# افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

## *AA-AA*

چو کشور نباشد تن من مبـــــاد            بدین بوم وبر زنده یک تن مـــباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم            از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

**www.afgazad.com**                              **afgazad@gmail.com**

| ***European Languages*** | **زبان های اروپائی** |
|---|---|

http://antiwar.com/blog/2013/07/10/the-zero-option-in-afghanistan/print/

# The 'Zero Option' in Afghanistan

By John Glaser

July 10, 2013

There are rumors [1] that the Obama administration is considering a "zero option" in Afghanistan [2] – that is, abandoning plans to leave a significant residual force there to train Afghans, perform special operations against the Taliban, and bolster the enfeebled Afghan state and instead withdrawing all U.S. troops sometime in 2014. According to reports, the zero option is being considered primarily because of the bitter disagreements and distrust between the Obama administration and President Hamid Karzai.

If it's true that Obama is considering pulling out all U.S. troops, it seems highly unlikely to me that Karzai himself is the reason. Granted, Karzai has been corrupt, mercurial, and downright cheeky towards the Obama administration. But Karzai is scheduled to be out of office in just under a year in any case, and I doubt Obama would abandon one of his most consistent foreign policy schemes just to spite a guy who is expected to be at least nominally out of the picture in a matter of months.

Then there is the question of whether it's true that the administration is considering a complete pullout. An obvious case in point is the complete withdrawal (excepting a hand full of forces as trainers) from Iraq, which nobody in the administration even considered as an option before the Iraqi government insisted on keeping to the prescriptions of the 2008 Status of Forces Agreement, which did in fact call for a full withdrawal. Yet, the administration did eventually succumb to the pressure to leave entirely.

Could this be happening again in Afghanistan? If so, it would probably be based on practical and strategic considerations instead of political ones. The Afghan war has been a sinkhole for U.S. lives and resources, and the American people largely want out [3]. More than a decade of war trying for the same objective and we've seen nothing but failure. The main objectives have been to rid the country of al-Qaeda, eliminate the Taliban, build up a legitimate Afghan government and train an effective Afghan army. Al-Qaeda has left, less because of the U.S. military campaign than because of other "opportunities" al-Qaeda fighters perceive in other parts of the world. But every other objective has failed miserably: the Afghan state is neither stable or legitimate, the Taliban insurgency is as strong as ever, and the Afghan army couldn't win a fight against an army of ants, never mind an armed insurgency determined to regain power.

I doubt the Obama administration is actually considering pulling out completely (after all, Washington and Kabul have already signed an agreement saying the U.S. military will be there in some capacity until 2024), but that is mere speculation on my part. What's more interesting are the arguments floating around for *staying in* Afghanistan. Here's Peter Bergen at CNN [4], who says "zeroing out U.S. troop levels in the post-2014 Afghanistan is a bad idea on its face":

After the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan, something that was accomplished at the cost of more than a million Afghan lives and billions of dollars of U.S. aid, the United States closed its embassy in Afghanistan in 1989 during the George H.W. Bush administration and then zeroed out aid to one of the poorest countries in the world under the Clinton administration. It essentially turned its back on Afghans once they had served their purpose of dealing a deathblow to the Soviets.

As a result, the United States had virtually no understanding of the subsequent vacuum in Afghanistan into which eventually stepped the Taliban, who rose to power in the mid-1990s. The Taliban granted shelter to Osama bin Laden and his al Qaeda organization from 1996 onward.

After the overthrow of the Taliban, a form of this mistake was made again by the George W. Bush administration, which had an ideological disdain for nation building and was distracted by the Iraq War, so that in the first years after the fall of the Taliban, only a few thousand U.S. soldiers were stationed in Afghanistan.

The relatively small number of American boots on the ground in Afghanistan helped to create a vacuum of security in the country, which the Taliban would deftly exploit, so that by 2007, they once again posed a significant military threat in Afghanistan.

This is an old argument. It holds that because America wasn't constantly occupying Afghanistan and dominating their politics, the country grew as a threat.

In fact, U.S. meddling in Afghanistan is a large part of what has fueled the trouble. Washington helped bring the Afghan warlords to power in order to land a strategic defeat against the Soviet Union. That was our first mistake. It was the experience ousting the Soviets from Afghanistan that motivated Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda [5] to try and bait the U.S. in there for a lengthy quagmire in the first place.

The reality – which Bergen and much of the rest of the establishment can't seem to grasp – is that military occupation and nation-building is a barbaric *and ineffective* policy prescription for a country like Afghanistan.

I can't predict what will happen if a complete U.S. withdrawal led to the Taliban regaining power, but it's entirely possible that the last decade of war has persuaded many in the Taliban's leadership that it ain't worth baiting military empires into Afghanistan for no reason. And it's quite possible most of the lower-level Taliban fighters feel just the way this Taliban fighter, in a 2010 interview for PBS's Frontline [6], said he feels:

Q: And what will happen if the Americans leave?

Taliban: We will sit back and give up our weapons.

[1] rumors: http://www.washingtonpost.com/posttv/national/white-house-debating-zero-option-in-afghanistan/2013/07/10/27681f3e-e93b-11e2-818e-aa29e855f3ab_video.html
[2] zero option" in Afghanistan: http://www.usatoday.com/story/theoval/2013/07/09/obama-afghanistan-karzai-zero-troops/2501165/
[3] want out: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/27/world/asia/support-for-afghan-war-falls-in-us-poll-finds.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0
[4] Here's Peter Bergen at CNN: http://www.cnn.com/2013/07/09/opinion/bergen-u-s-afghanistan/index.html?sr=sharebar_twitter
[5] motivated Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda: http://antiwar.com/blog/2011/09/16/follow-up-to-dc-column-beating-the-same-dead-horse/
[6] a 2010 interview for PBS's Frontline:
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/talibanlines/view/