

# Obama Signs on to Britain's Plan For Indefinite Stay in Afghanistan

by Ramtanu Maitra

At Lisbon, attending the Nov. 19-20 NATO heads-of-state summit, President Obama backtracked from his earlier commitment to start withdrawal from Afghanistan beginning July 2011, and invoked the end of 2014 as the new date for ending the war. In fact, he banished from his lexicon the word "withdrawal" vis-à-vis Afghanistan. Now, July 2011 has become simply the beginning of a "transition," an American analyst pointed out.

At a joint press conference with the other NATO leaders, Obama said: "First, we aligned our approach on the way forward in Afghanistan, particularly on a transition to full Afghan lead, that will begin in early 2011 and will conclude in 2014.

"It is important for the American people to remember that Afghanistan is not just an American battle. We are joined by a NATO-led coalition made up of 48 nations with over 40,000 troops from allied and partner countries. And we honor the service and sacrifice of every single one.

"With the additional resources that we've put in place, we're now achieving our objective of breaking the Taliban's momentum and doing the hard work of training Afghan security forces and assisting the Afghan people. And I want to thank our allies who committed additional trainers and mentors to support the vital mission of training Afghan forces. With these commitments I am confident that we can meet our objective.

"Here in Lisbon we agreed that early 2011 will mark the beginning of a transition to Afghan responsibility, and we adopted the goal of Afghan forces taking the lead for security across the country by the end of 2014. This is a goal that President Karzai has put forward."

While the policy was ostensibly put in place in Lisbon by the U.S. President, in reality, it was formulated by Britain, months ago, in conjunction with U.S.

Special Envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke, and Gen. David Petraeus, who is the current Commander, International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and Commander, U.S. Forces Afghanistan (USFOR-A). Obama, Holbrooke, and Petraeus are now mobilized to push through a British-run, centuries-old policy towards Afghanistan.

## Obama's Policy Drafted in London

This old British policy towards Afghanistan was laid out in detail by the former U.K. Ambassador to Afghanistan-Pakistan, Sherard Cowper-Coles, a trusted colleague of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair and of Britain's empire-servers, before the U.K. Foreign Affairs Committee, where he testified on Nov. 9. Cowper-Coles said a 50-year aid program would be needed, backed up by a "vigorous" political process. More importantly, he warned of "chaos and civil war" if British troops left Afghanistan "precipitately," or within the previously mooted, but much derided, timetable of five years. While serving as Ambassador to Kabul, Cowper-Coles had suggested U.K. forces retain a presence in Afghanistan for 30 years.

What Cowper-Coles presented at London that day at the House of Commons dovetailed nicely with the Obama Administration's resolve to move away from the earlier stated withdrawal timetable and to step up occupation in Afghanistan. That includes increasing drone attacks to kill all and sundry in Pakistan's tribal areas, and even to put boots on Pakistan's soil. President Obama has jacked up the U.S. troop level to 90,000 during his two years in office, increased drone attacks inside Pakistan significantly, killing more Pakistanis than ever before. And now, he has just introduced M-1 Abrams tanks with 160 mm guns for deployment in the plains of Afghanistan, and is reportedly planning to put special ops forces inside Pakistan, while stating repeatedly that the war in Afghanistan

cannot be won militarily. If the war cannot be won militarily, one may ask, why gear up this killing machine?

Cowper-Coles had the same mantra as well. "There is no military solution. The more Taliban we kill, the more difficult it is to negotiate a sustainable settlement. This is a question of a political problem needing a multilevel political settlement—both regionally and internally," he said. He also warned those arguing for a with-

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—U.K. Amb. Cowper-Cowles, on how to "negotiate" with the Afghan tribes

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drawal of troops, "If we were to leave precipitately, there would be chaos."

That Cowper-Coles was speaking for both Washington and London at the Foreign Affairs Committee was evident. He said his American counterpart, Richard Holbrooke, "'gets' Afghanistan in the way few other American policymakers do," understanding that it requires more than military force to resolve the conflict. "The problem often lies elsewhere in Washington, and sometimes, if the only or main tool in your toolbox is a hammer, every problem can look like a nail," he said.

### **Emergence of Old Colonial Ghost**

What Cowper-Coles is pushing in his 50-year-stay plan is to move the troops out of combat areas, and garrison them inside Afghanistan, after putting the so-called moderate Taliban in power in various provinces. He referred to this policy as the use of two hands—the right hand for hitting out if the Afghans do not "behave," while the left hand will hand out encomia when the Afghans serve the interest of the foreign troops. The right hand is represented by thousands of foreign troops who will remain garrisoned inside Afghanistan for decades to come. He said this is the policy that was adopted by

Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of British India, 1899-1905, to pacify the Afghans.

The British Raj in India in the 19th Century had a trying time pacifying the Afghan tribes, but still did not want to leave the area. For a while, the British policy oscillated between the backward and forward bases. Following the drawing up of the Durand Line in 1893, a line literally drawn on the sand, and never accepted by any Afghan ruler, the British Raj drew up an agreement with then-Afghan ruler Amir Abdul Rehman. One of the clauses of that agreement stated: "The Government of India will at no time exercise interference in the territories lying beyond this line on the side of Afghanistan, and His Highness the Amir will at no time exercise interference in the territories lying beyond this line on the side of India."

However, for obvious reasons, the Afghan tribes did not accept the foreign troops waiting across the border for an opportunity to hurt them. After it became evident to the tribes that the British troops were slowly moving into the tribal areas, a series of attacks by local Afghan tribes led to a full-fledged war between the two in Waziristan (now part of Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas).

Following that 1897-98 war, the controversy between the backward and the forward schools assumed a new meaning. Now the controversy was whether the tribal territory up to the Durand Line should be occupied, or whether the British should fall back to the Indus River. The tribes who had neither been consulted nor considered did not like this interference in their affairs. They resented the loss of their independence, and uprisings continued.

To meet the situation, Lord Curzon adopted a policy of "withdrawal and concentration"—withdrawal from the advanced posts, employment of the tribal forces for the defense of the tribal country, concentrations of British forces in British territory as the second line of defense, and the improvement of the means of transport and communication.

What Cowper-Coles is now suggesting for Afghanistan, which is swallowed, hook, line, and sinker by Obama, Holbrooke, and Petraeus, is to lay down the law to the Afghans, in the way Curzon had dictated to the tribes. Needless to say, with 100,000-plus armed-to-the-teeth soldiers garrisoned inside, the right-hand strike would be quite deadly.

But before garrisoning the troops, a negotiated arrangement would be necessary to allocate areas to dif-



White House/Pete Souza

*President Obama is now carrying out the British plan for endless war in Afghanistan. He is shown here on a Dec. 3 visit with U.S. troops at Bagram Air Field.*

ferent Afghan groups. Cowper-Coles, on London's Radio 4, described how he envisages it could be done. He said it would be like a double-decker bus: "On the bottom deck are all the internal parties. On the top deck all the external parties. There's an American driver, a British back seat driver, and a UN conductor. The bus is painted in Afghan colors and there's Saudi money in the petrol tank." He also said Britain should use its "premier league" influence in Washington to give the Obama Administration "the courage and the cover to start on the political process."

### **Inroads into the Pentagon**

Cowper-Coles is the mouthpiece of Britain's empire-server. He has served them well for over three decades. Besides his tenures as ambassador to Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan, and as Britain's Af-Pak envoy, he was Blair's man to muzzle the Serious Fraud Office investigation into allegations of multibillion-pound bribery of the Saudi ruling family by BAE Systems, Britain's leading defense contractor.

On the ground, however, Britain has deployed another British Foreign Office individual, Mark Sedwill, who had been the private secretary to Blair's then-Foreign Secretary Jack Straw during the period leading up to the British military support to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Sedwill now wears the hat of NATO's top civilian representative in Afghanistan, and he was at the summit in Lisbon.

Days before the Lisbon summit, Sedwill contended that the 2011 withdrawal date is not realistic. At Lisbon, on the 2014 transition concept, he said: "We think that goal is realistic, and we have made plans to achieve it, but of course, if circumstances agree, it could be sooner, absolutely." Sedwill said the troop withdrawal starting next year will be "shallow" and eventually accelerate, but did not elaborate.

If Cowper-Coles has virtually captured the not-insignificant hulk of Holbrooke in the British empire-server's pocket, Sedwill's achievements were not insignificant either. Take for instance, the report put out by the *New York Times* on May 15, 2010. At a Pentagon meeting, the American military brass and security people were startled to find a British diplomat, Sedwill, the new senior civilian representative of NATO in Afghanistan, and on that day, he was acting as then-ISAF/USFOR-A Commander Gen. Stanley McChrystal's proxy. It was not an isolated incident. The *Times* said that McChrystal and Sedwill traveled together every other week to hot spots around Afghanistan. They often teamed up to visit President Hamid Karzai. And with McChrystal's support, Sedwill turned what had been a low-profile advisor's role into a key civilian leadership post—one in which he vies for visibility with the American Ambassador in Kabul, Karl W. Eikenberry.

"Partly because of his interpersonal skills and partly because of his backing by McChrystal, he has emerged very fast," said Holbrooke, "McChrystal immediately

and with great skill began using Sedwill as his political arm, thus improving his effectiveness.” McChrystal knows how important the British are in Washington. Britain has its “premier league” influence in Washington. Cowper-Coles said.

The *Times* pointed out that Sedwill’s emergence served the United States’ demand to install a powerful viceroy who would function as a counterpart to the military commander. “Previous efforts to install a powerful civilian chief had foundered because of Hamid Karzai’s objections and European fears that a viceroy would dilute the authority of the United Nations’ special representative,” the *Times* said.

Sedwill fills out what Holbrooke described as a quartet of civilian leaders: himself; Ambassador Eikenberry; Staffan de Mistura, an Italian-Swedish diplomat who represents the United Nations; and Vygaudas Usackas, a Lithuanian who is the European Union’s special representative. “Of these four, though, only Sedwill can call himself General McChrystal’s wingman,” the *Times* said. “I wouldn’t have taken the job if I hadn’t been confident in my relationship with McChrystal,” he said. “He probably would have sought to block anyone he didn’t have confidence in.”

### **Britain Decides on Afghanistan**

In light of the “premier league” status of Britain with President Obama, it is only natural that what comes out of Washington is a lot of hemming and hawing. Obama may say that he would like the U.S. troops to begin withdrawal from Afghanistan in July 2011, but it did not meet the approval of London. And, hence, he had to come around and toe the line the British drew.

The end of 2014 is now being invoked by the U.S. and its allies as the key date in the war. But, it has not met the approval of the “backseat driver.” At Lisbon, President Karzai complained to Obama that the NATO troops break down Afghan citizens’ doors at night and arrest people without even letting Kabul know about it. He felt this not only increases Afghan civilian casualties, but it shows Kabul does not have any veto power. Kabul has no power to protect its sovereignty. Karzai should note that, when it comes to Afghanistan, and in a number of other foreign policy areas, Washington does not have the will or determination to exercise its sovereign authority based on what is good for both Afghanistan and the United States. Instead, it has willingly handed sovereign authority to Britain.

### **Third Man**

A third British Crown operative, no longer in Afghanistan, is pivotal to London’s hands-on control of their puppet in the Oval Office. Michael Semple, known among MI6 colleagues as “Lawrence of Afghanistan” for his decades of work among the Pushtun tribes in the South, was expelled from the country several years ago by President Karzai, after being caught bankrolling and arming local Taliban units on behalf of the British.

Whatever his shortcomings, Karzai has come to see the British as his enemy, working constantly behind his back to re-install the Taliban in power in Kabul, just as Cowper-Cowles spelled it out at Whitehall.

Upon his expulsion from Afghanistan, Semple was redeployed to the United States to sell himself as the primo back channel between President Obama and Taliban leader Mullah Omar. He was installed as a resident fellow at the Carr Center at Harvard University, where he rubs shoulders with Samantha Power, a White House advisor on “humanitarian” interventionism, and the spouse of Obama Chicago crony and economic advisor Cass Sunstein.

From his Harvard perch, Semple engineered a recent scam against Karzai, by infiltrating a British-run imposter into Karzai’s own secret back channels to the Taliban. Thoroughly iced out of Karzai’s back-channel talks, and desperate to penetrate them, British intelligence ran a covert operation, with Semple as a central player. Semple appeared in early October at U.K. Parliamentary hearings, to extol the virtues of Mullah Mansour, a top Taliban figure and, in Semple’s words, the man who could deliver the Taliban to the negotiating table, and a ceasefire and power-sharing deal—just what Cowper-Cowles spelled out as the key to London’s 50-year occupation scheme.

After promoting Mansour, the British surfaced a look-alike imposter (a Pakistani shopkeeper) and delivered him directly to Kabul, where he participated in at least two face-to-face meetings with President Karzai, before an aide exposed the hoax. While it is not clear whether the British hoax succeeded or not, the intent was clear, and the role of Semple was covered up in American and British media coverage.

With Cowper-Cowles, Sedwill, and Semple, London has captured key Obama Afghan policymakers in its web—including President Obama himself—a reality that may or may not have yet dawned on Secretary of Defense Robert Gates or Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.