



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on March 29, 2013

Gen. Allen Says U.S. Troops to Remain in Afghanistan

Speaking at an [event held at the Brookings Institution's](#) Falk Auditorium in Washington, D.C., on March 26, Gen. John Allen, the former commander of international forces in Afghanistan, said that the United States would retain a troop presence in Afghanistan sufficiently large to support Afghan forces after the withdrawal of international combat troops at the end of 2014.



General Allen's talk was spun differently in several reports, with [ABC News](#) summarizing Allen's optimistic statement: "Afghan security forces have proven themselves to be more capable than anyone expected, and will be ready to take over securing the country [in] 2014."

"They turned out to be better than we thought. They turned out to be better than they thought," said Allen.

ABC reported that Allen attributed the progress made by Afghan security forces to "developmental strategies" as much as "building military capacity." Allen specifically cited the emphasis on developing literacy within the Afghan forces. The report noted:

Allen said the literacy program was championed by international forces commanders — Stanley McChrystal, David Petraeus and then himself — and that he expected Gen. Joseph Dunford to continue the program because of its success. Allen said more than half the Afghan troops now have the capacity to read and write at a first grade level.

ABC's report inadvertently highlighted a curious aspect of the U.S. military campaign in Afghanistan, since Generals Allen, McChrystal, and Petraeus — as well as Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, former Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates (whose career spanned the Bush and Obama administrations), U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan James B. Cunningham, and previous Ambassadors Ryan Crocker and Karl Eikenberry — are all members of the Council on Foreign Relations, a group that has long promoted the interventionist U.S. foreign policy that has led to multiple overseas military operations and full-fledged wars.

The British [Guardian](#) newspaper emphasized another aspect of Allen's talk at Brookings — the "[zero option](#)" position, or the suggestion that no U.S. troops would remain in Afghanistan after the 2014 deadline for withdrawing U.S. troops. The suggestion, which apparently was never part of official U.S. policy, was taken from a statement made last January by U.S. Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes, who said the complete withdrawal of U.S. troops was "an option that we would consider."

Rhodes' statement provoked a strong response from Afghan leaders who predicted civil war in the country if all U.S. troops were withdrawn.

"If Americans pull out all of their troops without a plan, the civil war of the 1990s would repeat itself," said Naeem Lalai, an outspoken legislator from Kandahar province, the birthplace of the Taliban.

"It [full withdrawal] will pave the way for the Taliban to take over militarily," Lalai told Reuters.



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Another member of Afghanistan's parliament, Mirwais Yasini, said in response to the "zero option" suggestion that a total withdrawal after 2014 would be equivalent to the United States "accepting defeat."

But Allen said at the Brookings Institution meeting: "I was never asked to conduct any analysis with respect to the zero option."

Allen also adamantly refuted charges made by Afghan President Hamid Karzai two weeks ago, when [he accused the United states of colluding with the Taliban](#), prompting questions in America about why it bothered to keep any troops in the country.

"If the president truly does believe the U.S. is colluding with the Taliban, I am here to tell you [that] I would know — and it ain't so," said Allen.

The *Guardian* reported that President Obama is presently considering how many U.S. troops will remain in Afghanistan after the official withdrawal, and that "speculation on the size of the force ranges from about 6,000 through to 20,000."

"Sometimes this comes as a surprise when I say this: that on January 1 2015, there's still going to be fighting in Afghanistan," the paper quoted Allen.

Photo of U.S. troops in Jalalabad, Afghanistan: AP Images



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