

## Colombia sends troops to Afghanistan

Colombia will become the first Latin American country to participate in the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, the Spanish daily El Pais reported Thursday.

The Colombian unit comprising about 100 soldiers will be integrated into a Spanish force based in Qal-i-Naw in northwestern Afghanistan, the report said.

The Colombian soldiers, whose participation has been under negotiation for months, were expected to arrive in Afghanistan in the spring of 2009.

Spain will provide the Colombian troops with training, infrastructure and even equipment, according to El Pais. Many of the soldiers of the Spanish army serving on missions abroad are already Colombian immigrants.

The Colombian participation was expected to facilitate Spain's task in maintaining order in restless Baghdis province.

For Colombia, its presence in Afghanistan will reinforce its position as a privileged partner of the United States and Latin American allies, according to the daily.

Fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan could also boost the Colombian government's efforts to present its domestic Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) as a terrorist organization.

Spain has a contingent of about 800 soldiers in Afghanistan as part of the ISAF.

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