

Pentagon Approves New Embassy-Based Military Command for Afghanistan

The Pentagon expects the 'withdrawal' to be completed by the end of August

By [Dave DeCamp](#)

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On Friday, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin has approved [a new military command structure](#) that will be based out of the US embassy in Kabul, which will oversee Afghanistan operations after most US combat troops leave the country.

The new embassy-based military office, dubbed Forces Afghanistan-Forward, will be headed by Navy Rear Admiral Peter Vasely. The US has tried to portray its plans to keep troops at its embassy in Kabul as only for security purposes. But [Pentagon spokesman John Kirby described](#) what sort of operations the new office will oversee, which goes beyond guarding the embassy.

“That presence will remain focused on four things over the course of the coming period. One, protecting our diplomatic presence in the country. Two, supporting security requirements at Hamid Karzai International Airport. Three, continued advice and assistance to Afghan National Defense and Security Forces as appropriate. And four, supporting our counterterrorism efforts,” Kirby said.

Kirby said the embassy office would be supported by another Afghanistan office that will be established in Qatar. Under the plan, the authority to bomb Afghanistan will be transferred from the top US commander in the country, Gen. Scott Miller, to Gen. Frank McKenzie, the head of US Central Command. Airstrikes in Afghanistan will be carried out by warplanes based outside of the country, mostly in the Gulf region, what the Pentagon has dubbed “over the horizon capability.”

Although nothing has been confirmed, reports say the US plans to leave 650 troops at the embassy. The US embassy in Kabul is a [sprawling 36-acre compound](#) and has the room to host thousands of people. That means besides troops, there could also be CIA or civilian contractors that don't need to have a declared presence.

The US might also leave some troops to help Turkey control the Hamid Karzai International Airport, which is also in Kabul. The US sees control of the airport as key to its post-

withdrawal plans, and Washington and Ankara are [working out an agreement](#) that would keep the approximately 500 Turkish troops at the airport that are currently guarding it.

Recent media reports said the bulk of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan would be completed by July 4th. But both the Pentagon and the White House said on Friday the drawdown would probably be done by the end of August.

“We currently expect it to be completed by the end of August. So, as you know, the president decided to withdraw remaining US troops from Afghanistan and finally end the US war there after 20 years,” [White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki told reporters on Friday.](#)

While Psaki said President Biden wants to remove all “remaining troops,” it’s clear based on the fact that Austin approved a new military command for Afghanistan that troops will stay. The plan will fuel more violence since the Taliban will view it as a clear violation of the Doha agreement that called for all foreign forces to leave Afghanistan.

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Michel Chossudovsky

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