

US in talks on extending Afghanistan occupation past 2014 deadline

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Washington is holding talks to arrange for the continued occupation of Afghanistan by tens of thousands of US troops after the ostensible deadline for withdrawal at the end of 2014.

The ongoing negotiations in Kabul are aimed at ironing out an agreement that will determine “how we manage our forces going forward in Afghanistan” after the 2014 deadline, Marc Grossman, the US special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, told a conference in Washington Tuesday.

Grossman made his remarks, first reported on the *Foreign Policy* web site, at the annual summit of the International Stability Operations Association (ISOA). The ISOA is a trade group for private military contractors, which will no doubt play an even larger role in Afghanistan as US troop levels are drawn down from the present 68,000 level.

The talks, which are being led by Grossman’s deputy, James Warlick, and Afghanistan’s ambassador to Washington, Eklil Hakimi, are aimed at cementing an open-ended US military presence in Afghanistan, providing US imperialism with a base of operations against neighboring Pakistan, as well as Iran, China and Russia, and a platform for projecting American power in the strategically vital and energy-rich Caspian Basin region.

The discussions will concretize the “Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement” that President Barack Obama and Washington’s puppet Afghan president, Hamid Karzai, signed in Kabul last May to set the stage for another decade of US military operations in the country.

The bilateral security agreement now being negotiated will keep what military officials estimate at somewhere between 20,000 and 30,000 US troops, along with large numbers of contractor mercenaries and

CIA operatives, in the country.

A large number of these troops will be from the Special Operations Command and will continue carrying out the counterinsurgency operations that have earned the US-led occupation popular hatred among the Afghan population. The US will also maintain control over air power and heavy weaponry inside Afghanistan.

Patrick Kennedy, the US under secretary of state for management, spoke on the same panel with Grossman and stressed that US civilian operations in Afghanistan would require a continued heavy military presence.

“Rather than developing our own capabilities, we will be depending on DOD [Department of Defense] support for functions such as a quick reaction force, personnel recovery, fuel support, explosive ordnance disposal, and medical assistance, by 2015,” Kennedy said.

All of these arrangements give the lie to the claim being trumpeted by the Obama reelection campaign that the US is well along in a transition that will see US troops withdrawn from the country. During the vice presidential debate on October 10, Vice President Joseph Biden put forward this position, declaring: “We are leaving Afghanistan in 2014, period. There are no ifs, ands or buts.”

Such claims are aimed at placating an American public that is overwhelmingly hostile to the war. Romney and the Republicans have no interest in challenging the administration’s lies. They, like Obama and the Democrats, are committed to the same strategic objectives that underlay the US attempt to take over Afghanistan when it was launched 11 years ago, and would also seek to keep troops there.

The stated US objective is to transfer most security operations to Afghan army and police units that are being built up to over 350,000-strong.

This model calls for US and other NATO forces to work as “advisers” and direct these Afghan units. It has been called into question, however, by the escalating series of so-called “green on blue” or “insider” attacks, in which members of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and police turn their guns on their supposed US and NATO allies.

The latest of these took place last Saturday, when a uniformed member of the Afghan intelligence service, the National Directorate of Security, or NDS, carried out a suicide bomb attack in Kandahar province, killing a US Central Intelligence Agency operative and a US soldier, along with four Afghan intelligence officers.

The attack took place in the remote Maaruf district of Kandahar near the Pakistan border, as a US Chinook helicopter was ferrying the joint intelligence team into the area.

The US soldier killed in the attack was identified as Spc. Brittany Gordon, 24, of the 572 Military Intelligence Company, 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division. Pentagon sources said that she was the 22nd woman to lose her life to hostile fire since the war began in 2001. In all, 2,140 US troops have been killed since the beginning of “Operation Enduring Freedom” 11 years ago.

The attack from within the NDS was seen as particularly troubling as it is the agency assigned to vet recruits to the Afghan security forces, supposedly weeding out elements with potential ties to armed resistance groups.

This was the eighth “insider” attack since August. Together, these attacks have claimed the lives of 21 American and other NATO troops. Well over 50 have died from such attacks so far this year.

The spike in these killings led Marine Gen. John Allen, the top US commander in Afghanistan, to order a halt to joint operations with Afghan forces last month. While this ban has been partially lifted, tight restrictions remain in place.

At joint bases, the *Wall Street Journal* reported, areas for Afghans and areas for Americans now “are separated by barbed wire and checkpoints—even as posters proclaim that the two militaries are standing ‘shoulder to shoulder.’”

While US military personnel are instructed to carry loaded weapons at all times, the Afghan troops are usually disarmed, with their rifles locked up in

armories. These policies serve to increase tensions between the two sides and deepen the crisis of morale within the Afghan puppet forces.

A further indication of this crisis was reported Monday by the *New York Times*, which revealed that because of rampant desertions and low rates of re-enlistment, the Afghan National Army is forced to replace fully one third of its troops each year.

“Afghan deserters complain of corruption among their officers, poor food and equipment, indifferent medical care, Taliban intimidation of their families and, probably most troublingly, a lack of belief in the army’s ability to fight the insurgents after the American military withdraws,” the *Times* reports.

Undoubtedly the desertions are also driven by the rising casualty rate among the Afghan forces, who, according to NATO, have seen on average 243 soldiers and 292 policemen killed or wounded each month this year.

According to the *Times* article, there is not a single ANA unit judged by NATO to be capable of operating on its own.



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