



Written by on June 15, 2010

Withdrawal From Afghanistan May Be Delayed

Citing a statement from a Middle East affairs expert who helped formulate the Obama administration's first Afghan strategy in early 2009, a New York Times article published on June 15 cast doubts on the practicality of President Obama's plan to begin pulling U.S. troops out of Afghanistan by July 2011.



The report quoted Bruce O. Riedel, the senior fellow, Foreign Policy, at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, whose assessment of the administration's prospects for keeping to its original timetable is: "Things are not looking good. There's not much sign of the turnaround that people were hoping for."

Riedel, a former CIA agent, is the author of *The Search for al Qaeda: Its Leadership, Ideology, and Future*, a book in which he criticized President Bush's decision "to declare war not on al Qaeda, but on 'terrorism,' a concept that he and Vice President Cheney arrived at by confusing 9/11 with Saddam Hussein's Iraq."

The *Times* article concluded by noting:

Mr. Riedel, the regional specialist, said the administration had few attractive alternatives to its current course. Pouring in more troops is politically infeasible, he said, while pulling out altogether would make the United States vulnerable to a terrorist attack organized by al Qaeda and originating in a Taliban-dominated Afghanistan.

"Staying where you are is not attractive, because sooner or later, it means you'll lose," Mr. Riedel said. "Obama inherited a disaster in Afghanistan and he faces the same bad options he faced in 2008."

A report published by AFP on June 10 carried a statement from General Stanley A. McChrystal, commander of the UN-created International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and U.S. Forces Afghanistan (USFOR-A) who, like Riedel, predicts a slower-than-anticipated drawn-down of U.S. troops from Afghanistan. "I do think it will happen more slowly than we originally anticipated," McChrystal told reporters in Brussels after a meeting of NATO Defense Ministers.

McChrystal attributed the delayed victory to a shortage of Afghan forces, but also said that more political groundwork was needed in Kandahar to build support from local leaders and the local population.

"I don't intend to hurry it. We want to make sure we've got conditions shaped politically with the local leaders, with the people. We really want the people to understand, and literally pull the operation towards them, as opposed to feel as though that they're being forced with something they didn't want." McChrystal foresees that it will "take a number of months for this to play out."



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The same reported cited Brigadier General Ben Hodges, head of U.S. forces in the south, who told AFP on June 10 that the offensive in outlying districts of Kandahar city could be delayed by two or three months.

A report about the Brussels meeting posted on [NATO's website](#) noted :

The meeting [of NATO Defense Ministers] began with a briefing by the ISAF Commander, General Stanley McChrystal, on the progress of operations. He explained that the current strategy is working but warned that progress towards real stability will be slow and deliberate in order to make sure that hard-won progress is enduring.

The NATO report also observed:

What General McChrystal heard from 46 nations around the table was equally straightforward: *ISAF will stay as long as necessary* because a stable, sovereign Afghanistan means a safer world for all. [Emphasis added.]

A report in the New York *Daily News* for June 15 also quoted from statements that General McChrystal made at the Brussels meeting: "Violence is up, and I think violence will continue to rise, particularly over the summer months."

The *News* observed that more than 20,000 troops will be devoted to the operation attempting to quell the insurgency in Kandahar, called the "birthplace of the Taliban," following moderate success in reclaiming the Helmand River Valley. The withdrawal of ISAF forces is dependent on the successful suppression of the Taliban in Kandahar and on the ability of Afghan forces to secure the region.

Recognizing that importance, Afghan President Hamid Karzai visited Kandahar on June 13, accompanied by General McChrystal.

"Right now the life of Kandahar is a very bad life," Reuters news quoted Karzai's statement at a conference hall in the city. "Step by step, we can go forward."

McChrystal observed of Karzai's public presence in Kandahar: "'I thought I saw extraordinary ownership on the part of a national leader.'"

U.S. troops have now been in Afghanistan since October 7, 2001. The U.S. military suffered its 1,000th death of that war on May 28.

Photo: Gen. Stanley McChrystal meets with Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates (out of picture) at NATO headquarter in Brussels, June 10, 2010. (Both Gates and McChrystal are members of the Council on Foreign Relations.): AP Images



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