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## Obama Looking Beyond Karzai to Secure Afghan Troop Deal

By Jason Ditz

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The Obama Administration continues telling two different stories on Afghanistan. After yesterday's threats to withdraw from the nation if Karzai doesn't sign a troop deal, officials are now saying President Obama is "looking beyond Karzai" in securing the occupation for years and decades to come.

Karzai has repeatedly ruled out signing the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA), which would keep troops in Afghanistan "through 2024 and beyond," and several US ultimatum deadlines have come and gone with no signature.

Karzai's term in office ends in April, however, and the Obama Administration is in talks with some of the candidates to replace him, hoping to get them to sign off on the occupation as soon as the election ends.

Despite Obama presenting the "zero option" as real, officials have repeatedly insisted that it is not, and all indications are that, by hook or by crook, they intend to stay.

NATO chief Anders Fogh Rasmussen also expressed hope that such a deal could be put into place too, saying NATO also wants to keep its troops in Afghanistan beyond the end of the year.

