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British Defense Chief: 30 to 40 Years of Afghanistan Occupation Ahead

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The foreign policy bait-and-switch continues. First, President Barack Obama declared the [end of combat](#) in Iraq, withdrawing some U.S. troops but leaving many others behind, possibly for decades, and redefining their role as “advise and assist” — whereupon they continued engaging in combat. Now, with Obama having publicly stated his intent to begin withdrawing troops from Afghanistan next July, both Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Gen. David Petraeus are [arguing](#) for a long-term, if not permanent, U.S. presence in Afghanistan.

On top of that, British Defense Chief Gen. Sir David Richards, echoing their sentiments, has stated that “Nato now needs to plan for a 30 or 40 year role to help the Afghan armed forces hold their country against the militants,” [according to the Daily Mail](#), though he “stuck to the government’s plans to withdraw combat troops by 2014 but made clear that thousands of troops will be needed long after that date.”

In an interview on November 14, Richards said, “Everyone is clear that we will have to remain [sic] a lot longer than” four to five years. “The plans,” he added, “are now in place to do that” and will be made “rather clearer” at the upcoming NATO summit in Lisbon.

Richards correctly argued that the Taliban and al-Qaeda cannot be defeated militarily and that victory cannot be declared by “marching into another nation’s capital,” as in conventional warfare. These organizations, after all, are loosely organized and have no command center that can be neutralized. However, he contended, victory over Islamic terrorism in the traditional sense “is unnecessary and would never be achieved. But we can [sic] contain it to the point that our lives and our children’s lives are led securely? I think we can.”

The problem is that Richards, along with most other members of the government and media elite, believes that continued intervention in Afghanistan by foreign countries is the best way to go about containing terrorism. Therefore, in his opinion, U.S. and British forces must remain in Afghanistan for “generations,” albeit under the rubric of assistance rather than combat. Richards, writes the *Mail*, “said that there would need to be more support for the military from political, diplomatic and international aid efforts if the effort is to succeed.” (He did allow for the possibility of negotiating with some Taliban members, an option that the Obama administration has opposed.)

The idea that Islamic terrorism is, in large measure, a response to foreign intervention in Muslim countries seems never to have crossed Richards’ mind; but then such thoughts are anathema to a political