



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on November 20, 2013

War Without End in Afghanistan?

U.S. participation in the war in Afghanistan will be renewed, not ended, next year if the draft of a new security agreement is accepted by both Washington and Kabul, [NBC News has reported](#). The tentative agreement is for American forces to carry out military operations and the United States to fund the large Afghan security force for an indefinite period of time beyond 2024 — 10 years after the deadline for the withdrawal of major U.S. combat units.



“The document outlines what appears to be the start of a new, open-ended military commitment in Afghanistan in the name of training and continuing to fight al Qaeda,” according to the report. “The war in Afghanistan doesn’t seem to be ending, but renewed under new, scaled-down U.S.-Afghan terms.”

The 25-page document obtained by NBC is dated July 25, 2013 and is described in the report as a “work in progress.” But it does indicate what the nature of the U.S. commitment is likely to be in the continuation of the 12-year-old war that is already the longest in U.S. history. The United States will both conduct counter-terrorism operations of its own and sustain and equip the hundreds of thousands of Afghan security personnel. The agreement is to take effect on January 1, 2015 and remain in force “until the end of 2024 and beyond.” It could be terminated by either the United States or Afghanistan, though a written notice would be required two years in advance of the termination date.

A potential sticking point in the agreement might be a provision in the July draft stating: “No detention or arrest shall be carried out by the United States forces. The United States shall not search any homes or other real estate properties.” While a later draft is believed to give the United States more leeway in that regard, the restrictions remained a point of concern to the Obama administration over the past weekend, NBC reported, quoting a senior defense official stating: “It is the one remaining issue that could ultimately kill the deal.”

There is apparently some difference as well between Afghan and American expectations of the number of U.S. and NATO forces that will remain in the country. The draft document doesn’t say, but Afghan officials told NBC News they hope it will be 10 to 15 thousand, while U.S. officials contemplate a commitment of seven to eight thousand American troops, complemented by an undetermined number of NATO forces. Even at the lower number, sustaining that number of troops for 10 years or more, along with the funding of Afghan security forces, will add up to a commitment of many billions of dollars from U.S. taxpayers over the next decade or more.

American forces entered Afghanistan in October 2001 to eliminate al-Qaeda, following the September 11 attacks in New York and Washington, D.C. In the summer of 2010, Leon Panetta, then the secretary of defense, said there were no more than 50 to 100 al-Qaeda left in Afghanistan. During his reelection campaign last year, President Obama boasted of having brought an end to the U.S. war in Iraq and a winding down of the war in Afghanistan, both of which began under the George W. Bush administration. But the Obama administration had tried to keep U.S. combat units in Iraq beyond the December 2011 deadline in the Status of Forces Agreement, but gave up when the Baghdad government refused to



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grant U.S. personnel immunity from prosecution for any crimes they might commit in Iraq. And U.S. soldiers and Marines will apparently be fighting and dying in Afghanistan for a decade or more beyond the December 2014 deadline for the withdrawal of American combat forces.

The new security agreement is scheduled for debate this week among 2,500 village elders, academics, and officials gathered in Kabul for what is called the “Loya Jirga.” The outcome will not be legally binding, but Afghan President Hamid Karzai has said he won’t sign the agreement without the Jirga’s approval.

It remains to be seen, however, if the Obama administration will seek the approval of the United States Senate, as the Constitution requires for treaties. The Constitution also cites among its purposes the need to “provide for the common defense,” which might reasonably be understood to mean the defense of the United States, not of distant Afghanistan or the other 130 or so countries where U.S. troops are stationed. The warnings of Washington and Jefferson against “entangling alliances” appear long forgotten at a time when the cost of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars will be measured not only in lives and limbs, homes and villages destroyed, but in the trillions of dollars expended on arms and equipment, the burial of the dead and the care of soldiers wounded and crippled in wars of dubious intent and unclear purpose.

The United States would not be the first nation to bankrupt itself through an endless series of foreign wars. Nor would it be the first to discover why Afghanistan has been called “the graveyard of empires.”

Photo of U.S. Army soldiers carrying the remains of Army Staff Sgt. Alex A. Viola, who was killed in Afghanistan: AP Images



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