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The Afghanistan Weekly Reader – March 11, 2011

The week started with Secretary Gates' unannounced visit to Afghanistan, in part to assess the number of troops that can be withdrawn starting in July (the President's stated deadline). But Gates (or perhaps the media) buried the lead—while stating that enough progress had been made to begin reducing the American presence on time, he also made clear that our presence would continue to be significant not just through 2011, but even after the new understood date for withdrawal, 2014. One congressman recently returned from a visit to Afghanistan and said our commitment could last an additional 8 to 10 years—Gates himself raised the idea of permanent military bases.

Meanwhile, the debate between conservatives about the war is now in full bloom, with reliable neo-conservative outlets like the *Weekly Standard* continuing to cling to anecdotal evidence of “progress” to demonstrate why our commitment must be indefinite, and others, including well-regarded foreign policy conservatives like Cliff May asking questions about our continued involvement.

Next week's visit to Capitol Hill by General Petraeus should be the best opportunity to ask hard questions about our long-term strategy and prospects.

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Articles

U.S. Likely to Have a 'Significant Presence' in Afghanistan for 8 to 10 More Years: Dem Rep

The Huffington Post by Amanda Terkel

“WASHINGTON — The United States is likely to have a “significant presence” in Afghanistan for another eight to 10 years, according to a member of Congress who just returned from a trip to the region and has introduced legislation calling for a full accounting of the costs of the war.”

Afghanistan Civilian Casualties: Year by Year, Month by Month

Guardian UK

“Civilian casualties in Afghanistan have increased, according to the latest statistics from the United Nations creating the highest total since 2006 for civilian deaths – the continued annual rises has seen over 8,000 killed in the past four years”.

GOP Rep: Republicans Are Turning on the War In Afghanistan

TPM by Evan McMorris-Santoro

“A bipartisan group of House members are pushing a new plan to end the war in Afghanistan. Many of the lawmakers who spoke at event on Wednesday announcing the new effort have been outspoken on ending what has become America's longest military conflict for years, but one Republican, Rep. Walter Jones (NC), says the names on the list of legislators opposing the Afghanistan conflict are expanding on his side of the aisle.”

Opinion

The \$110 Billion Question

The New York Times by Thomas L. Friedman

“When one looks across the Arab world today at the stunning spontaneous democracy uprisings, it is impossible to not ask: What are we doing spending \$110 billion this year supporting corrupt and unpopular regimes in Afghanistan and Pakistan that are almost identical to the governments we're applauding the Arab people for overthrowing?”

Leaving Afghanistan?

The National Interest by Christopher Preble

“On Monday, Defense Secretary Robert Gates, speaking in Kabul, stated that the United States “will be well-positioned to begin drawing down some U.S. and coalition forces this July.” But as Greg Jaffe of the Washington Post reports, the

- New America Foundation
- The Progressive Realist
- The Race for Iran
- The Sharbat Gula Justice Center
- The Washington Note

planned reductions likely wouldn't lead to a major change in the U.S. mission in Afghanistan. Indeed, even as Gates is stating that the United States will adhere to its date to begin withdrawing troops, negotiations are in the works that could establish a long-term security presence for the U.S. beyond 2014 and might include permanent military bases."

America's 'Aimless Absurdity' in Afghanistan

CATO Liberty by Malou Innocent

"Rasmussen reports that 52% of Americans want U.S. troops home from Afghanistan within a year, up from 43% last fall. Of course, polls are ephemeral snapshots of public opinion that can fluctuate with the prevailing political winds; nonetheless, it does appear that more Americans are slowly coming to realize the "aimless absurdity" of our nation-building project in Central Asia."

How's That Population-Centric COIN Going?

The American Conservative by Kelley Vlahos

"If the success or failure of the Afghan military "surge" rests on whether the U.S can bring down the level of violence and protect the civilian population from the Taliban – a metric that the now fading COINdinistas had once insisted could be achieved with the right strategy — then two new statistics to emerge this week don't bode well for the prospects of the nearly 2-year-old counterinsurgency operation in Afghanistan."

A Tale of Two Headlines...

Afghanistan Study Group by Will Keola Thomas

"The cognitive dissonance is giving me a headache. Two headlines from yesterday's news ...The Obama Administration: Gates Says U.S. May Stay in Afghanistan Past 2014 Deadline "Gates told troops in Afghanistan that the U.S. may remain in the country past a 2014 deadline for the end of combat operations... "We are fully prepared to have a continuing presence here assisting the Afghans after 2014..." – National Journal The American Public:"

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