

Beat: Miscellaneous

Nearly half of all UK forces to leave Afghanistan in 2013

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USPA News - The British government plans to withdraw nearly half of all its troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2013, part of a security handover to Afghan forces which will lead to the end of combat operations by NATO forces by the end of 2014, officials said on Wednesday. British Prime Minister David Cameron told parliament that approximately 4,300 British troops are expected to leave Afghanistan by the end of 2013. About 500 of those troops were already expected to return home by Christmas next week, and the remaining 3,800 troops are now set to withdraw by the end of 2013. "Because of the success of our forces and Afghan national security forces and the fact that we are moving from mentoring at battalion level to mentoring at brigade level by the end of 2013, we will be able to see troops come home in two relatively even steps - 2013 and 2014 - probably leaving around 5,200 troops after the end of 2013," Cameron told the House of Commons.

There are currently more than 102,000 foreign troops in Afghanistan, including some 68,000 U.S. troops and 9,500 British soldiers. The British Ministry of Defense said it is still working out the exact details on how force levels will be reduced exactly, but said they will be conducted in line with operational requirements and the transition process. "We have consistently said that there will not be a cliff-edge reduction in troop numbers at the end of 2014," British Defense Secretary Philip Hammond said. "This gradual drawdown is firmly in line with the planning of our ISAF partners and the advice of military commanders. UK forces will continue to operate alongside their Afghan counterparts, albeit in lower numbers, until our combat operations cease at the end of 2014" The officials recognized "huge challenges" remain for the Afghan people, but emphasized the drawdown is the result of Afghan forces increasingly taking the lead. In Helmand province, where British forces are stationed, there are now about 80,000 Afghan security service members.

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