

Troops withdrawal from Aghanistan to start by 2010-end: report

International forces will begin a lengthy process of withdrawing from Afghanistan by the end of 2010 under a detailed roadmap to be agreed at an international conference here January, according to a report Sunday.

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown has set out detailed 'benchmarks' for the process of 'Afghanisation' amid growing calls for the withdrawal of British troops, more than 200 of whom have been killed in that country since 2001.

According to Brown's roadmap reported by The Observer, the process will begin with the Afghan government identifying - within three months - additional troops to send to the troubled Helmand province for training.

The plan, according to the newspaper, also envisages:

- Police training plans within six months.
- The appointment of nearly 400 provincial and district governors within nine months.
- Five thousand additional Afghan troops to be trained by Britain in Helmand and thousands more in other parts of the country within 12 months.
- Afghan security forces taking the lead in five out of the country's 34 provinces by the end of 2010, with control in one or two districts in Helmand also handed over.

The Jan 28 conference in London is expected to be attended by Afghan President Hamid Karzai, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the foreign ministers of 42 other countries involved in Afghanistan.

It will not set a timetable for withdrawal but Brown indicated that the process of local troops and police assuming control would allow international troops to begin to leave, the paper reported.

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