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REUTERS

## Germany to Set End - 2011 Start Date for Afghan Pullout

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The German government will ask parliament this month for approval to start withdrawing troops from Afghanistan at the end of the year, excerpts of the proposal obtained by Reuters showed on Saturday.

The disclosure came during a trip to Pakistan by German Foreign Minister [Guido Westerwelle](#), who lauded Islamabad's role in combating militancy and underlined a need for closer cooperation between the nuclear-armed state and Afghanistan.

The pullout proposal, drafted by foreign and defense ministry officials, is set to be agreed by Chancellor [Angela Merkel's](#) cabinet next week before it is sent to the lower house of parliament, the Bundestag, for approval on January 28. The measure is likely to pass easily, with opposition backing.

"The government is confident it will be able to reduce the presence of German troops from the end of 2011, during the handover of responsibility for security," the proposal reads.

Germany is the third largest troop contributor to [NATO](#) operations in Afghanistan, with around 4,600 forces based in the north, where violence increased last year.

The war is deeply unpopular among Germans and has brought down both the chief of the armed forces and a cabinet minister over a German-ordered air strike against the [Taliban](#) last year in which civilians were also killed.

A German president had to resign last year after saying during a visit to Afghanistan that Germany should use its armed forces to back its foreign trade interests.

## COOPERATION

Speaking to reporters after talks with Pakistani counterpart Shah Mehmood Qureshi, Westerwelle said his country appreciated Islamabad's efforts in fighting militancy, but called for cooperation between Islamabad and Kabul to tackle the menace.

"We encourage Pakistan and Afghanistan to closely cooperate in the interest of stability and peace," he told reporters in the capital Islamabad, flanked by Qureshi.

Pakistani action against militants along its Afghan border is considered crucial to maintain military operations against Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan.

Pakistan will be a pivotal player in any Afghanistan accord due to the influence it has on the Taliban, which it nurtured to fight Soviet troops occupying Afghanistan in the 1980s.

The United States and its allies acknowledge Pakistan's role in stabilizing Afghanistan, but Islamabad is under rising U.S. pressure to crack down on militants who used Pakistani sanctuaries to plot attacks in Afghanistan and in the West.

Reports of some militants with German citizenship killed in a suspected U.S. [drone attack](#) in North Waziristan in October deepened concern that foreigners, some with Western passports, had travelled to Pakistan and planned attacks on Europe from the remote mountains.

The German foreign minister said his country would fully support Pakistan in countering terrorism.

Qureshi sought more cooperation in the defense field and asked his German counterpart to liberalize export control policy to help Pakistan modernize its means of fighting militants.

"We feel that there is German equipment that could be provided to the armed forces to enhance our capacity in dealing with counter-terrorism," he said. "German equipment is good equipment."

Westerwelle said he was hopeful a coming move by the [European Union](#) to lower trade barriers for imports from Pakistan would help stabilize the country's economy.