

British commander says war in Afghanistan cannot be won

By [Global Research](#)

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LONDON (Reuters) - Britain's commander in Afghanistan has said the war against the Taliban cannot be won, the Sunday Times reported.

It quoted Brigadier Mark Carleton-Smith as saying in an interview that if the Taliban were willing to talk, then that might be "precisely the sort of progress" needed to end the insurgency.

"We're not going to win this war. It's about reducing it to a manageable level of insurgency that's not a strategic threat and can be managed by the Afghan army," he said.

He said his forces had "taken the sting out of the Taliban for 2008" but that troops may well leave Afghanistan with there still being a low level of insurgency.

But Afghanistan's Defense Minister expressed his disappointment on Sunday at the commander's statements, maintaining the insurgency had to be defeated.

"I think this is the personal opinion of that commander," Abdul Rahim Wardak told reporters.

"The main objective of the Afghan government and the whole international community is that we have to defeat this war of terror and be successful," he said.

Wardak said success also depended on how British forces were approaching the problems they faced in Helmand but did not say whether their current strategy was the right one.

Asked if the commander's comments came as a disappointment, Wardak said: "Yes, it is disappointing, for sure."

Britain has around 8,000 troops based in Afghanistan, most of them in the volatile southern province of Helmand, where they face daily battles with a growing insurgency.

NO NEGOTIATIONS WITH "INVADERS"

NATO commanders and diplomats have been saying for some time that the Taliban insurgency cannot be defeated by military means alone and that negotiations with the militants will ultimately be needed to bring an end to the conflict.

"If the Taliban were prepared to sit on the other side of the table and talk about a political settlement, then that's precisely the sort of progress that concludes insurgencies like this," Carleton-Smith said. "That shouldn't make people uncomfortable."

But a spokesman for the Taliban said on Sunday there would be no negotiations with foreigners and repeated calls made by Taliban commanders for the unconditional withdrawal of the more than 70,000 international troops from Afghanistan.

“They should know that Taliban will never hold talks with the invaders,” Taliban spokesman Qari Mohammad Yousuf told the Pakistan-based Afghan news agency, AIP.

“What we had said in the past, we also say once again, that foreign forces should leave without any condition,” he said.

Violence in Afghanistan has increased to its worst level since 2001, when U.S.-led and Afghan forces overthrew the ruling Taliban following the September 11 attacks on the United States.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai said last week he had asked the king of Saudi Arabia to mediate in talks with the insurgents and called on Taliban leader Mullah Omar to return to his homeland and to make peace.

Writing by Myra MacDonald; additional reporting by Jonathon Burch in Kabul; Editing by Valerie Lee

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