

# NO PULL-OUT IN AFGHANISTAN: US makes a Pact with its Afghan Puppet

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In-depth Report: [AFGHANISTAN](#)

*US and Afghan officials announced Sunday that they had reached a draft agreement committing the United States to continuing military and financial support to the puppet regime in Kabul long after the scheduled withdrawal of the bulk of US ground troops at the end of 2014.*

The pledge of long-term involvement in Afghanistan flies in the face of popular sentiment in the United States, the European countries and Australia, where there is overwhelming opposition to continuing the occupation of Afghanistan and a war that has dragged on for eleven years.

Neither of the envoys who negotiated the agreement, US ambassador Ryan C. Crocker and Afghan national security adviser Rangin Spanta, would release its text, or even outline its main features, ostensibly to give time for their respective governments to review and approve the drafts.

The deal will become final when signed by US President Obama and Afghan President Hamid Karzai. It will not be submitted for Senate ratification, making the agreement's longterm effect contingent on Obama's reelection in November. In effect, it is a promissory note from Obama to Karzai to keep funding the regime in Kabul, assuming Obama remains in the White House and Karzai survives the pullout of most US and NATO ground troops.

The *New York Times* cited unnamed "Western diplomats in Kabul" who said the agreement was important "because it would help persuade other Western countries to continue to support Afghanistan." The talks have been conducted under the deadline of a May 20-21 NATO summit in Chicago, where Obama is expected to pressure his European counterparts to make pledges of money to offset the anticipated drawdown of their military forces in the Central Asian country.

The US is also pushing for commitments of elite special forces to conduct "counterterrorism" operations after 2014, after its biggest non-NATO ally in Afghanistan, the Australian government of Prime Minister Julia Gillard, enlisted Australian SAS troops for such a mission.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported that the US has begun discussions on the deployment of special ops forces from other NATO countries, and has proposed to cut the size of the Afghan security forces in order to free up funds to conduct counterterrorism missions. Prior to a meeting of NATO foreign and defense ministers in Brussels April 18, US defense secretary Leon Panetta met with Australian defense minister Stephen Smith.

The *Journal* noted Gillard's declaration that Australia would pull out most ground troops but "was prepared to consider a limited special-forces contribution" beyond 2014. According to the newspaper, "That statement was greeted warmly by US officials," and the *Journal* cited a "senior US defense official" declaring "Not only is this not a pullout, this is a symbol of commitment."

What information has been released on the terms of the draft agreement suggests that the deal corresponds precisely to the power relationship between the two sides: the United States makes no definite commitment of either money or manpower after 2014, but Afghanistan commits itself to host and stand guard over whatever forces the US side decides to deploy. The US will have complete freedom of action for at least a decade after 2014, while the Afghan regime operates at its beck and call.

A US official told the *Washington Post*, "The nature, function and size of the U.S. security commitment still has to be worked out."

Talks were stalled for months because of a series of atrocities and offenses committed by American troops in Afghanistan, including the burning of Korans at a US base, the massacre near Kandahar by an American staff sergeant in which 17 people were killed, nine of them children, and the release of photos and video of US soldiers desecrating the corpses of Afghan victims of the war.

The American media has repeatedly suggested that Karzai was adopting a hard-line position in the talks, demanding a halt to night raids by US special forces and the handover of all US-run prisons where Afghan citizens captured in the war are being held. In practice, however, Karzai accepted a fig leaf of acknowledgement of Afghan control and sovereignty, while the US occupiers will continue to do as they please.

Some press reports spoke of private assurances, not spelled out in the text, that US financial backing to the Karzai government would be at least \$2 billion a year, enough to sustain capital flight from the country. Nearly half of Afghanistan's annual income has been exported in the form of cash, taken out by government officials and those profiteering from the war—frequently their relatives—and invested in safer venues such as banks and real estate in the Persian Gulf sheikdoms.

An Associated Press account made clear what was uppermost in Karzai's mind, reporting that he complained last week in a speech in Kabul, "They are providing us with money, there is no doubt about that. But they say they will not mention the amount in the agreement. We say: give us less, but mention it in the agreement. Give us less, but write it down."

Perhaps the most critical issue has been postponed for later discussion: the US demand for long-term leases on military bases which will give American air and special ops units more or less permanent access to the oil-rich Central Asian region, maintaining the deployment of American military forces on all sides of beleaguered Iran: on the east, in Afghanistan, on the north in several of the former Soviet republics, on the west in Turkey, Iraq, Kuwait and other Persian Gulf sheikdoms, and in the south, in the Arabian Sea.

The draft agreement was also said to be aimed at warning the Taliban and other anti-occupation guerrilla forces that the US and NATO were not pulling out abruptly in 2014, but intended to "stay the course" in propping up the Karzai regime.

A statement issued by the Taliban noted that the number one goal of the agreement was “securing routes to the Central Asian and Caspian oil fields,” as well as “establishing an army hostile to Islam that protects Western interests.”

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