

Announcing Afghan Drawdown, Obama Pledges Military Forces for Other “Priorities Around the Globe”

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In a brief appearance in the White House Rose Garden Tuesday, President Barack Obama announced that the US would maintain nearly 10,000 troops in Afghanistan next year despite an official declaration of an end to combat operations. Obama said his plan to keep thousands of US military forces in the country for the next two years was dependent on the reaching of a military cooperation agreement with the incoming president of Afghanistan.

Saying, “We will bring America’s longest war to a responsible end,” Obama announced that the number of US troops would be reduced from the current level of 32,000 to 9,800 by the beginning of 2015. Military analysts say this would allow the US military, working with Afghan forces, to operate six bases and maintain air bases and drone operations in key parts of the country.

By the end of 2015, the president said, the US would still have a force of more than 4,000 troops in the country, mostly concentrated in the capital of Kabul and at Bagram Air Base. By the end of 2016, an unspecified number of troops would be left to defend the US Embassy and maintain a “security assistance component” similar to the current US force level in Iraq. White House spokesmen said separately that some 1,000 US troops would remain.

While stating that US forces would no longer be patrolling Afghan “cities, towns, mountains and valleys” after this year, the president said the US was open to “cooperate after 2014” in “training forces and supporting anti-terrorism operations against remnants of Al Qaeda.” This depended, however, on the Afghan government signing a bilateral security agreement that would “give our troops authority to fulfill their mission while respecting Afghan sovereignty.”

Obama noted that both candidates in next month’s presidential election in Afghanistan were committed to sign an agreement for post-2014 military cooperation with the US. Current Afghan President Hamid Karzai has refused to sign such an agreement, which would give US troops immunity from Afghan and international law and thereby allow the continuation of night raids and air strikes against civilian targets.

A bilateral agreement would allow for a continued and open-ended US military presence in the country. NBC Nightly News reported Tuesday that under the proposed deal, a new US president could increase the US troop presence without seeking approval either from the US Congress or the Afghan government.

In addition to US troops, moreover, an unknown number of CIA mercenaries and “private contractors” will remain.

Obama’s proposed troop reductions have nothing to do with a diminution of US military violence. On the contrary, the president is carrying out a redeployment of US military resources in accordance with American imperialism’s focus on its anti-Chinese “pivot to Asia,” its confrontation with Russia in Eastern Europe, and new neo-colonial operations in Africa, the Middle East and elsewhere.

Obama hinted as much, saying that the “bottom line is, it is time to turn the page on more than a decade when so much of our foreign policy was focused on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq... In addition to bringing our troops home, this new chapter in American foreign policy will enable us to redirect some of the resources saved by ending these wars to respond more nimbly to the changing threat of terrorism while addressing a broader set of priorities around the globe.”

Today, the president is addressing graduates of the military college in West Point, New York. In his Rose Garden remarks, he said, “I will travel to West Point and speak to America’s newest class of military officers to discuss how Afghanistan fits into our strategy going forward. I am confident that if we carry out this approach we can not only responsibly end our war in Afghanistan and achieve the objectives that took us to war in the first place, we can also begin a new chapter in the story of American leadership around the world.”

Regarding the West Point speech, NBC Nightly News pointed to White House discussions of redeploying US forces for a future military operation against Syria, where US-backed jihadists have been unable to unseat the Assad regime.

The Afghan War is the longest military conflict in US history. It began with the deployment of US troops in October 2001, when the Bush administration seized on the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York and Washington to extend US military power into Central Asia. The cynicism of the “war on terror” has since been fully exposed by the collaboration of the US with Al Qaeda-affiliated forces in Libya, Syria and other countries to overthrow secular regimes that have run afoul of American imperialism.

After taking office in January 2009, Obama escalated the war in Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan, leading, according to conservative estimates, to at least 70,000 civilian deaths in the two countries.

Meanwhile, the US puppet regime in Kabul has overseen an explosive growth of opium cultivation, gross corruption involving billions in US contracts, and an ever-worsening social crisis, exacerbated in recent months by an economic downturn. This has led to a resurgence of the Taliban, which controls large portions of the country.

The squandering of an estimated half trillion dollars on the Afghan War and the death of 3,441 coalition forces, including 2,322 American soldiers, has deepened popular hostility to the war in the United States. A December 2013 poll by CNN/Opinion Research showed public opposition to the war hitting a new high, with 82 percent of respondents opposing it. This level of opposition is higher than for any other recent conflict, CNN noted, with opposition to the Iraq and Vietnam wars never surpassing 70 percent.

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