



Barack Obama formally ordered the Pentagon on Tuesday to make plans for a full pullout of American troops from Afghanistan by the end of the year, pointing to a way out of the conflict that is reminiscent of his end to the Iraq campaign.

While the Obama administration reiterated that it would prefer to maintain a residual military presence in Afghanistan, the Afghan president, Hamid Karzai, has refused to sign an accord that would pave the way for some US forces to remain. That has forced the administration to begin a contingency plan for a full departure after Nato formally ends hostilities in November.

A similar rebuke from the Iraqi government prompted all almost all US troops to leave there in 2011.

Obama told Karzai during a Tuesday morning phone call that while he would prefer Karzai or his successor to sign the so-called bilateral security agreement reached with the Afghans in November, “the United States is moving forward with additional contingency planning,” according to a White House description of the call.

But defense secretary Chuck Hagel said Tuesday that it was prudent “to ensure adequate plans are in place to accomplish an orderly withdrawal by the end of the year should the United States not keep any troops in Afghanistan after 2014”.

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