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President Obama has admitted that US troops could remain in Afghanistan in significant numbers long after July 2011, the drawdown date Obama set just six months ago.

President Obama: "We did not say that, starting July 2011, suddenly there would be no troops from the United States or allied countries in Afghanistan. We didn't say we'd be switching off the lights and closing the door behind us. What we said is we'd begin a transition phase in which the Afghan government is taking on more and more responsibility."

President Obama made the comment while defending his decision to fire Afghan war commander Gen. Stanley McChrystal and replace him with Gen. David Petraeus, the architect of the so-called surge in Iraq. Despite the personnel change, Defense Secretary Robert Gates said Thursday the US Afghan war strategy is still on track.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates: "No one, be they adversaries or friends or especially our troops, should misinterpret these personnel changes as a slackening of this government's commitment to the mission in Afghanistan. We remain committed to that mission and to the comprehensive civil military strategy ordered by the President to achieve our goals there."