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US, Growing Impatient, Likely to Miss Deadline on Afghan Deal

By Jason Ditz

October 11, 2013

US officials claimed nonspecific “progress” on the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) to keep US troops in Afghanistan beyond 2014, but with the deadline President Obama set just three weeks away, a deal remains far from imminent.

Indeed, US officials say that they are “losing patience” with President Hamid Karzai, who is holding back the deal over certain US demands to continue to launch unilateral operations in the nation, and a US refusal to guarantee that the deployed troops would help defend Afghanistan if it came under attack.

As with the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) that kept troops in Iraq beyond 2008, the US seeks to retain more or less all of the unilateral authority it enjoyed in the wake of the initial invasion, and is once again finding that a tough sell.

Secretary of State John Kerry is in Afghanistan right now for “urgent” talks aimed at the BSA, but the reality is that there is virtually no chance of a deal by President Obama’s October 31 deadline, after which he threatened a full withdrawal.

The withdrawal is unlikely to happen either, of course, since the Pentagon by all accounts hasn't even seriously considered getting the pullout done by the end of 2014. A deal may ultimately wait until after the April 2014 election, on the assumption that Karzai's successor, whoever it may be, could be sold on the deal.