

# Long US Stay in Afghanistan Foreseen

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Major US policy analysts say the appointment of David Petraeus as new commander of American forces in Afghanistan signals a long US military presence in the country.

Former member of George Bush's national security team and US State Department's Policy Chief Richard N. Haass states that since a dramatic increase in an Afghan government force in a near future appears unlikely, "a large number of US forces will remain fighting in Afghanistan for many years to come."

In a statement published by influential US think tank Council on Foreign Relations, Haass writes that the Obama administration's desire to withdraw US forces from Afghanistan within the next 12 months can either come significantly boosting "the effectiveness" of Afghan government forces, "both in absolute terms and relative to the Taliban" — or "that a large number of U.S. forces will remain fighting in Afghanistan for many years to come."

"Everything about Afghanistan points to the latter as being more likely," Haass emphasizes, adding that since the Afghan government is "riddled with corruption" and the Taliban benefit from "sanctuary in Pakistan," such a policy is unlikely to succeed given the enormous costs.

Additionally, Haass observes, the US is faced with a "looming fiscal crisis" as well as growing "strategic challenges in Iran and North Korea."

Anthony Cordesman, a prominent military analyst with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, has welcomed recent appointment of Gen. Petraeus as the new US military commander in Afghanistan, stressing, in a NPR report, that putting him "in charge of the war" has the benefit of showing the Afghans that the United States "does not intend to leave — that it is going to be a partner."

Meanwhile, another NPR report on the ouster of General Stanley McChrystal from the command of the US-led forces in Afghanistan reflected unhappiness of "some US soldiers" with the rules of engagement established by the McChrystal that called for protecting Afghan civilians at the cost of putting the lives of US troops at risk.

The US troops have basically reported serious concerns about having to take extra precautions to avoid taking civilian lives.

According to the report, US soldiers, particularly the Marines deployed in Helmand province, have complained that "they can't really go after the Taliban now because they have to be so concerned about killing innocent civilians."

Observers say that it will remain to be seen whether new US commander General Petraeus

is going make changes to the current rules of engagement and allow US troops freer hand at taking innocent civilian lives.

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