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French President-Elect to Announce 2012 Afghanistan Withdrawal

By John Glaser

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Newly elected French President Francois Hollande will formerly announced at this month's NATO summit in Chicago that he plans to [withdraw French troops from Afghanistan in 2012](#) as per his campaign promise, despite objections from President Obama and NATO leaders.

Hollande is set to take office and replace Nicolas Sarkozy next week and his spokesman Manuel Valls said France would announce the withdrawal of all of its 3,400 troops in Afghanistan "sometime between now and the end of the year."

President Obama has invited Hollande to the White House for talks and is expected to ask him to keep French troops in Afghanistan until the stated withdrawal date of 2014. Sarkozy had already declared in January that he would pull French combat forces out a year early, by the end of 2013. But Hollande's pullout date would be two years early.

Technically, an early French withdrawal date would need to be agreed upon by NATO at this month's May 20-21 summit. Whether France will get that kind of accommodation is unclear. France also has committed to play a part in the training of Afghan forces which will proceed beyond the 2014 withdrawal date.

"France as we all know is a staunch ally," NATO spokeswoman Oana Lungescu said in Monday's [press briefing](#). "NATO counts on France, and France can count on NATO."

Lungescu added that there's "agreement that we're sticking to the timetable for transition in Afghanistan. We're sticking to the principle of 'in together, out together.' And we're sticking to our pledge of an enduring commitment to Afghanistan after transition is completed by the end of 2014."