

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY UPDATE
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1. [Obama: U.S. to Keep Nearly 10,000 Troops in Afghanistan in 2015 \(05-27-2014\)](#)

By Nick Simeone
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, May 27, 2014 – President Barack Obama today announced the United States plans to keep nearly 10,000 American troops in Afghanistan next year -- a level largely in line with what U.S. commanders had requested -- and that nearly all U.S. forces will leave the country by the end of 2016, bringing to an end a U.S. military mission that began in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

“The bottom line is it’s time to turn the page on more than a decade in which so much of our foreign policy was focused on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq,” Obama said in a televised address from the White House Rose Garden.

In laying out his military plan for Afghanistan once the U.S.-led NATO mission there ends in December, Obama said keeping 9,800 American troops in the country to train Afghan forces and to support counterterrorism operations will be contingent upon Afghanistan’s next president signing a bilateral security agreement with the United States, something outgoing Afghan President Hamid Karzai has refused to do.

“The two final Afghan candidates in the runoff election for president have each indicated they would sign this agreement promptly after taking office, so I’m hopeful we can get this done,” Obama said, emphasizing the growing and increasing competence of the Afghan security forces as well as the success of April’s first round of presidential elections -- despite threats by the Taliban to disrupt them -- as key to the timing of today’s announcement.

“This transition has allowed us to steadily draw down our own forces from a peak of 100,000 U.S. troops to roughly 32,000 today,” the president said. “Together with our allies and the Afghan government, we have agreed this is the year we will conclude our combat mission in Afghanistan.”

Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said he strongly supports Obama’s decision. In a statement issued after the president spoke, Hagel said the proposed U.S. troop presence “will help us sustain the significant progress we have made in training and equipping the Afghan national security forces.”

As the nation brings an end to its longest war, “all Americans are grateful for the sacrifice and service of the men and women who deployed there over the past 13 years,” the secretary said.

For months, U.S. officials have been deliberating over post-2014 U.S. troop levels and had even raised the prospect of a complete pullout of all U.S. forces if the Afghan government refused to sign the bilateral security agreement, a move that would have triggered an end to billions of dollars in foreign aid, upon which the government in Kabul relies heavily.

The post-2014 U.S. troop levels would be in addition to contributions from NATO countries, and a senior administration official said discussion about NATO commitments will continue during an alliance defense ministers conference in Brussels next week. But in his address today, Obama made clear that beginning next year, Afghanistan’s security will be fully in the hands of Afghans while U.S. troop levels in the country will continue to be reduced, with those remaining consolidated at Kabul and at Bagram Airfield.

“We have to recognize Afghanistan will not be a perfect place, and it is not America’s responsibility to make it one,” he said. “The future of Afghanistan must be decided by Afghans.”

By the end of 2016, Obama said, the U.S. military presence in the country will be pared back even further, to a level required to maintain security at the U.S. embassy, along with a security assistance component, similar to current U.S. force levels in Iraq.

Obama’s announcement about the way forward in Afghanistan comes two days after he made a brief, unannounced visit to U.S. commanders and troops in the country but did not meet with Karzai, whose relations with the United States have grown increasingly tense. White House officials told reporters the trip was meant to be a visit with troops. Obama and Karzai did speak by phone.

And today’s address comes a day before Obama is set to deliver the commencement speech at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., during which he will outline his foreign policy and national security agenda for the remainder of his second term, including redirecting some of the resources saved by ending the war to “respond more nimbly to the changing threat of terrorism while addressing a broader set of priorities.”

“I’m confident that if we carry out this approach, we can not only responsibly end our war in Afghanistan and achieve the objectives that took us to war in the first place, we’ll also be able to begin a new chapter in the story of American leadership around the world,” he said.

Related Sites:

[NATO International Security Assistance Force Statement](#)

[Hagel Expresses Support for Afghanistan Troop Decision](#)

[Dempsey: President's Troop Decision Aligns Tasks, Resources](#)

2. U.S. Sends Expert Team to Balkans after Floods Unearth Land Mines (05-27-2014)

Washington — The U.S. State Department is deploying its Quick Reaction Force (QRF), a group of civilian explosive-ordnance-disposal experts, to Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina after flooding increased the danger from land mines and unexploded ordnance in those nations.

The QRF, from the department's Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement, was scheduled to arrive May 26. The team will work with local officials of both the Serbian Mine Action Center and the Bosnia-Herzegovina Mine Action Center to survey land mine-contaminated areas affected by the recent floods, the State Department said in announcing the deployment May 25.

Heavy rains in the Balkans have caused widespread flooding that has led to the possible shifting and uncovering of some of the 120,000 land mines remaining from the 1992–1995 conflict associated with the breakup of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the department said. The flood waters also may have washed away many of the markers around minefields. Efforts by local authorities to begin mapping the most-affected areas and informing their communities about the imminent danger posed by mines and unexploded ordnance are ongoing, State said.

Residents in flood-affected areas are reporting discoveries of mines and unexploded ordnance. On May 21, a land mine dislodged by flooding near the town of Brcko, Bosnia-Herzegovina, exploded underwater, causing no damage or casualties. The government of Bosnia and Herzegovina estimates that 320 square kilometers of the flood zones are potentially contaminated by shifting mines or unexploded ordnance, the State Department notice said.

In Serbia, according to the department, preliminary reports from the Serbian Mine Action Center indicate a similar problem with the shifting and uncovering of numerous land mines and explosive ordnance. Local commercial land-mine-removal companies and both the Serbian and Bosnia-Herzegovina armed forces mine-removal units are well versed in regular land-mine-removal operations, but they will be facing clearance operations in unfamiliar circumstances — assessing large areas, clearing mines from landslides, and conducting underwater mine removal, the State Department said.

Since 2008 the State Department has deployed QRF teams to countries including Congo-Brazzaville, Cyprus, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Uruguay and Vietnam to address emergency issues related to the removal or mitigation of abandoned or otherwise at-risk conventional weapons and munitions, land mines and unexploded ordnance.

Also, since 1993 the United States has invested more than \$2.3 billion in more than 90 countries around the world to reduce the harmful effects of the explosive remnants of conventional weapons in post-conflict environments, including more than \$96.7 million in Bosnia-Herzegovina and more than \$15.7 million in Serbia.

More information on U.S. land mine removal and conventional weapons destruction programs is available in the department's annual report [To Walk the Earth in Safety](#).

3. Secretary Kerry on 2014 Presidential Elections in Ukraine (05-26-2014)

2014 Presidential Elections in Ukraine

The United States congratulates the people of Ukraine and the Ukrainian government for their historic elections on May 25th. Ukrainians united to express their political will freely and to choose their own future together. The large turnout sends a clear message: the Ukrainian people want to live in a united, democratic and peaceful Ukraine anchored in European institutions.

We welcome today's preliminary report from the OSCE and other international observers, including their finding that the election demonstrated, "the clear resolve of the authorities to hold what was a genuine election largely in line with international commitments and with a respect for fundamental freedoms in the vast majority of the country." As the international observers made clear, the security situation and outright armed intimidation by separatist groups prevented some voters in two of Ukraine's regions in the east from participating in the polling, while voting was also prevented in occupied Crimea. We commend the courage and determination of those in Donetsk and Luhansk who ensured voting did take place in some precincts. We thank the OSCE's Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, and the many others who made this international observation effort possible.

The successful conduct of these elections reaffirms Ukraine's commitment to the democratic process. The United States will continue to work with the people of Ukraine and the newly elected President to build on this victory for democracy. We will support their efforts to determine their own future in a more united, secure, independent, and prosperous Ukraine. The United States respects Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, condemns and rejects Russia's occupation and attempted annexation of Crimea, and remains committed to working with Ukraine and other partners to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

Related Site:

[President Obama on Elections in Ukraine \(05-25-2014\)](#)

4. President Obama Issues Memorial Day Proclamation (05-23-2014)

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, May 23, 2014 – President Barack Obama today proclaimed Memorial Day, May 26, 2014, as a day for all Americans to "never forget" the service and sacrifices of U.S. military members in defense of the nation and to "pray for and hold close the families of the fallen."

The president's proclamation reads as follows:

Constant in the American narrative is the story of men and women who loved our country so deeply they were willing to give their all to keep it safe and free. When a revolution needed to be won and our Union needed to be preserved, brave patriots stepped forward. When our harbor was bombed and our country was attacked on a clear September morning, courageous warriors raised their hands and said, "send me." On the last Monday of each May, our Nation comes together to honor the selfless heroes who have defended the land we love and in so doing gave their last full measure of devotion.

Today, we pause to remember our fallen troops, to mourn their loss, and to pray for their loved ones. Though our hearts ache, we find a measure of solace in knowing their legacy lives on in the families our heroes left behind -- the proud parents who instilled in their sons and daughters the

values that led them to serve; the remarkable spouses who gave our Nation the person they cherished most in the world; and the beautiful children who will grow up with the knowledge that their mother or father embodied the true meaning of patriotism. To those we lost, we owe a profound debt that can never be fully repaid. But we can honor the fallen by caring for their loved ones and keeping faith with our veterans and their fellow brothers and sisters in arms.

The security that lets us live in peace, the prosperity that allows us to pursue our dreams, the freedom that we cherish -- these were earned by the blood and the sacrifices of patriots who went before. This Memorial Day, as we near the end of more than a decade of war, let us never forget their service and always be worthy of the sacrifices made in our name. And today and every day, let us pray for and hold close the families of the fallen.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, BARACK OBAMA, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim Memorial Day, May 26, 2014, as a day of prayer for permanent peace, and I designate the hour beginning in each locality at 11:00 a.m. of that day as a time to unite in prayer. I also ask all Americans to observe the National Moment of Remembrance beginning at 3:00 p.m. local time on Memorial Day.

I request the Governors of the United States and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, officials of the other territories subject to the jurisdiction of the United States, and appropriate officials of all units of government, to direct that the flag be flown at half-staff until noon on this Memorial Day on all buildings, grounds, and naval vessels throughout the United States and in all areas under its jurisdiction and control. I also request the people of the United States to display the flag at half-staff from their homes for the customary forenoon period.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-third day of May, in the year of our Lord two thousand fourteen, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-eighth.

BARACK OBAMA

Related Sites:

[Presidential Proclamation -- Prayer for Peace, Memorial Day, 2014](#)

[Special: Memorial Day 2014](#)

[5. Hagel's 14th International Trip Spans Asia, Europe \(05-23-2014\)](#)

By Cheryl Pellerin
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, May 23, 2014 – Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel next week begins a 12-day trip that ranges from Alaska to the Straits of Malacca to the Black Sea, marking the intensity of DOD's global engagement and the secretary's own commitment to sustaining the effort, the Pentagon press secretary said today.

Hagel's 14th international trip will focus on Asia and Europe, Navy Rear Adm. John Kirby told reporters during a briefing here this afternoon, and the secretary's first stop will be Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Alaska, where he will receive briefings on missile defense and homeland defense.

While there, the secretary “will have an opportunity to thank service members and their families, who are playing a vital role in our nation's defense in Alaska,” the admiral said.

Hagel will then travel to Singapore, where he will deliver remarks at the annual Shangri-La Dialogue and hold a series of bilateral and multilateral meetings with other ministers of defense.

“This will be his fifth trip to the Asia-Pacific region,” Kirby said, and it comes on the heels of Hagel’s successful trip last month to Japan, China and Mongolia, and his hosting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN defense ministers in Hawaii.

Hagel initiated the informal meeting of the ASEAN defense ministers, and it was the first meeting ever held on American soil.

“It is an important opportunity to build on the momentum we've achieved in strengthening our engagement, our alliances and our partnerships in the Pacific region,” Kirby added.

From Singapore, the secretary will travel to Brussels to participate in his fourth NATO Defense Ministers’ Meeting.

“He views this as a particularly important meeting,” Kirby said, “as it is the first since Russia's incursions into Ukraine and the last before September's NATO Summit in Wales.”

As Hagel discussed earlier this month in his speech at the Wilson Center here in Washington, the admiral added, “the secretary believes our European allies must use this crisis as an opportunity to revitalize NATO and enhance their commitments to collective defense, so I certainly expect that will be a major theme of his discussions while in Brussels.”

Next, Hagel will visit Romania, a valued NATO ally. Kirby said the stop gives Hagel a chance to visit sailors aboard a U.S. Navy ship that will be in port there and to consult bilaterally with Romania's minister of defense on ways to strengthen NATO's deterrents.

From Romania, the secretary will travel to France to participate in the 70th anniversary commemorations of D-Day with President Barack Obama, other cabinet officials, and leaders from around the world.

“Hagel has been looking forward to paying tribute to the heroes of D-Day for some time,” Kirby said, “and he will also have the opportunity, while there, to meet bilaterally with his French counterpart.”

Biographies:
[Chuck Hagel](#)

6. Russia Must De-escalate or Risk Isolation, Hagel Says (05-23-2014)

By Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, May 23, 2014 – Russia must work to de-escalate tensions along its border with Ukraine, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said on PBS’s “Charlie Rose Show” last night.

Hagel said there is some evidence that Russia is making a “minor movement” away from the eastern and southern borders of Ukraine, but nothing significant.

Russia still has about 40,000 troops near the border.

Hagel pointed to defensive moves NATO has made in response to Russia’s annexation of Crimea and threats to the rest of Ukraine. The 28 NATO nations have added aircraft to the Baltic Air Policing mission. NATO airborne warning and control aircraft are operating over Poland and Romania. NATO ships are operating in the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. And NATO has bulked up the exercise program in Eastern Europe -- specifically in the Baltic Republics and Poland.

These moves have reassured the eastern NATO allies. But Ukraine is not a member of NATO -- it is a partner. “We are helping the Ukrainians,” Hagel said. “We are complying with many other requests. We are trying to find a diplomatic solution to this. President Obama said there won't be -- can't be -- a military solution to this.”

Russian President Vladimir Putin is isolating his country, Hagel said. “How many countries around the world are supporting what the Russians are doing? Not many,” the secretary said. “We had a vote in the last few weeks here at the United Nations on this issue in the general assembly and I don't know if they got 10 votes.”

Russia’s actions in Ukraine have galvanized the countries of Europe, which are now are demonstrating a solidarity not seen since the fall of the Soviet Union, he said.

“If you want to align yourself with a totalitarian government, if that’s where you think your future is on any issue, that's certainly the Russians’ option,” Hagel said. “But I think the world is going in a different direction. The world is going toward more freedom, more options, more rights, and more democracy.”

Biographies:
[Chuck Hagel](#)

Related Sites:
[Secretary Of Defense Chuck Hagel Is Interviewed On PBS’s “Charlie Rose Show”](#)

[7. Ukrainians Deserve to Choose Own Path Too, U.S. Ambassador Says \(05-23-2014\)](#)

This blog post by U.S. Ambassador to Spain James Costos was originally published on [El Mundo's](#) website on May 23.

Ukrainians Deserve to Choose Their Own Path Too *By U.S. Ambassador to Spain James Costos*

Recently, while reading the news about Ukraine, I was struck by a photo of an unarmed Ukrainian man facing down a dozen Russian paramilitary troops in the streets of Sevastapol. Alone, naked to the waist, hands held high up above his head, he seems to implore the soldiers, whose faces are covered in black, to stop. But they pay him no heed.

As I watch the campaign for the European parliamentary elections from Madrid, deliberative and above all peaceful, I find the contrast with what is happening here and not so far away in Ukraine surreal and striking.

Public opinion polling shows that the number one concern in Spain is unemployment. When the citizens of this country take to the streets - this is most often their issue. That is why my team and I have prioritized working with the government, civil society, and the private sector to help Spaniards maximize their economic opportunity and chart a brighter future through education and entrepreneurship. We can afford to focus on these kinds of conversations because in Spain, vital questions about fundamental freedoms have long been answered.

On May 25, Spaniards and other EU citizens will go to the polls to choose a new European parliament. Every citizen of voting age who chooses to do so will be able to take part. There is no threat of violence, no concern about sabotage, no prospect of intimidation or fear. No shadowy armed men standing in the streets to block their path.

Ukrainians are also going to the polls on May 25, to choose a new president in what may well be the most important elections in the country's history and certainly for the country's future. But the confidence of their aspirations is dampened by a real threat to the same freedoms that we ourselves hold dear and often take for granted. In Ukraine, the top concern among citizens, according to recent polls, is the very survival of their state.

The Ukrainian government is doing everything it can to make the upcoming elections credible, inclusive, transparent, and peaceful. The EU, U.S., NATO, and the OSCE are all offering their support. International media and observers have been given access to all areas of the country. Political competition is open - with all existing parties able to participate, and new parties being offered electoral training. Every effort is being made to ensure all Ukrainians can go to the polls - including in Crimea.

But not all of Ukraine's citizens may have the opportunity to exercise this basic, democratic freedom. Russia is working to destabilize the country. Its troops remain on Ukraine's borders, despite statements to the contrary. Separatists backed by Moscow are staging military attacks on local institutions, intimidating members of the community who speak out. Ordinary citizens, like the man in the photo, are powerless in their protest.

This is wrong. All of us are entitled to fundamental human rights and democratic freedoms. Those of us who value them need to stand with this man and with all Ukrainians in solidarity.

Russia's aggression has violated international law and challenged the future of Europe. The best way to stand up to this behavior is for the U.S. and Europe to remain united in support of the rights of citizens to make their own choices.

Just as Spaniards from Ceuta to Santander have a choice on May 25, so should Ukrainians. The international community as a whole must stand alongside Ukraine in the defense of this freedom. The elections and the future of Ukraine should be in the hands of the Ukrainian people, and no one else. Everyone else should get out of the way.

8. Dempsey: Changing World Requires New Strategies (05-22-2014)

By Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

ABOARD A U.S. MILITARY AIRCRAFT, May 22, 2014 – The world has changed and because of it, protecting NATO's eastern and southern flanks has to be a priority, Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey said today at the end of the NATO Chiefs of Defense Meeting in Brussels.

The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said he has attended many NATO meetings and this was, by far, the most interesting, with many of his fellow chiefs of staff joining in the discussion.

The chiefs are preparing their best military advice to present to their civilian leaders in advance of the September 3-4 NATO Summit in Wales.

With the winding down of operations in Afghanistan and Russia's annexation of Crimea and threats to Ukraine, NATO may be at an inflection point, Dempsey said.

Much has changed since the Chicago Summit two years ago. Then, the alliance was concerned with how to responsibly end the war in Afghanistan and how to maintain military capabilities despite declining budgets.

"This summit will focus on the changing security environment related to Russia's activities as well as the inherent instability that is now at least the near-term outcome of the Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa," Dempsey said in an interview as he flew back to Washington.

On the eastern flank the threat comes from Russia acting in what Dempsey described as a dangerous and provocative manner. The southern flank is different. "Dealing with the threats and influences that are emanating out of the Middle East and North Africa into NATO's southern flank requires more than just the military instrument of power," he said. "It requires cooperation with law enforcement, public diplomacy, border control, customs, and that's not something that comes naturally to NATO."

Terrorism, criminal networks, drug trafficking, and human trafficking are just some of the problems on NATO's southern flank.

The United States and NATO have been very successful in suppressing al-Qaida elements in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Dempsey said. "But the al-Qaida ideology has adapted and has decentralized," he added.

At the same time, the Arab Spring is creating political instability in North Africa and the Middle East with al-Qaida taking advantage of the instability.

"Now you find these groups are spread across an arc that runs roughly from Pakistan across the Arabian Peninsula, across the Middle East and North Africa and all the way down into Nigeria with Boko Haram," Dempsey said.

The southern flank will require different tools, Dempsey said. The chiefs talked about speaking with the European Union. "They actually have the mandate to do things like build partner capacity, law enforcement, customs and border controls and so forth," the chairman said.

The alliance needs to maintain the ability to do out-of-area operations, "but we also have to realize something has changed close to home -- the eastern flank and southern flank -- and that requires us to refocus on the threats that are real," Dempsey said.

Biographies:

[Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey](#)

Related Sites:

[Special Report: Travels With Dempsey](#)