



Lawmakers, O-5 unite in effort to end war

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A bipartisan group of nine lawmakers has enlisted the help of an Army whistle-blower in their determined efforts to bring a swift end to the war in Afghanistan. But before they asked for his insight, the members of Congress had a few strong words of their own.

Many called the 2014 troop withdrawal an “artificial date.” Rep. Timothy Johnson, R-Ill., said the troops are fighting a “war that cannot be won.” Rep. James McGovern, D-Mass., said “there is no reason for this war to continue.”

Arguably the most pointed words came from Rep. Walter Jones, R-N.C. He called on the nation’s leaders to use the \$10 billion spent monthly in Afghanistan to rebuild America, “and to hell with Afghanistan.”

“We need for you, the American people, to start raising hell about staying in Afghanistan,” Jones said. “Why the American people are not demonstrating across this nation I do not know. ... Especially when our young men and women are dying for a corrupt leader [Afghan President Hamid Karzai], and actually dying for nothing.”

The panel, which met May 31, was clear in its assertion that the U.S. should not simply walk away from Afghanistan. The strong consensus, however, was that any solution must come through the State Department, not the military. A mountain of reports and analysis from foreign and domestic agencies were presented to support that.

Lt. Col. Daniel Davis took point on this effort. In February, **he penned a four-page essay in *Armed Forces Journal***, sister publication to Army Times, titled “Truth, Lies & Afghanistan: How military leaders have let us down.” In it, he decried “rosy official statements” that paint Afghanistan as a picture of progress, and demanded that military leaders come clean about the “absence of success on virtually every level.”

Lawmakers that hosted the panel agreed.

Davis’ essay was based on an 82-page classified report he wrote after a yearlong tour with the Rapid Equipping Force. In that tour, the armor officer covered more than 9,000 miles; interviewed or had conversations with more than 250 soldiers ranging from privates to division commanders; and spoke at length with Afghan security officials, Afghan civilians and village elders.

Davis is not the only officer who has been critical of the current strategy. Maj. Gen. Peter Fuller, deputy commander of the NATO Training Mission in Afghanistan and responsible for training Afghan security forces, **was fired Nov. 4 for saying the same.**

Fuller slammed Karzai **in a Politico interview** after the Afghan president said his nation would side with Pakistan in a war against the U.S.

“You’ve got to be kidding me.” Politico quoted Fuller as saying. “I’m sorry, we just gave you \$11.6 billion and now you’re telling me, ‘I don’t really care’? ... They don’t understand the sacrifices that America is making to provide for their security.”

Marine Gen. John R. Allen, commander of ISAF, immediately fired Fuller.

“The Afghan people are an honorable people, and comments such as these will not keep us from accomplishing our most critical and shared mission — bringing about a stable, peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan,” Allen said.

That goal can be achieved only through a diplomatic strategy, said Shukria Dellewar, director of the Afghanistan Study Group, and Malou Innocent, a foreign policy analyst with the Cato Institute. They joined Davis on the May 31 panel. They said a failure to make this switch will likely prolong the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan. They provided a wealth of data that showed the war had worsened since — and likely because of — the surge, and the strength and activity of the Taliban are connected to the size and activity of U.S. forces in country.

The fact that the trio was asked to participate in a panel discussion rather than speak on the House floor was another sore spot for the lawmakers involved.

“In February, I joined with five of my colleagues — both Republican and Democrats — asking House leadership to invite Lt. Col. Daniel Davis to Capitol Hill,” said Rep. Barbara Lee, D-Calif.

“Lt. Col. Davis has served two tours of duty in Afghanistan and authored a valuable report on the situation on the ground in Afghanistan. To date, no formal congressional committee has invited Lt. Col. Davis to testify, so we will receive his testimony here today.”

Jones and McGovern also submitted a bipartisan resolution in the 2013 National Defense Authorization Act that would accelerate troop withdrawal, and require a full congressional debate and vote if the timeline slipped past 2014. The resolution lacked only seven votes from passing one year earlier. Now, as support for the war has reached an all-time low, the group was confident the effort would pass. But congressional leaders didn’t allow it to be included.

“American politicians are talking about the need to promote democracy in Afghanistan. We need to promote a little more democracy here in the United States of America,” McGovern said. “I was told ‘this is the Defense Authorization Bill. We have a lot of important issues to discuss.’ What is more important than the fact we are at war in Afghanistan?”

"Today's hearing should be taking place in the House Armed Services Committee. This discussion ... should be on the House floor. And shame on leadership of the House for not letting us have it."

Rep. Hank Johnson, D-Ga., said he trusts the president's commitment to the 2014 withdrawal. Still, he said the failure to bring the bipartisan resolution to the floor was "an historic act of political cowardice."

"Ten years later and \$533 billion spent on the war in Afghanistan, it remains clear there is no military solution," Lee said. "The American people have made it clear that the war is no longer worth fighting... It is past time for our policy to catch up with the American people."