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With a new chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the way, as well as leadership changes at the CIA and Defense Department, the U.S. combat mission in Afghanistan is expected to continue — as it has for the past decade. That idea is not sitting well with a growing number of Americans and lawmakers across the political spectrum.

Without measurable progress to show, the case for sustained involvement in Afghanistan, particularly at current troop levels, is becoming harder to make. New leadership set to take charge of the defense and intelligence communities definitely have lots of hard work ahead of them. There are certainly advancements to build upon, but there is no telling how much longer support will last, including their own, to continue the mission as it stands now.

A more favorable strategy might entail moving away from a sizable ground combat force and relying more on a smaller number of specialized personnel — special operators, in particular. The coalition would still be intact. The only major difference would be in the number of personnel moving from village to village, defending near impenetrable mountain passes or patrolling terrain that is almost impossible to navigate.

Of course, a far more drastic option is the complete withdrawal of U.S. forces. It's a move that would have disastrous consequences for the region and global security.

For me, both as a Marine who served in Afghanistan and a member of the House Armed Services Committee, it is most frustrating that victory remains within reach. It has been that way for some time. But standing in the way are factors far beyond the control of the military men and women undertaking this dangerous mission.

One of these challenges is unreliable Afghan leadership. The country's government, from President Hamid Karzai down, has shown itself to be more interested in upholding the tenets of a corrupt political system than achieving progress on behalf of its people. In no way is this attributable to our military or to any of the civilians working the country's diplomatic channels. This is an inherent problem that only the Afghans can resolve, assuming the right amount of

pressure and encouragement is provided.

Militarily, the roadside bomb threat remains a significant problem. It's still the single largest source of U.S. casualties — as it was in Iraq for some time. Soldiers and Marines are suffering serious injuries, if not losing their lives, from bombs targeting them while they are in vehicles or on foot patrols. Only recently, after much persistence from me and a few others, have additional steps been taken to address this threat.

Even so, more needs to be done to incorporate new counter-roadside-bomb technology — and it needs to happen fast. There's no time for bureaucratic delays that seem to define the way business is done. Otherwise, roadside bombs will keep driving a wedge between our military and its objectives.

This also happens to fit right into the Obama administration's other shortcomings in Afghanistan, from the duration of time that elapsed until a decision was made on the current surge strategy, to mixed messages that have been sent to American service personnel and the rest of the world about our commitment to leaving only when the time is right. Take, for instance, the president's drawdown date and subsequent transition plans. Or even the president's detainee policy. There is an obvious lack of clarity on these points.

The same goes for the rules of engagement binding the hands of American troops. Unleashing the full force of the U.S. military can only occur when its capability is not stifled by political correctness.

There's still time to make necessary gains in Afghanistan, but the window of opportunity is closing. The Obama administration needs to renew its focus, define the parameters for success and stop echoing a misshapen worldview that puts American interests last. Only then will victory be possible.