

# *U.S. President Barack Obama Orders Expansion of U.S. War in Afghanistan*

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Kabul, June 10 (RHC)-- In news from Afghanistan, U.S. President Barack Obama has approved giving the U.S. military greater ability to conduct airstrikes and assist Afghan forces fighting the Taliban.

The U.S. military will once again carry out airstrikes against Taliban militants in Afghanistan, the Associated Press reported Thursday night, a decision that comes amid rising violence in the war-torn nation.

The U.S. currently has just under 10,000 troops stationed in Afghanistan, where it has been at war with Taliban insurgents since 2002. Since the end of 2014, however, those troops have primarily served in support role for Afghan security forces rather than engaging in direct combat, with U.S. airstrikes focusing on al-Qaida and the Islamic State group rather than the Taliban.

But the decreased U.S. presence -- down from a high of 100,000 troops -- has not translated into decreased violence, with the United Nations declaring 2015 the worst year on record for Afghan civilians. At least 3,545 civilians were killed last year, according to the U.N., the majority by Taliban insurgents.

The U.S. decision to start bombing the Taliban again was reportedly made after “months of debate” at the White House, according to AP, and reflects “a broad desire across the Obama administration to give the military greater ability to help the Afghans fight and win the war.”

Under the new rules of engagement, U.S. troops will have “greater flexibility in how they partner with Afghan forces” and when they can call in airstrikes, AP reported.

A U.S. official told Reuters that the U.S. commander in Afghanistan, General John Nicholson, will now be allowed to deploy U.S. troops alongside conventional Afghan forces, not just for special operations.

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