

Last week President Obama made a surprise pre-dawn trip to Afghanistan to mark the one year anniversary of the killing of Osama bin Laden and to sign a document further extending the US presence in that country. The president said, "we're building an enduring partnership...As you stand up, you will not stand alone." What that means in practice is that the US will continue its efforts to prop up the government in Afghanistan for another ten years beyond the promised withdrawal date of 2014.

To those of us who believe the US should leave Afghanistan immediately, the president retorted, "We must give Afghanistan the opportunity to stabilize." But how long will that take, when we have already fought the longest war in our nation's history at incredible human and economic cost to the nation and no end is in sight?

There is little evidence of any sustained increase in stability in Afghanistan and, in fact, April saw the loss of 34 more American troops and an escalation of violence and upheaval. Within 90 minutes of the president's departure, seven more people were killed in Kabul by a suicide bomber. It is clear that our presence in that country is not creating any real stability. With Osama bin Laden dead and the al Qaeda presence in Afghanistan virtually non-existent, we are reduced to nation-building in a nation where there is no real nation to build.

We should ask ourselves why Obama's trip was a "surprise" visit rather than a normal state visit. The reason is that after ten years it is still far too dangerous to travel in or out of that country. Does that not speak much more loudly than the president's optimistic words about the amazing progress we have made in Afghanistan?

What does our enduring commitment mean? Ask the South Koreans, where the United States has maintained an "enduring commitment" of US troops more than fifty years after hostilities ended. By some estimates the United States taxpayer is saddled with a 40 billion dollar annual price tag for our "enduring commitment" to maintaining a US military presence in Korea. Polls suggest that particularly younger Koreans are tired of the US military presence in their country and would prefer us to leave. The same is true for the residents of Okinawa, who have argued strongly and with some recent success for American troops to leave their island.

The Soviets believed the road to their goal for a universal form of government ran through Afghanistan. They were also wrong and paid an enormous price. However, after nine years and

15,000 Soviet lives lost, the communist regime in Moscow realized its mistake and withdrew from that country. The Soviet withdrawal was complete in early 1989. The Soviet Union by that time had further plunged into economic crisis, fueled in great part by its commitment to maintain a global empire of client states. Later that year, the Soviet world began crashing down, with first the collapse of Eastern European regimes and then the Soviet Union itself. That collapse produced an economic calamity for the successor states from which most have not yet fully recovered. It is not too late for the United States to learn what the Soviets discovered too late, back in 1989. Mr. President: the time to leave Afghanistan is today, not in 2024.