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## Karzai open to Sen. Lindsey Graham's idea of 2 permanent U.S. bases

By Clark Brooks • Staff writer • Published: November 16, 2010 2:00AM

U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham is advocating permanent U.S. air bases in Afghanistan – provided “we have a reliable partner” there.

The partner, Afghan President Hamid Karzai, hasn't fully embraced U.S. efforts in his country, but Graham said he has been receptive to the idea of having two U.S. air bases, one in the north and one in the south, to provide stability when Afghans take over the lead role in their national security.

Graham said he also has talked with people in Obama administration who are in favor of installing the bases.

In addition to helping the Afghan military, Graham said, permanent bases would send a message throughout the Middle East that the United States isn't going to abandon allies who join the war on terror.

“American air power permanently assigned to Afghanistan would make it very hard for the Taliban to come back because one of the big edges we have over the Taliban is American air power that would be available to Afghan security forces,” Graham said in an interview with *The Greenville News*.

Graham, who recently returned from a trip to the Middle East, has been considering bases for Afghanistan for months. He said he has discussed it off and on with Karzai, U.S. military commander David Petraeus and people within the Obama administration he declined to name.

Graham said Petraeus also is in favor of installing the bases, but with the same caveat: a reliable partner who embraces his war strategy.

It might be a hard sell either way, say political and military experts.

“If Graham were running for president, I'd say this would be a bad move (politically),” said Larry Sabato, director of the University of Virginia's Center for Politics. “Increasingly, Americans have severe

doubts about our long-term involvement in Afghanistan.”

However, as a senator in South Carolina, it might help Graham regain support from conservatives, Sabato said.

“I analyze things politically, but I need to add that for Graham, I think this is a matter of principle. It may help him get re-elected, but I suspect he would advocate this idea even if it didn't.”

One problem with selling permanent bases for Afghanistan is that people are tiring of the war there, said John Simpkins, director of diversity initiatives for the Charleston School of Law. But that is less daunting, he said, than the Karzai issue.

“The idea of having a permanent presence there makes sense for promoting stability in the region,” Simpkins said. “It would be analogous to our continued presence in Europe after World War II, and that makes perfect sense.”

But in Afghanistan, he said, “I don't look at the Karzai government as having the same staying power now as the post-war German government had.”

Graham said he believes a majority of Americans would support a long-term U.S. presence in Afghanistan with a more cooperative Karzai.

“I think most Americans understand that we have fought too hard and invested too much to not have a good outcome, and future bases would help

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secure the country," he said. "I think most Americans would welcome that but, again, you're not going to invest in a country if you're not going to have reliable partners."

Although Petraeus favors the idea, not all military experts are sold on it.

Peter Feaver, a professor of political science at Duke University, cited pros and cons.

"The larger strategic goals, to recognize that we have an enduring interest in being in the region, the long-term partnership with the Afghan people, framed that way I think it does make sense to a longer-range relationship," he said.

However, "It would play into the Taliban propaganda of the U.S. as a permanent occupier of Afghanistan," said Feaver, who was on the national security staffs of presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush.

Benjamin H. Friedman, whose expertise includes counter-terrorism, homeland security and defense politics, said he is opposed to installing permanent bases.

"I think U.S. military bases, U.S. military presence in that region are a source of instability because there's tremendous anti-Americanism based on the fact that people think that we're occupying their country," said Friedman, a research fellow for the Cato Institute, a public policy research group that emphasizes the principles of individual liberty, limited government, free markets and peace.

Graham said that without a long-term U.S. presence in Afghanistan, "A lot of people who helped us are going to be killed."

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