Has the War in Afghanistan Been Worth It?

President Obama is planning to withdraw U.S. combat troops from Afghanistan by the end of the year.

**YES**

On Sept. 11, 2001, Afghanistan was home to Osama bin Laden and his terrorist organization, Al Qaeda, the group responsible for the 9/11 attacks. Today, Bin Laden is dead and what’s left of the Al Qaeda leadership has fled to Pakistan and beyond.

But the United States has achieved much more than vengeance for the 9/11 attacks. Afghanistan is no longer a base for terrorists. Instead, it serves as a base for the U.S., as it strives to suppress terrorism and Islamic extremism and stabilize a fragile Pakistan next door.

The U.S. and its allies have achieved a great deal in Afghanistan. The initial invasion quickly ousted the repressive Taliban regime, which had sheltered Al Qaeda. For all its faults and corruption, the current government of Afghanistan has proved durable and is on the verge of a peaceful transfer of power from President Hamid Karzai to an elected successor. That’s something that hasn’t happened in Afghanistan for decades. And, most important to Americans, the U.S. has succeeded in training the Afghan army so it will be able to defeat attempts by the Taliban to reclaim power.

More than 2,300 Americans have been killed in Afghanistan since 2001, many more have been wounded, and billions of dollars have been spent. That is a terrible cost, but the value earned in return—protecting the U.S. from terrorist attacks, preserving representative government in Afghanistan, and protecting U.S. interests in a volatile region—is priceless.

—THOMAS DONNELLY
American Enterprise Institute

**NO**

The war in Afghanistan has not been worth the steep cost Americans have paid in blood and treasure. Our military is stretched too thin and our troops are weary. Many men and women in uniform have served eight, nine, or even 10 deployments.

After the 9/11 attacks, I voted to authorize the use of force to go after Al Qaeda, the terrorist group that carried out the attack. I did not vote for a 13-year nation-building mission that has ended up costing us trillions of dollars and thousands of lives. More than 2,300 American soldiers have been killed in the war in Afghanistan and 17,000 have been wounded, many of them seriously. Tens of thousands of Afghan civilians have also been killed since the U.S. and its allies invaded in 2001.

We were all outraged when nearly 3,000 people were killed on 9/11. There had to be a response to that horrific attack, but it should have been directed solely at Al Qaeda and the Taliban leadership that protected the terrorist group. Instead, two nations and their people have become entangled in a bloody conflict whose effects will linger for both countries long after the final American soldier has left Afghanistan.

It’s time to end this madness and reinstate a defense policy that protects the United States instead of overextending our armed forces to serve as world policemen. People always ask me what my plan is for how to withdraw from Afghanistan, implying we cannot leave right away. I say: We just marched in; we can just march home.

—RON PAUL
Former Congressman and 2008 presidential candidate

**A 13-year nation-building mission has cost many lives and trillions of dollars.**