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We the People: Stop the war in Afghanistan

By Joe Parko

5/9/2012

The Obama administration has been attempting to negotiate a Strategic Partnership Agreement with Afghanistan since last year through the State Department and the Department of Defense (DoD). On May 2, 2012, the United States and Afghanistan formally signed the agreement. Unfortunately, the agreement between the United States and Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai keeps the U.S. military involved in Afghanistan with an American military presence there until 2024, and not on actually providing resolution to the broad conflicts in Afghanistan and the region.

The Pentagon maintains that the U.S. war is going well, and that the United States is in the right position to begin to transition out of the lead role by the end of 2014. This directly contradicts information from the ground and from Afghan veterans like Lt. Col. Daniel Davis, whose recent 84-page report has changed the conversation around Capitol Hill. In a February article in the Armed Force Journal, Davis wrote that his year-long deployment in Afghanistan in 2011, during which he traveled more than 9,000 miles in-country as part of the Army's Rapid Equipping Force, "bore no resemblance to rosy official statements by U.S. military leaders about conditions on the ground... Instead, I witnessed the absence of success on virtually every level."

His Armed Forces Journal article has been viewed more than 800,000 times, making it one of the 149-year-old periodical's most widely read articles in a decade, editor Bradley Peniston said.

It is clear that assessments regarding progress on the ground given by the military to Congress and the administration have been largely misleading. The distance between rhetoric and reality is setting up a worst-case scenario that involves the following elements: Congress will continue to take Pentagon rhetoric at face value and fund a costly plan unable to deliver peace or stability to Afghanistan, dismissing contradictory evidence, despite the knowledge that upwards of 70 percent of the American public is presently polling in favor of withdrawal. The United States signs a strategic partnership agreement focused on fighting (first by the United States and then by Afghans) an insurgency that has consistently and historically risen to resist foreign involvement in Afghanistan. That agreement leads to a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) that backs the Afghan National Security Forces which firmly pits the US-backed Afghan military against the Afghan insurgency and effectively deepens the Afghan civil war that is at the root of the conflict.

Under this Pentagon scenario, the United States fails to provide a process for a viable political or economic transition. No legitimate regional political plan or Afghan-led reconciliation efforts are put in place. Post 2014, the United States is still making multibillion dollar investments in the Afghan government and security forces with little to show for it. Afghanistan is an increasingly violent and divided place as the civil war deepens and political will in the United States continues to fade. By 2015 or 2016, the United States finally bails on Afghanistan — full-scale abandonment — fulfilling the most common deeply held fear among average Afghans and producing an out-of-control civil war that will have serious consequences for Pakistan, India and the entire region.

How can this scenario be avoided? Warring on until 2014 and keeping U.S. forces in Afghanistan until 2024 at the cost of thousands of lives and billions of dollars will deliver absolutely no additional political leverage, so don't do it. Instead, end combat operations now and begin a complete military withdrawal. This will force the Afghans to work through their differences on their own. Keeping the U.S. military in Afghanistan will only make a bad situation even worse. There are only political solutions to the political problems of Afghanistan and the region.

The latter scenario is the only hope for staving off a long and bloody civil war in Afghanistan. The current war strategy will not deliver peace and stability, but rather undermine both. It is not too late to change course, but the time to act is rapidly fading. We the people must clearly and forcefully say NO to the 10 year war in Afghanistan. We must not let this war drag on for another 10 years. Enough is enough!