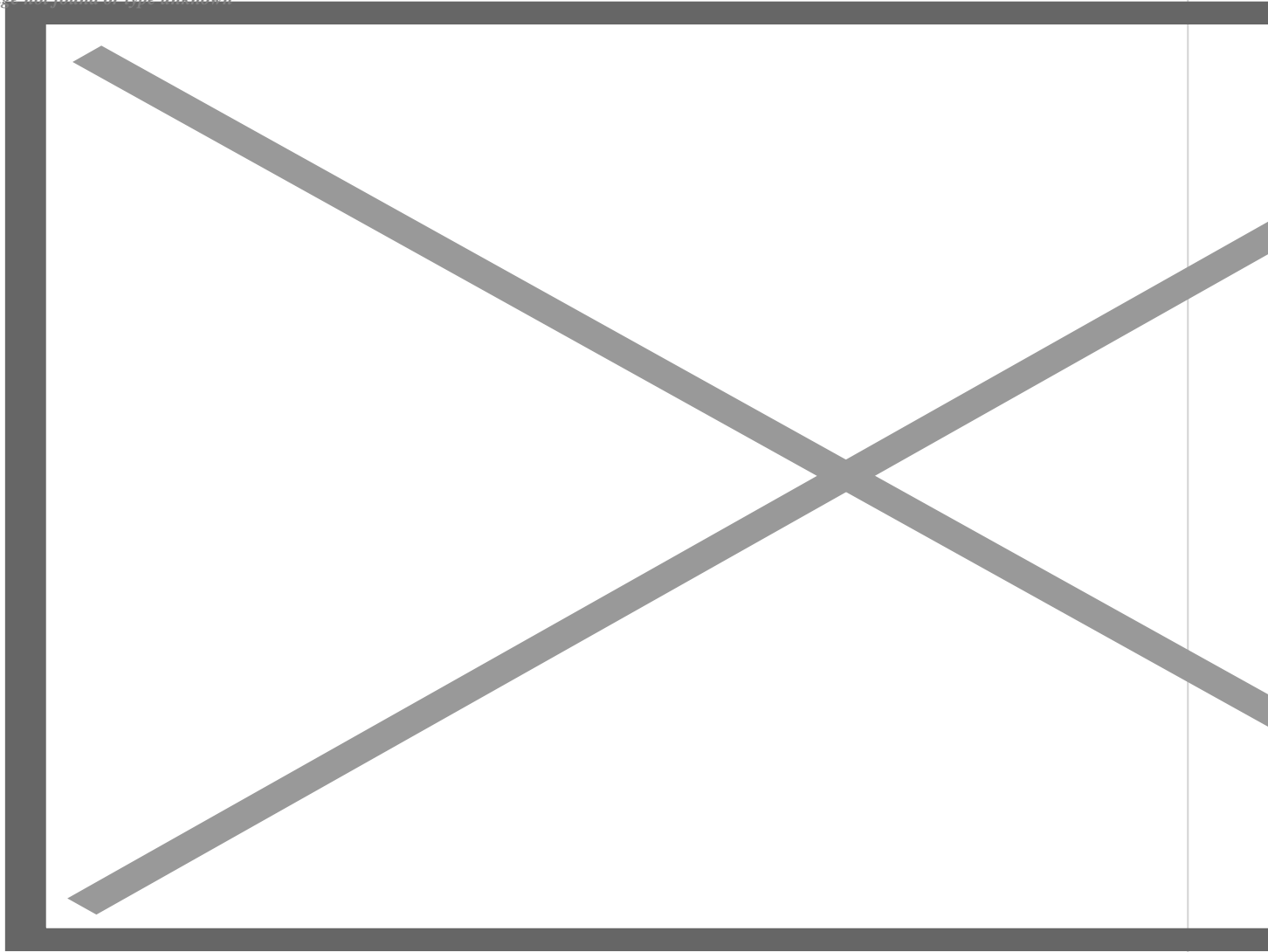


UK to follow U.S. in leaving Afghanistan

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London, April 15 (RHC)-- Following the announcement by the U.S. government that it is pulling its forces out of Afghanistan in just under six months, the UK has strongly signaled that it will follow the same

timetable.

The Ministry of Defense released a statement reiterating that any changes to the UK presence will be in keeping with the position of its NATO and U.S. allies. The defense ministry claims it is “working closely” with the UK’s allies “to support a secure and stable Afghanistan.”

"For there to be any chance of a lasting peace, the Taliban must engage meaningfully in a dialogue with the Afghan government," the MoD statement added. Earlier, U.S. officials said American troops will depart the Afghan arena by September 11, which coincides with the 20th anniversary of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001.

Addressing a meeting of NATO officials in Brussels on Wednesday, U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said: "I am here to work closely with our allies, with the [NATO] Secretary General [Jens Stoltenberg], on the principle that we have established from the start: In together, adapt together and out together."

Blinken added that the NATO allies would work closely in the coming months "on a safe, deliberate and coordinated withdrawal of our forces from Afghanistan." For his part, Nato Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, said in November last year that member states will leave Afghanistan together “in a coordinated way.”

The UK military has had a continuous presence in Afghanistan since late 2001 with 454 British service personnel killed in this 20-year period. The last British combat troops left in 2014, but around 750 remain as part of the Nato mission to ostensibly train Afghan forces.

There is no verifiable information on the current activities of UK Special Forces in Afghanistan.

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