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Afghan base expansion aimed at Iran?

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Afghan base expansion aimed at Iran?

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Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan (file photo)

The US Congress has given a preliminary approval to a major expansion of US airbases in Afghanistan, reflecting Washington's wish to establish permanent bases there.

US President Barack Obama has asked for \$300 million to continue building three multimillion-dollar facilities in northern and southern Afghanistan.

One of the airbases is situated just north of the Afghan capital Kabul, while another airfield and a US marine base is to be set up in the southern province of Helmand.

A third base is also being constructed at Mazar-e Sharif to supply US forces in the north.

The three bases — which are being built strictly for US forces rather than their Afghan counterparts — are expected to be completed in the latter half of 2011.

This is despite President Barack Obama's promise of withdrawal by July 2011.

The long-term construction indicates that Pentagon plans to be staying in Afghanistan well into the future.

"These bases are intended for long term operations that have little to do with the current insurgency inside the country," Carl Osgood from the Executive Intelligence Review told Press TV.

"Think about the possibility of a US or Israeli strike on Iran, which seems to be temporarily off the table, but over the long term there are still people pushing for this strategy," he added.

Despite loud objections from some anti-war lawmakers in Congress — which is now increasingly reluctant to deepen the US involvement in Afghanistan — the money for the construction of the bases is coming.

The US House has already approved the fund, as has the Senate Appropriations Committee. The full Senate is also expected to pass the measure when it returns from its summer break in September.

To persuade Congress to approve the money, the Pentagon has said that it needs the capital to expand air support for NATO forces fighting against the Taliban in Afghanistan.

These measures are all considered part of a multi-year US plan to rule the skies of Afghanistan with overwhelming air power, despite the growing unhappiness of the American public with the Afghan war.

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