

On March 16, 2011, I joined my Co-Chairs of the Congressional Progressive Caucus Task Force on Peace and Security, and 76 other Members of Congress, in sending a letter to the President asking him to move swiftly to end America's longest war, the war in Afghanistan.

Since then, the Co-Chairs have continued to call on the Administration to move towards a significant, swift and sizeable reduction in our troops in Afghanistan, meeting or exceeding the number of troops on the ground before the escalation.

Similarly, the Democratic National Committee, of which I am vice-chair, called for a "sizeable and significant" drawdown beginning in July.

This week, the U.S. Conference of Mayors called for an end to the Afghanistan war. In poll after poll, the majority of Americans are consistently calling for an end to this war.

A significant redeployment of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, beginning next month, would send a clear message that the United States does not seek a permanent presence in Afghanistan. This move would recognize that we cannot afford the war in Afghanistan –costing nearly \$10 billion per month – while American families struggle to stay afloat amid the slow recovery of our nation's economy.

The Co-Chairs of the CPC Task Force on Peace and Security believe that a significant, swift and sizeable troop reduction in Afghanistan is necessary.

Anything less hurts our nation's future and is unacceptable. It is time to focus on securing a future of economic opportunity and prosperity for the American people, and the President must move swiftly and boldly to end the war in Afghanistan and bring our troops home now.

The President's announcement yesterday does not reflect a significant policy change in Afghanistan. This strategy does not represent a drawdown in Afghanistan, but rather aims at maintaining the status quo through the end of 2012.

Simply removing the 30,000 "surge" troops from Afghanistan means that by the end of summer 2012, we will be exactly where we were in late 2009. Tens of thousands of American soldiers will continue to fight a battle that their commanders insist will only end with a political solution. Peace in Afghanistan will depend ultimately on an Afghan solution, not on American soldiers.

Everyone seems tired of this war -- from Republicans and Democrats in Washington, to Afghans in Kabul, to Americans in Kansas. Administration officials acknowledged that due to America's mounting debt and deficits, war costs -- at \$113 billion annually for Afghanistan alone -- are no longer sustainable.

Republicans gave similar ground with Appropriations Chairman Harold Rogers and Defense Subcommittee member Jack Kingston expressing concern about the costs, the mission and the

lack of progress -- bolstering Republican Senator Dick Lugar's call for troop withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Nearly half the House weighed in during the recent Defense authorization debate with a call for an accelerated plan to drawdown troops and transition to Afghan control.

Moving beyond what Washington wants; consider the Afghans, who are at the receiving end of all of this. After a series of serious civilian casualties resulting from multiple indiscriminate NATO bombings, Afghan President Hamid Karzai has declared opposition to any and all air strikes on Afghan homes. This adds to Karzai's insistence that foreign forces must end night raids, stop unilateral operations, and stay off roads and out of Afghan villages.

The Afghan people are no more pleased than Karzai with America's continued presence – hardly a surprise given that General Petraeus has increased bombing throughout the country by 80 percent in the last year alone. According to a recent poll, nearly six out of 10 Afghans said Western troops should leave on or before the original July 2011 withdrawal date.

Only 17 percent say the deployment should be maintained longer. After spending hundreds of billions of American taxpayer dollars, the security and day-to-day life in many regions of Afghanistan isn't improving. Crime, economic opportunity and freedom of movement are getting worse, not better.

Availability of electricity, food, medical care and schools has shown little or no improvement in recent years. Afghans are witnessing more violence, not less; their support for the war is diminishing.

Nor are Americans pleased. Two-thirds are tired of this war and want the troops home, thinking, rightly, that the death of Osama bin Laden gave America the opportunity to close the book on a war without end.

For those who remain concerned about the Taliban, they can support the effective disarmament, demobilization and reintegration efforts already underway.

For those focused on al Qaeda, they should do what the RAND Corporation already reported as most effective – pursue policing, intelligence and negotiation tactics.

However, for both the Taliban and al Qaeda, a heavy air and troop force gets us nowhere.

For all these reasons and more, the case is clear:

We need to end this war in Afghanistan.