

Pentagon approves troop withdrawal plan in Afghanistan, keeps larger bases

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U.S. Army soldiers from 1-506 Infantry Division set out on a patrol in Paktika Province, on the Afghan-Pakistan border. (Photo: AP)

Washington, December 4 (RHC)-- The Pentagon has approved plans for partial withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan, under which the US will remain in control of two larger bases in the war-ravaged country.

U.S. Army General Mark Milley, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, made the announcement, saying the United States plans to remove some 2,500 troops from Afghanistan and focus on a smaller number of bases, Reuters reported.

Offering the first details about the drawdown plan ordered by President Donald Trump last month, Milley told an event hosted by the Brookings Institution think tank that Washington would, however, keep “a couple of larger bases, with several satellite bases.” The top U.S. Army general declined to disclose which bases in Afghanistan would be closed.

The largest American bases in Afghanistan include Kandahar Air Field in the country’s south and Bagram Air Field in the east, just north of the Afghan capital of Kabul.

Milley also said the U.S. would keep up what he called its two core missions, namely helping Afghan security forces involved in a fight with local Taliban militants and carrying out operations against Takfiri militants, including Daesh, who have exploited the US-led invasion of the country and strengthened their foothold there.

Trump has ordered the partial drawdown of US troops from Iraq and Afghanistan to be completed by January 15, five days before he leaves office. The pullout would leave about 2,500 troops in Afghanistan and 2,500 in Iraq at the beginning of the next U.S. administration.

In an agreement reached between the U.S. and the Taliban last February, the Trump administration promised to pull out all its troops by mid-2021 in return for the Taliban to stop their attacks on U.S.-led occupation foreign forces in Afghanistan.

The Taliban agreed to negotiate a permanent ceasefire and a power-sharing formula with the Afghan government. Milley’s announcement came hours after the Afghan government and Taliban representatives reached a preliminary deal to press on with peace talks.

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