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Sarkozy to Speed French Pullout, Urges NATO to Step Up End of Afghan War

By Jason Ditz

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In a move that was probably inevitable after they froze training operations last week, French President Nicolas Sarkozy has announced that French troops will begin transferring control of their sphere of influence, in Kapisa Province, to the Afghan government in March and speed their withdrawal of troops.

The goal now is for the French to have all their troops out of Afghanistan by the end of 2013. The plan was previously for France, along with the rest of NATO, to complete their “handover” by the end of 2014.

Sarkozy and Afghan President Hamid Karzai discussed the announcement and now say they are pushing for the entire NATO “handover” to be sped up to the end of 2013. Sarkozy is presenting this as a faster end to the war. Karzai, who has in the past confirmed negotiations to keep US troops in the nation through 2024, is likely just in the market for the “handover” part, and the influence on the ground that might confer. Karzai’s government has been mostly sidelined in the US-Taliban talks due to its comparative lack of influence, particularly across the nation’s south.

The sudden interest in an exit plan by the French government is the result of an incident last week, in which four French soldiers were killed and a dozen others wounded in an attack by an Afghan soldier. The Afghan soldier was reportedly motivated by anger at a video of US Marines urinating on the corpses of several slain Afghans.