



Obama Aide to Romney: Where's Your Afghan Plan?

Obama deputy campaign manager Stephanie Cutter called on Mitt Romney Wednesday to come forward with his own plan for ending the war in Afghanistan. While in Israel last month, Romney told [ABC News](#) he supported the Obama plan to have all U.S. forces out of Afghanistan by the end of 2014, but did not agree with the plan to remove 23,000 of the current 100,000 troops in that country by this September 30. Some military experts have said that withdrawal could impede efforts over the next year to stabilize the country. Romney told ABC in the same interview that he would be open to keeping some combat troops in the country beyond 2014 should conditions change. Cutter, speaking Wednesday on MSNBC's *Morning Joe* [show](#), accused the Republican presidential candidate of being less than forthright on the subject.



"Just two days ago, Mitt Romney was asked about his plan for Afghanistan, and in his words, he said he's not going to lay out details for how he's going to draw down the war in Afghanistan until after the election," Cutter said. "Sounds very familiar to a 'secret plan' that another candidate promised many, many years ago.... We'd love to have a discussion. There's not a willingness on the other side to put out details."

The reference to "another candidate" of "many, many years ago" was apparently to Richard Nixon, who was elected in 1968. Nixon was widely criticized that campaign season for what was often described as his "secret plan" to end the war in Vietnam. Nixon did not use the term "secret plan," but did say he would end the war, while refusing to say how. The former vice president canceled a speech he was going to deliver on Vietnam when President Lyndon Johnson announced on March 30 of that year that he would not seek reelection. From that point on, Nixon claimed he would not discuss his plans for Vietnam out of concern that his statements could undermine negotiations that had begun in Paris for ending the war. Records since released, however, indicate that Nixon campaign operatives were working behind the scenes to persuade South Vietnam officials to hold out against a tentative peace agreement reached a few days before the election. The Nixon campaign feared that news of a last-minute peace agreement would swing the election to then-Vice President Hubert Humphrey in what polls accurately predicted would be one of the closest presidential races in U.S. history. Johnson privately called the efforts to undermine the Paris peace talks "[treason](#)," but never issued a public statement about it.

Romney campaign spokesperson Andrea Saul denied the charge of secrecy regarding the former Massachusetts governor's plans for Afghanistan. "Gov. Romney has described his strategy to ensure a successful transition in Afghanistan, one that rejects Obama's practice of ignoring military



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on August 23, 2012

commanders' advice and making decisions based on politics," Saul said in a statement to [Politico](#). In a pointed reference to unauthorized releases of information from the White House, Saul said: "If we did have a secret plan the Obama administration would just leak it."

President George W. Bush ordered the bombing and invasion of Afghanistan in the fall of 2001 over training and staging bases in that country operated by al-Qaeda, the organization believed to be responsible for the terrorist attacks of September 11. While Congress never issued a declaration of war against Afghanistan, members did approve overwhelmingly a broadly worded Authorization for the Use of Military Force, authorizing the president to "use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons."

The Taliban government in Kabul fell within weeks of the invasion, and by 2010, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta estimated there were no more than 50 to 100 al-Qaeda left in the country. President Obama has since begun a drawdown of troop levels aimed at meeting the 2014 deadline. Meanwhile, the fighting continues and Americans continue to be killed, often by Afghan forces they have trained and equipped. A total of 40 NATO soldiers, including 23 Americans, have been killed in attacks by Afghan police and military personnel, U.S. military authorities [said](#) this week. All told, 2,000 Americans have been killed so far in Afghanistan since the start of the 11-year-old war.

"This administration and this president takes those lives lost very seriously, which is why the President has a plan on the table to draw down our troops in Afghanistan and turn the security over to the Afghan people," Cutter said. "We're sticking with our plan, we're moving forward to draw down our troops."

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