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THE U.S. ISN'T LEAVING AFGHANISTAN

by Sheldon Richman

November 20, 2013

If a draft agreement between the Obama administration and President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan is finalized, U.S. troops will remain in that country indefinitely — instead of being withdrawn at the end of 2014, as the administration has said.

This is a confession of failure. America's longest war is nowhere near its end.

The draft agreement dated July 25, 2013, which was obtained by Richard Engel of NBC News, states,

This Agreement shall enter into force on January 1, 2015.... It shall remain in force until the end of 2024 *and beyond*, unless terminated pursuant to paragraph 4 of this Article [requiring two years written notice]. [Emphasis added.]

Under the proposed agreement, the U.S. government would continue to train, arm, and assist the Afghan military. "In addition," the unsigned document continues, "the Parties acknowledge that

continued U.S. military operations to defeat al-Qaeda and its affiliates may be appropriate and agree to continue their close cooperation and coordination toward that end.”

“Continued U.S. military operations” reportedly includes raids on the homes of Afghans, which have created so much anti-American sentiment. The issue of raids has held up a final agreement, but the *New York Times* [reports](#) that the logjam was broken when the Obama administration agreed to write a letter “acknowledging American military mistakes in Afghanistan and vowing not to repeat them.”

The *Times* said the two governments have agreed to terms “allowing American-led raids on Afghan homes under ‘extraordinary circumstances’ to save the lives of American soldiers.” That language is not found in the July 25 draft agreement, which instead contains an Afghan government insertion stating, “No detention or arrest shall be carried out by the United States forces. The United States forces shall not search any homes or other real estate properties.” This restrictive provision must have been dropped from a later draft in return for the U.S. pledge to write the letter conceding “mistakes.”

[UPDATE: In announcing that a final agreement had been reached, Secretary of State John Kerry [said](#) a letter of apology was not requested by Karzai. Meanwhile, a group of senators are backing an [amendment](#) to the defense appropriations bill that would require President Obama to get congressional permission to keep troops in Afghanistan after 2014.]

Despite a \$17 trillion national debt, American taxpayers will continue to be on the hook, as the agreement commits the U.S. government to

seek funds on a yearly basis to support the training, equipping, advising and sustaining of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), so that Afghanistan can independently secure and defend itself against internal and external threats, and help ensure that terrorists never again encroach on Afghan soil and threaten Afghanistan, the region, and the world.

One wonders how independent Afghanistan can be if Americans are footing the bill.

According to NBC’s Nov. 19 report, “The bilateral security agreement will be debated this week in Kabul by around 2,500 village elders, academics and officials in a traditional Loya Jirga. While the Loya Jirga is strictly consultative, Afghan President Hamid Karzai has said he won’t sign it without the Jirga’s approval.”

Under the terms of the agreement, the U.S. government would continue to be the guarantor of Afghanistan's sovereignty and its authoritarian regime, a commitment that could endanger Americans, as well as cost them much money. The Afghan government, at U.S. insistence, would waive jurisdiction over U.S. military and civilian personnel who commit war crimes. The U.S. government would have sole jurisdiction: "Members of the force and of the civilian component are exempt from personal arrest or detention." Further, "Afghanistan and the United States agree that members of the force and of the civilian component may not be surrendered to, or otherwise transferred to, the custody of an international tribunal or any other entity or state without the express consent of the United States."

We don't know how many U.S. troops will remain in Afghanistan, but NBC says that an Afghan source estimated 10,000–15,000, while a U.S. source said 7,000–8,000, along with NATO troops.

What's clear from the negotiations is that the United States is not close to ending combat operations in Afghanistan, which began in October 2001.

Thousands of [Afghan noncombatants](#) have died in the 12-year war, yet Afghanistan remains a dangerous place, and reports of U.S. progress are not merely gross exaggerations, but [outright lies](#). Meanwhile, al-Qaeda and its offshoots have spread to Iraq, Syria, the Arabian Peninsula, and Africa.

In other words, the U.S. government has lost a war it never should have begun.

Further U.S.-inflicted bloodshed will do nothing but make matters worse. It's time for the U.S. military to leave.