



## Karzai Says Afghans Need Help Until 2024

Afghan President Hamid Karzai declared on December 8 that his country would not be capable of paying for the armed forces necessary to maintain internal security until at least 2024.

Karzai made the announcement at a news conference in Kabul with U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates. Karzai emphasized his country's dependence on the United States and NATO, while Gates, without committing America to any particular timetable, stated that the U.S. government understands "that it will be some time before Afghanistan is able to sustain its security forces entirely on its own."

Overshadowing the conference was the news that only hours earlier as many as a dozen people were killed during a raid by American forces in Laghman Province. The strike occurred to the east of Kabul, outside the provincial capital of Mehtar Lam.

Sayed Ahmed Safi, a spokesman for the Laghman governor, claimed that the attack took place "without any coordination with the Afghan forces or Afghan officials." Safi said both civilians and insurgents were among the dead. NATO confirmed the raid, noting that seven militants were killed, but had no "reports to substantiate those claims of harming civilians, including women and children."

While civilian casualties during military operations anger Afghan officials and citizens, Karzai nonetheless couldn't seem to emphasize strongly enough that Afghanistan is not ready to make a go of it alone. Speaking of the kind of military force required to maintain internal security throughout the entire nation, Karzai said, "For another 15 to 20 years, Afghanistan will not be able to sustain a force of that nature and capability with its own resources."

Secretary of Defense Gates was in Kabul specifically to discuss this topic with Karzai, especially in light of the slow withdrawal of American forces that is not even supposed to begin until July 2011, after first expanding the American deployment. Gates emphasized the possibility that as Afghanistan's economy improves, the country will be better able to bear the burden of maintaining its forces.

"Whether that is 15 or 20 years, we'll hope for accelerated economic development in Afghanistan," Gates said, mentioning, "As the Afghan economy expands, then the proportion of the costs of supporting the Afghan security forces will diminish."

The price tag for getting Afghan forces to the point of operating independently of the United States or NATO has been placed at as much as \$50 billion. This would be for a five-year build up of army and police to the 400,000-member level desired by General Stanley McChrystal, the American commander in Afghanistan.

Gates pointed out how much of an "eye opener" it was when American officials learned that the Taliban often pays its members more than the Afghan government pays its soldiers and police. A simple boost in pay would be vital to recruiting more Afghans to join the security forces.

Also mentioned by Gates was that Afghan forces were spread too thinly around the country. "Attrition is higher in the areas where the combat is heavier," he noted. "The reason is there aren't enough of them. And they basically fight until they die, or they go AWOL."

When asked if learning these basic facts about Afghanistan's security forces wasn't coming a bit "late in the game" during a war that has dragged on for eight years, Gates merely replied that "there's a lot of this that's late in the game, frankly."

Late in the game, indeed! It stretches credulity to claim that it has taken eight years to uncover these



Written by [Steven J. DuBord](#) on December 9, 2009

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facts. And Karzai's claim that he needs America to babysit his country until 2024 is beyond unreasonable.

With allies like Karzai and Afghanistan potentially costing the United States \$50 billion dollars and however many more American lives are yet to be lost, who needs enemies? The U.S. government is allowing the Taliban to inflict more damage on the American economy and military through the war in Afghanistan than these terrorists are ever likely to do in any further attacks on American soil.

*Photo of Karzai: AP Images*



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