US planning to keep military forces in Afghanistan for “decades”

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The US military plans to maintain a presence of thousands of US forces in Afghanistan for “decades,” unnamed senior US military officials told the *Washington Post* Tuesday.

“The US was supposed to leave Afghanistan by 2017. Now it might take decades,” unnamed US military leaders cited by the *Post* said.

The confirmation of long-term US troop deployments to Afghanistan has been prompted by the instability of the US-backed regime in Kabul, whose tenuous hold over the capital is threatened by insurgent forces including the Taliban, al Qaeda and ISIS, the US officials said.

Current Afghan President Ashraf Ghani is a US and NATO stooge imposed through a managed election geared to deflect popular hatred of the previous US-backed ruler, Hamid Karzai. Ghani was described by the US officials as a “willing and reliable partner” who can “provide bases to attack terror groups not just in Afghanistan, but also throughout South Asia for as long as the threat in the chronically unstable region persists.”

US officials added, “There’s a broad recognition in the Pentagon that building an effective Afghan Army and police force will take a generation’s commitment, including billions of dollars a year in outside funding.”

The US-NATO intervention in Afghanistan will also require “constant support from thousands of foreign advisers on the ground,” the officials said.

“We’ve learned that you can’t really leave,” an unnamed Pentagon official said. “You’re going to be there for a very long time.”

Unnamed Obama administration officials confirmed the White House’s support for the plans, saying that the US intervention is analogous to that in South Korea, where Washington has deployed tens of thousands of soldiers since the end of the Second World War to cement its domination over the Pacific Rim.

The *Post* report, which amounts to a de facto US government press release, comes amid a broader upsurge of escalatory moves by the US military in Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa.

Last week the Obama administration signed orders authorizing the US military to expand its military operations in northeast Afghanistan in the name of targeting the Islamic State. US Department of Defense chief Ashton Carter announced further deployments of US ground forces to Iraq, pledging to put “boots on the ground.” US Vice President Joseph Biden declared that Washington is prepared to seek a “military solution” in Syria.

On Friday, US General Joseph F. Dunford said that the US is on the verge of launching “decisive military action” in Libya, in coordination with a NATO coalition.

Dunford’s statements have signaled “the opening of a third front in the war against the Islamic State,” according to a *New York Times* editorial Tuesday. The new US war in Libya “could easily spread to other countries on the continent,” the *Times* admitted, before calling for the US Congress to pass a new authorization to use military force.

With the US and European powers engaged in a competitive scramble over the redivision of the world, the announcement that US forces will remain in Afghanistan for untold decades underscores the centrality of the Central Asian region in the strategic calculations of US imperialism.

The US ruling class and military establishment seek to utilize Afghanistan as a permanent military outpost for operations throughout South and Central Asia. Washington is determined to project power throughout

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the entire Eurasian landmass as part of its campaign to destabilize Russia and China and foster conditions more suitable to US control over the world's decisive economic centers.

On Sunday, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, a prominent US think tank, noted, "Major geopolitical shifts and internal dynamics are setting the stage for possible increased great-power competition in Central Asia." The Carnegie report calls for the US to "prioritize regional engagement with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan" and "harness Russian and Chinese actions to advance US interests."

The US military presence in Afghanistan is a key component in the global struggle against Moscow and Beijing, as US imperialism's strategists openly state. As a result of increased involvement by Russia and China, "the region is becoming less hospitable to the projection of US power," the Carnegie Endowment wrote.

Last April, the Obama administration released a plan, "An Enduring Vision for Central Asia," laying out provisions to deepen US security and military ties to the region and build up "human rights" organizations.

US Secretary of State John Kerry followed up on the White House's "vision" by visiting the region in November for talks with leaders of five Central Asian governments, establishing a new forum known as the C5+1 to streamline the collaboration of US-aligned forces in the region.

Central Asian states "have aided in the War on Terror and have the potential to serve as a bulwark to Russian and Chinese influence," George Washington University's *International Affairs Review* noted last week in a report, "Achieving America's Vision for Central Asia."

China's energy-rich western province of Xinjiang has also increasingly become a focus for US imperialism's network of State Department-backed NGOs. "Xinjiang Seethes Under Chinese Crackdown," the *New York Times* warned at the beginning of January.

The Chinese ruling elite has sought to deepen its own involvement in Afghanistan, spurred on by the crisis of the US-backed regime. Beijing strives to insert itself into the US- and Pakistan-backed Afghanistan Peace Process, as part of its efforts to construct a Eurasian-wide economic and political alliance to counter efforts by the US to isolate the Chinese economy.

Afghanistan's foreign ministry arrived in Beijing on Monday for week-long talks aimed at a political deal that would integrate sections of Afghanistan's economic elite into the commercial and infrastructure network being developed by the Chinese government.

"A stable Afghanistan could become a critical transportation hub and market for Chinese goods, and another investment opportunity for President Xi Jinping's grand economic plans for Central Asia," the *Times* wrote in a report Sunday, "China Considers Larger Role in Afghanistan Peace Process."

"The big backdrop is that the United States will have withdrawn most of its troops from Afghanistan with the antiterrorism mission unfinished," Du Youkang of Shanghai's South Asia Studies Center at Fudan University in Shanghai told the *Times* on Sunday. The *Post* report is a statement from the Obama administration and the military that, in fact, the US has no intention of withdrawing its forces.

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