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British Defense Minister: No Outright Winner in Afghanistan

By John Glaser

January 23, 2013

British Defense Secretary Philip Hammond said on Wednesday that there is a “growing realisation on both sides of” the conflict in Afghanistan “that neither side can win outright.”

The Obama administration is in the process of beginning to draw down US troop levels in Afghanistan, but will continue to occupy the country, conduct operations, and train meager Afghan security forces beyond 2014.

The transition to “Afghan security” is supposed to be taking place, but the war is increasingly seen as a failure.

“A decisive end seems nowhere in sight,” The Associated Press reported in October, noting the enduring Taliban insurgency, the failure of a negotiated settlement, and the weakness of the US-backed Kabul government.

“We are probably headed for stalemate in 2014,” says Stephen Biddle, a George Washington University professor who has advised US commanders in Afghanistan and Iraq. Biddle warns that the US will probably be pumping billions of dollars a year into Afghanistan for decades to come in an attempt to prevent collapse and civil war.

The Taliban actually control entire parts of the country, where they “collect taxes, maintain law and order, and adjudicate disputes,” Dexter Filkins reported in the *New Yorker* in July. An

Afghan told Filkins, the “country will be divided into twenty-five or thirty fiefdoms, each with its own government,” as soon as they Americans leave.