clearer” at the upcoming NATO summit in Lisbon.

Richards correctly argued that the Taliban and al-Qaeda cannot be defeated militarily and that victory cannot be declared by “marching into another nation’s capital,” as in conventional warfare. These organizations, after all, are loosely organized and have no command center that can be neutralized. However, he contended, victory over Islamic terrorism in the traditional sense “is unnecessary and would never be achieved. But we can [sic] contain it to the point that our lives and our children’s lives are led securely? I think we can.”

The problem is that Richards, along with most other members of the government and media elite, believes that continued intervention in Afghanistan by foreign countries is the best way to go about containing terrorism. Therefore, in his opinion, U.S. and British forces must remain in Afghanistan for “generations,” albeit under the rubric of assistance rather than combat. Richards, writes the *Mail*, “said that there would need to be more support for the military from political, diplomatic and international aid efforts if the effort is to succeed.” (He did allow for the possibility of negotiating with some Taliban members, an option that the Obama administration has opposed.)

The idea that Islamic terrorism is, in large measure, a response to foreign intervention in Muslim countries seems never to have crossed Richards’ mind; but then such thoughts are anathema to a political establishment with an enormously inflated opinion of its own benevolence and effectiveness. Rare indeed is the politician or pundit who suggests that his own government ought to maintain “peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations; entangling alliances with none,” as Thomas Jefferson



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counseled. When one does make such a suggestion, he can expect to be shouted down with charges of “isolationism.”

Thus, both British and American officials, regardless of political affiliation, are playing along with the charade of ending combat while continuing to station troops in volatile regions and of stamping out terrorism by prolonging the conditions that incite it. In Britain, Prime Minister David Cameron of the Conservative Party “has recently moderated [his] stance” toward withdrawing troops from Afghanistan next year in response to Richards’ and Petraeus’ assertions that “it may be 2012 before there can be any significant draw down of frontline forces,” says the *Mail*. Likewise, the paper reported that the Labor Party’s shadow defense secretary, Jim Murphy, “said Gen Richards was ‘right’ that there was no purely military solution and said there would be ‘no white flag surrender moment.’ He added: ‘It will be for the long haul.’ ”

On this side of the Atlantic, Obama himself “is going to make a public announcement of the US government’s official abandonment of the July 2011 date and the new 2014 ‘target’ for the war effort’s transition to Afghan control,” [according to Antiwar.com’s Jason Ditz](#), who adds that “Obama will be vowing an ‘enduring presence’ in Afghanistan beyond the 2014 date.”

It appears, then, that Afghanistan (and Iraq) will be occupied by foreign troops for years to come, costing American and British taxpayers a hefty sum and increasing, rather than decreasing, the chances of terrorism against those same taxpayers. There was no al-Qaeda in Iraq prior to the U.S. invasion; and just this summer CIA Director Leon Panetta [estimated](#) there were no more than 100 al-Qaeda militants in all of Afghanistan. At the same time, NATO is spending an estimated [\\$50 million](#) for every Taliban member it kills in that same country. Surely there are better uses for this increasingly scarce money, such as in paying down both governments’ astronomical debts. Bringing the troops home, cutting the defense budget down to what is needed strictly to defend our actual territory, and eliminating foreign aid and other intervention will do far more for our pocketbooks and our security than another 40 years’ worth of futile — and, from the American perspective, unconstitutional — intervention.

Photo: Head of the British Army, General Sir David Richards gives a talk entitled ‘Future War’ at Chatham House in London, Sept. 17, 2009: AP

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