

## Chief: Military 'focused' on 2011 exit date

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The military is focused on withdrawing from Afghanistan in two years and is already eyeing preparations for possible future missions.

Chief of Defence Staff Gen. Walter Natynczyk said he has "clear guidance" from the government for troops to pull out in 2011. While some experts believe the military is stretched too thin to stay any longer because many frontline troops have done several tours to the war zone, Natynczyk said officers have also carried a heavy load with security, training and working with government officials in Afghanistan.

"Really, the pressure is on those officers," he said. "At this point in time, we're focused on the 2011 (date) in terms of ending our military mission and we will look to resetting the force both from a people standpoint and an equipment standpoint and see what goes beyond that."

Natynczyk's remarks came after a meeting with chairman of the U.S. joint chiefs of staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, just one week before U.S. President Barack Obama visits Canada. Obama has ordered a review of operations in Afghanistan, and is expected to nearly double the U.S.'s current troop deployment of 33,000.

While the mission is expected to be high on the agenda when Obama sits down with Prime Minister Stephen Harper on Feb. 19, it's not known if he'll ask Canada to extend its role.

Yesterday, Mullen said he's aware of Canada's planned exit date, but did not discuss the policy during his visit.

"In the fight that we're in, having partners like this is absolutely vital," he said. "But it is for the government of Canada to make that decision, not for me or for anybody in my country."

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