

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/07/26/what-would-happen-if-the-untied-states-totally-disengaged-from-afghanistan/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.5383f5084646

What would happen if the United States totally disengaged from Afghanistan?



U.S. troops with Task Force Iron maneuver an M-777 howitzer, so it can be towed into position at Bost Airfield, Afghanistan, in June. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Justin T. Updegraff, Operation Resolute Support via AP)

KABUL — The United States' longest war doesn't look like it will end anytime soon.

Sixteen years have passed. Nearly 2,400 U.S. troops have died. More than \$700 billion has been spent. But talk of “winning” is scarce.

The goal now seems more akin to “not losing.”

The Taliban is present in nearly half the country's districts, and the group regularly attacks Kabul and provincial capitals. A fledgling Islamic State affiliate is [proving hard to eliminate](#) in the mountainous east. The popularity of the American mission here has eroded into cynicism as the war grinds on. Afghan civilians and security forces are dying in record numbers — and [more than 600](#) civilians were killed by NATO or government-aligned forces last year. Casualties among Afghan security forces soared by 35 percent in 2016, with 6,800 soldiers and police killed, according to U.S. government watchdog SIGAR.

Perpetual conflict and lack of opportunity are driving thousands of Afghan youths to either flee the country or join militant groups. Discontent with the government and the revival of ethnic rivalries are threatening to plunge the country into [political chaos](#), or worse. Regional powers such as Iran, Pakistan and Russia advance their own strategic interests in Afghanistan, often at the cost of American objectives.

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and President Trump's national security adviser, Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, are leading a White House review of Afghanistan policy. The United States currently has around 8,800 troops here, down from a high of more than 100,000 in 2011. The debate has been intensely fractious within the administration, with Trump particularly skeptical of his advisers' plan for a modest troop increase and a multiyear commitment to the

war — essentially par for the course. Given the way the war is going, many Americans may be wondering why their government is still in Afghanistan at all.

The United States is not winning in Afghanistan, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis told Congress on June 13. (Reuters)

With that in mind, The Post's Kabul bureau asked a variety of people here — from the Taliban's spokesman to provincial politicians to taxi drivers to the press officer for the U.S. military — this question: What would happen if the United States totally disengaged from Afghanistan?

Navy Capt. William Salvin, spokesman for the U.S. military in Afghanistan

If the U.S. and NATO were to leave Afghanistan, it will leave a void that would be exploited by the 20 terrorist and violent extremist organizations that are based in the Afghanistan/Pakistan region. That is a higher concentration of terror groups than anyplace in the world. Those groups would seek to both destabilize Afghanistan and organize and launch attacks against the U.S. and the West. Those terror groups would also work to destabilize the legitimate government of Afghanistan that is fighting to bring peace and stability to the country.

Zabiullah Mujahid, spokesman for the Taliban

It will be cause of salvage for both Afghans and America, if Americans withdraw and put an end to the occupation. It will prevent further loss of its manpower and economy and lead in ending America's longest war in history and decline of America's prestige globally.

From the other side, this will be a means of salvage for us Afghans, too; the war will possibly end here, Afghans will unite and will create a sound Islamic establishment.

Therefore, if America's occupation comes to an end, it means that the problem between the two nations will end, too.

Davood Moradian, director of the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies

Disengagement would result in the partition of the country into regions akin to “Somalia” and “Somaliland.” The Pashtun heartland will resemble the former and the central, northern and western regions the latter. In this scenario, Pakistan revives its strategic depth by creating a “Grand Waziristan,” comprising of Pashtun-dominated border regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Russia will consolidate its reign over Central Asian states. Should Afghan and regional players fail to manage this scenario, then the Pashtun heartland will revert to an Islamist, Sunni, Pashtun caliphate where attacks on the West could be launched.

Hashemi Nezhad, political analyst, researcher and writer

Afghanistan relies on foreign aid entirely. If the United States pulls out of the country, the government will collapse and inter-factional political and military conflicts will ruin all the achievements the country attained since 2001.

Hameedullah Tokhi, lawmaker from restive, southern Zabul province

The U.S. military presence in Afghanistan has earned the government here enmity of the entire region such as Russia, Iran, Pakistan and Central Asia, who all support the Taliban now.

We do not want the U.S. to remain forever in Afghanistan and defend us, but to leave in a responsible manner, without any fallout. Premature disengagement or departure will mean 100 percent failure of the United States not only in Afghanistan, but globally. It will be forced to end its military missions across the world and will mean a defeat similar to the one the former Soviet Union faced not only in Afghanistan, but in the world stage. The Soviet Union disintegrated after the withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Putin as a strong leader has been able to make Russia, the heir of the Soviets, stand on its feet, but Trump is not strong at all compared to Putin. If he opts to disengage, that surely will be the demise of U.S. might globally.

Ahmad Shah, 57, taxi driver

If Trump chooses to pull the troops out of Afghanistan, the likely scenario will be another big war involving factional leaders, backed by our neighbors. It will be a disaster for us

and also for the United States. Leaving without winning the war certainly means defeat. It will damage America's prestige in the world.

A previous version of this story incorrectly stated that the Taliban controls 40 percent of all Afghan districts. The Taliban is present in 40 percent in those districts, according to SIGAR, the U.S. government watchdog agency in Afghanistan.