

Biden to withdraw all troops from Afghanistan by 9/11

President Biden has decided to withdraw military forces from Afghanistan by September 11, 2021, the twentieth anniversary of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, a U.S. official confirmed to CBS News.

President Biden is expected to announce Wednesday his decision to begin the drawdown of U.S. forces before May 1 and the plan to have all the troops out of the country by September 11, at the latest.

According to a senior administration official, Mr. Biden has made the determination that the best path forward to protect American interests is to end the war in Afghanistan to address the global threat picture of today that includes China, pandemics, and terrorism in places across the globe.

The U.S. went into Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks to prevent terrorists from launching more attacks from Afghanistan. The Biden administration has determined that al Qaeda does not currently possess an external plotting capability, according to the official.

There will be counterterrorism capabilities that remain in the region to counter the potential reemergence of al Qaeda and hold the Taliban to its commitment that al Qaeda will not grow its capabilities.

An Afghan government official texted a response to the news: "Well we now have to charter our own way forward." The Afghanistan government is concerned about the withdrawal of U.S. troops; Afghan National Security Adviser Hamdullah Mohib predicts civil war will ensue.

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The Biden administration has had to contend with a May 1 deadline negotiated by the Trump administration with the Taliban last year in a deal that called for a reduction of violence. The deadline of September 11, according to the official, is not “conditions-based.”

The Taliban has threatened to harm U.S. troops if there is a break from the May 1 deadline. The official said the Taliban knows any violence against U.S. forces will prompt “a forceful response.”

The U.S. has been consulting with NATO allies and will coordinate the withdrawal of NATO forces within the U.S. timeframe. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and Secretary of State Antony Blinken are traveling to Brussels on Wednesday.

The Biden administration is still pushing for the diplomatic process to find a political settlement between the Taliban and the Afghan government. The next peace negotiations will take place in Istanbul later this month, and the senior administration official said the Biden administration is committed to ensuring that women are both participating in the talks as well as the government.

The Washington Post first reported the president’s plans.

Some Republicans were vocal in their criticism. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said in a speech on the Senate floor that Mr. Biden was making a “grave mistake.”

“Precipitously withdrawing U.S. forces from Afghanistan is a grave mistake. It is retreat in the face of an enemy that has not yet been vanquished and abdication of American leadership,” McConnell said.

GOP Senator Jim Inhofe called Mr. Biden’s decision “outrageous,” and Senator Joni Ernst said that it was “concerning.”

“I think a random withdrawal just because you’re celebrating an anniversary is not the right decision,” Ernst said.

Republican Congressman Michael McCaul, the ranking member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said that he was “shocked and extremely concerned” by reports of Mr. Biden’s decision.

“This premature withdrawal shows a complete disregard for the realities on the

ground and will not only put Afghans at risk but endanger the lives of U.S. citizens at home and abroad. I have urgently requested details on this decision and strongly urge the president to reconsider,” McCaul said in a statement. The congressman had previously pushed back against the Trump administration’s decision to slash the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

Some Democrats, too, responded to the news of the withdrawal with some skepticism. Democratic Senator Bob Menendez, the chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, told reporters on Tuesday that he wants “to hear the administration’s rationale” for pulling out of Afghanistan.

“I just am concerned that after so much blood and national treasure that we don’t lose what we were seeking to achieve,” Menendez said. He added that he will “certainly will not be supportive of any assistance to Afghanistan if there is backsliding on civil society [and] the rights that women have achieved.”

“If the Taliban ultimately doesn’t keep its obligations, then there will be consequences and one of them will be that there will be no money flowing. So I don’t know how they will rebuild the country,” Menendez said.

Democratic Senator Jack Reed expressed unease over the decision, saying that the U.S. must “maintain a presence for regional stability.”

“This should be seen as transitional, not as closure,” Reed said.

But other lawmakers welcomed the news. Senator Bernie Sanders, an independent who caucuses with Democrats, said in a statement that Mr. Biden was making “the brave and right decision.”

“We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to every U.S. and coalition service member who has served in Afghanistan since 2001, and we will never forget the over 2,300 U.S. service members who gave their lives there. We also remember the over 100,000 Afghan civilians who have been killed in this war,” Sanders said. “The United States must remain committed to diplomatic, economic, and humanitarian support for Afghanistan even as we bring this military intervention to an end.”

Democratic Congressman Ro Khanna also praised the decision.

“I applaud President Biden for achieving an impossibility here in Washington:

ending a forever war. It is an act of extraordinary political courage and vision. After 20 years, thousands of lives lost, and trillions of dollars spent, we are finally bringing home our troops from Afghanistan. President Biden campaigned on this popular policy and is now delivering on that promise,” Khanna said.

The U.S. launched its operation in Afghanistan in October of 2001. The engagement in Afghanistan is the longest conflict in American history.

Margaret Brennan contributed to this report.

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