

## Afghan Security Tops Agenda for Karzai Washington Talks

BY: Scott Stearns - January 06, 2013

---

STATE DEPARTMENT — Afghan President Hamid Karzai comes to Washington this week for talks with President Barack Obama about the future of relations following next year's withdrawal of most U.S. troops.

President Karzai met with U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta last month before these Washington talks, which are expected to include the breadth of U.S.-Afghan relations beyond next year's exit of most of the remaining 60,000 U.S. troops there.

State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said, "I think we expect the full range of issues to come up, the issues of security, issues of political transition - as you know, there are elections scheduled in 2014 in Afghanistan - U.S. ongoing economic support, our Silk-Road strategy, our regional-integration strategy. So there is a lot to talk about when President Karzai comes, and we are all looking forward to having him in the U.S."

Taliban fighters continue to undermine security for the Karzai government and they still control large parts of the country, especially along the border with Pakistan.

Cato Institute analyst Malou Innocent says U.S. President Barack Obama's second term is a chance to change the U.S. approach to Afghanistan. "Begin working with the Taliban to sort of incorporate them within the government, accepting the realities on the ground and understanding that the Taliban with their local lay of the land, their understanding of the human terrain, their cross-border sanctuaries that they have in Pakistan, understanding and coming to reconcile our interests and our limited ability to change that situation," she said.

Afghanistan and Pakistan are cooperating on the release of some Taliban prisoners as part of an effort to win over more moderate elements in the group.

Afghan government spokesman Aimal Faizi said, "We hope the release of these Taliban prisoners will help the peace process in Afghanistan and encourage other Taliban to negotiate with the Afghan government."

State Department spokeswoman Nuland says it is a good start. "This needs to be done in a manner that encourages the best possible path forward, a renunciation of violence, acceptance of the Afghan constitution, et cetera. But we are very supportive of dialogue between Afghanistan and Pakistan that can support reconciliation," she said.

Middle East Institute Professor Marvin Weinbaum says there is a greater push for that reconciliation, after more than a decade of combat. "It would be nice to have a political

outcome here because that would give us a better sense that when we left in 2014 things would not come apart," he said.

The Obama administration says it will maintain an "enduring security presence" in Afghanistan beyond 2014, including training and support for counter-terrorism.