

America's Decade In Afghanistan Nears End

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Greg Milam, US correspondent

Barack Obama has infuriated some of his military commanders but delighted much of the American public with his Afghanistan troop withdrawal announcement.



After the surge withdrawal, there will still be around 70 ,000 US troops in Afghanistan

The top brass at the Pentagon are believed to have wanted a more modest 'drawdown' amid fears US gains against the Taliban and al Qaeda could be reversed.

But Americans, perhaps like people in the UK, are growing weary of a decade of war and the cost in lives and money.

[This is the beginning of the end of the war in Afghanistan and the President made it very clear that coalition forces have had significant successes.](#)

One of the most interesting might be found in the admission by the US and the UK that talks with the Taliban are now on-going in the search for a political settlement.

[With his latest decision, the president may have determined whether his war in Afghanistan will be remembered as a military success or failure when his legacy is written.](#)

Sky's Jon-Christopher Bua

Senior administration officials point out that when [Mr Obama](#) announced a troop surge 18 months ago, there was barely a mention of reconciliation in his speech.

But in his TV address outlining the withdrawal of 33,000 soldiers by 2012, the President said: "Thanks to the pressure delivered by the surge, we're in active support of Afghan initiatives to reach out to the Taliban and explore what might be possible by way of a political settlement.

"Our red lines, our conditions for such a settlement, have been clarified and agreed with the Karzai government and with our allies and there are openings that simply didn't exist 18 months ago."

President Obama's Speech In Full

So the surge has almost disabled al Qaeda in Afghanistan, stopped the Taliban's momentum and advanced political goals as well.

No one in the administration seriously expects hardcore Taliban to be won over by negotiation, but they do believe local groups are ready to come across.

Those who doubt Mr Obama's approach believe the Taliban will simply wait out American forces before returning to their dominant position.

Mr Obama believes building up the Afghan government and security forces will guard against that.



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There are legitimate questions out of the President's speech, such as why take so long to switch the focus fully to Pakistan?

But he was never going to please everyone.

Christopher Preble, director of foreign policy studies at the [Cato Institute](#) in Washington, said: "Despite reports that the President's decision signals a move toward a narrowly focused counter-terrorism mission, the fact is nearly 70,000 troops will remain in Afghanistan after this drawdown.

"Such a force is unnecessary and a far less costly alternative is available to us.

"We could keep pressure on the Taliban, and deny al Qaeda a sanctuary, with perhaps as few as 10,000 troops in Afghanistan."

One place the commander-in-chief is sure of a pretty good reception is Fort Drum in New York where he will visit the 10th Mountain Division on Thursday.