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# Experts discuss Afghan endgame

By Carissa Kranz - The Daily Caller 1:37 AM 07/08/2010

### ADVERTISEMENT

The war in Afghanistan is back in the spotlight and that's probably not going to change anytime soon. While most Senators agree that General David Petraeus is the best man to lead the Afghan mission, there is much less consensus among politicians and experts about how the United States should proceed with the war.

Most contentiously, politicians and policymakers are debating whether the July 2011 drawdown date is a good idea.

“Probably not. Afghanistan has a lot of serious hurdles to overcome. Mostly, with its inability to win over its own people,” said Brian Fishman, counterterrorism research fellow for the New America Foundation.

These issues coupled with the British government's announcement on Wednesday that it will withdraw its troops from the Sangin region of Afghanistan's Helmand province by the end of 2010 compound the problem and complicate the answer. U.S. Marines are scheduled to replace British troops in the Helmand province, the country's deadliest region.

“[Deploying more troops] sends a hypocritical message to follow through on an official drawdown in July,” said Malou Innocent, foreign policy analyst at the CATO Institute.

Nine years into the war, politicians and experts don't agree about when we will leave, when we should leave and how.

### When will we leave?

“I think that come mid-2011 there will be an assessment that starts to reduce the presence in Afghanistan, and politically speaking, the administration is going to have to do something” at that time, said Fishman.

Innocent agrees, but adds he doesn't believe American troops will be leaving completely anytime soon. “I definitely see the U.S. remaining in Afghanistan in a long term role for at least the next five to ten years,” he said.

### When should we leave?

“We don't need 100,000 foreign troops in a region given the fact that there is no guarantee that we can capture and kill more insurgents than our presence helps to recruit,” said Innocent. But at the end of the day, our military will appear strong “because after all, our enemies are in caves.”

Fishman echoes that sentiment in part, adding that the human and financial cost will ultimately be the deciding factor.

“First, we have to determine when the Afghan government is ready to take over, or when the cost is no longer

worth it...some people say we've already reached that point," said Fishman.

### How should we leave?

"We should withdraw over time and have a residual troop presence," Innocent said.

But Fishman doesn't think it will be that easy.

"It's too soon to tell. We got distracted by Iraq. Afghanistan was an afterthought. The chance of success is low, but the costs of failure are high," he said. "We need to give the new strategic concepts we have in place a chance."

At the end of the day, both experts agree that winning comes down to how we define "win."

"I don't think we can win with a capital "W", but we can win with more narrow goals," Innocent said. "Democracy is not going to happen any time soon in Kabul, that should not be our goal."

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