



Trump backs off Afghan withdrawal

U.S. President Donald Trump delivers remarks on America's military involvement in Afghanistan at the Fort Myer military base

War on terror

On October 7, 2001, less than a month after the September 11 attacks, US president George W. Bush launches operation "Enduring Freedom" in Afghanistan, after the Taliban regime refuses to hand over Al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden. In a matter of weeks the US-led forces overthrow the Taliban, in power since 1996.

Forgotten war

Attention is diverted from Afghanistan as US forces in 2003 mount an invasion of Iraq, which becomes the main US concern. The Taliban and other Islamist groups regroup in their strongholds in the south and east of Afghanistan, from where they can easily travel to and from Pakistani tribal zones. In 2008 the American command on the ground calls for manpower to carry out an effective strategy against the Taliban insurgency. Bush agrees to send additional soldiers and by mid-2008 there are 48,500 US troops there.

End of combat

In September 2014 Afghanistan signs a bilateral security accord with the US and a similar text with NATO: 12,500 foreign soldiers, of which 9,800 are Americans, will remain in the country in 2015, after the end of the NATO combat mission at the end of 2014.

From the beginning of 2015, American troops will be charged with two missions: anti-terrorist operations against Al-Qaeda and the training of Afghan forces. In late December, the NATO combat mission ends, and is replaced by an assistance mission baptized "Resolute Support". However, the security situation degenerates.

On July 6, 2016, Obama again slows down the pace of withdrawal, saying that 8,400 US troops will remain in Afghanistan into 2017.

Washington

President Donald Trump cleared the way for the deployment of thousands more US troops to Afghanistan Monday, backtracking from his promise to rapidly end America's longest war, while pillorying ally Pakistan for offering safe haven to "agents of chaos."

Trump discarded his previous criticism of the 16-year-old war as a waste of time and money, admitting things looked different from "behind the desk in the Oval Office."

"My instinct was to pull out," Trump said as he spoke of his frustration with a war that has killed thousands of US troops and cost US taxpayers trillions of dollars.

But following months of deliberation, Trump said he had concluded "the consequences of a rapid



First lady Melania Trump stands with Ivanka Trump before President Donald Trump delivered remarks on American involvement in Afghanistan

exit are both predictable and unacceptable" leaving a "vacuum" that terrorists "would instantly fill."

While Trump refused to offer detailed troop numbers, senior White House officials said he had already authorized his defense secretary to deploy

up to 3,900 more troops to Afghanistan.

Taliban later vowed it would make the country "a graveyard" for the United States and would continue its "jihad" as long as American troops remained in the country.

"If America doesn't withdraw its troops from Afghanistan, soon Afghanistan will become another graveyard for this superpower in the 21st century," Zabiullah Mujahid, a spokesman for the Taliban in Afghanistan, said in a statement.

Trump also indicated that single-minded approach would extend to US relations with troubled ally Pakistan, which consecutive US administrations have criticized for links with the Taliban and

for harboring leading jihadists -- like Osama bin Laden.

"We have been paying Pakistan billions and billions of dollars at the same time they are housing the very terrorists that we are fighting," he said, warning that vital aid could be cut. That will have to change and that will change immediately."

Ahead of the speech Pakistan's military brushed off speculation that Trump could signal a stronger line against Islamabad, insisting the country has done all it can to tackle militancy.

"Let it come," army spokesman Major General Asif Ghafoor told reporters, referring to Trump's decision. "Even if it comes... Pakistan shall do whatever is best in the national interest." (AFP)

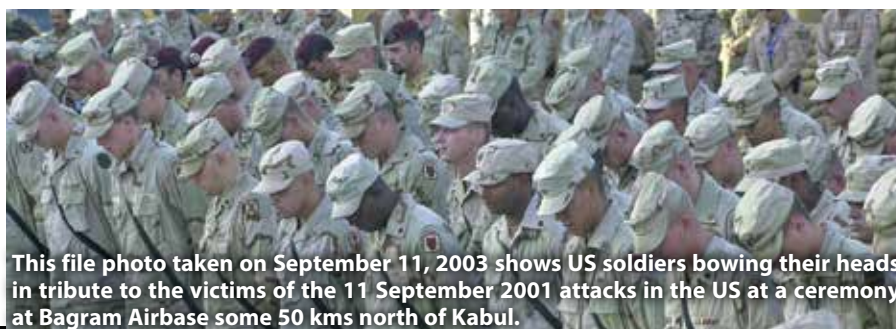
Deal with Taliban!

Trump for the first time also left the door open to an eventual political deal with the Taliban.

"Someday, after an effective military effort, perhaps it will be possible to have a political settlement that includes elements of the Taliban in Afghanistan," he said. But he vowed that

"America will continue its support for the Afghan government as they confront the Taliban in the field." His Secretary of State Rex Tillerson went further, saying the US would "stand ready to support peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban without preconditions."

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This file photo taken on September 11, 2003 shows US soldiers bowing their heads in tribute to the victims of the 11 September 2001 attacks in the US at a ceremony at Bagram Airbase some 50 kms north of Kabul.



We welcome President Trump's determination to enhance efforts to overcome the challenges facing Afghanistan and confronting issues of safe havens and other forms of cross-border support enjoyed by terrorists. India shares these concerns and objectives."

- Indian foreign ministry statement



Trump's first formal address as commander-in-chief late Monday showed that America was with us, without any time limit."

- Ashraf Gani, Afghanistan President

Pakistan's status as privileged ally in question: Rex Tillerson

Washington Secretary of State Rex Tillerson warned yesterday that Pakistan's privileged status as a major non-NATO US ally could be in question if it continues to give safe haven to

extremists.

"We have some leverage," Tillerson told reporters, "in terms of aid, their status as a non-NATO alliance partner -- all of that can be put on the table."