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## Top US Commander in Afghanistan: Troop Withdrawal Should Stop Next Year

By John Glaser

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The top U.S. commander in Afghanistan on Thursday said he believes American troop withdrawals [should stop in 2013, keeping at least 68,000 by 2014](#) in contradiction of Obama administration plans to have combat troops out by that year.

Marine Gen. John R. Allen said in congressional hearings in response to questions from pro-war Senator John McCain: “My opinion is that we will need significant combat power through the end of 2013. . . . Sixty-eight thousand is a good going-in number.”

“I owe the president some analysis on that,” Allen said, but that he would not prepare this recommendation for the Obama administration until after the September departure of 23,000 surge troops.

The war in Afghanistan is failing on virtually every front and the instability has been exacerbated by successive outrages like the U.S. military’s Koran burning, Staff Sgt. Robert Bales’s massacre of 17 civilians, and leaked video of Marines urinating on Afghan corpses.

Most Americans want an even faster drawdown of forces from Afghanistan than the administration is planning, according to recent polls, and even some Republicans in Congress have begun to express doubts about the worth and viability of the mission.

But Allen's comments give fuel to exceedingly bellicose Republican presidential candidates who have claimed that Obama is not listening to his military commanders by planning to withdraw most troops by 2014. Despite the unpopularity and futility of the war, it may continue so that U.S. military commanders and political leaders fulfill their need to seem tough and effective. So far, that need has built their reputation as stupid and inept.