

Britain to host conference on Afghanistan in January

Britain would host a conference on Afghanistan Jan 28 next year, where members of the international coalition will discuss plans for handing control of the country back to local authorities, the prime minister's office announced Saturday.

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown joined UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to make the announcement Saturday from the Commonwealth summit in Trinidad and Tobago, Xinhua reported Sunday.

Brown said Afghan President Hamid Karzai would be asked to commit to boosting his country's army, police and local governance during the meeting.

'Within three months, our benchmark is that the Afghan government should have identified additional troops to send to Helmand province for training. This is part of our idea that we will build up the Afghan army by nearly 50,000 over the next year, ' he said.

'Within six months, we will want a clear plan for police training that means corruption is being dealt with and we have a police force that works with the local community rather than sometimes against it,' the prime minister said.

Within nine months, President Karzai should have completed the process of appointing 400 provincial and district governors, he added.

Brown said the milestones would put in place the conditions for control of Afghanistan to be handed over to Afghan authorities, district by district, and for British troops to withdraw.

He said that a timetable for a British troop withdrawal would only happen when the Afghan army and police show themselves capable of maintaining security in growing areas of the country.

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