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# Holbrooke calls for increase in Afghan police force

~ *Sikorski: Europe must contribute to stability, leave region with honor* ~

BRUSSELS (March 21, 2009) – Ambassador Richard C. Holbrooke, the U.S. special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, advocated today for an increase in the Afghan police force while speaking at Brussels Forum.

“The police aren’t very good right now,” he said. “We know they’re the weak link in the security chain.”

The Obama administration has a plan for an increase in Afghan police numbers from 78,000 to 82,000 over the next three to four years, but Holbrooke said everyone he has talked to has said that is not enough.

“So we’re looking in conjunction with our allies and friends in the Afghan government at a very significant increase,” Holbrooke said.

Holbrooke spoke alongside Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Radek Sikorski, Afghanistan National Security Advisor Zalmay Rasoul, Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid, and Ruprect Polenz, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the German Bundestag, at the fourth-annual Brussels Forum, a high-level meeting of influential worldwide leaders to discuss pressing transatlantic issues. Brussels Forum is organized by the German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) with the Federal Authorities of Belgium & the Egmont Institute, Daimler, and the government of the Czech Republic.

The European leaders on the panel said that one of the difficulties they face going into the NATO summit is that public support for intervention in Afghanistan is relatively low. They acknowledged they need to stress to their constituents that terrorist forces such as the Taliban and Al-Qaeda remain a threat to global security.

Sikorski, who has been mentioned as a candidate for NATO secretary general, said that while Europe might not have a lot of leverage with Afghanistan, it must help to combat terrorist factions there. He said that, in the end, international forces must be able to hand off local government, including police and military functions, to Afghan leaders.



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“Our objective [is] to be able to withdraw with honor, leaving a stable situation behind us,” he said. In dealing with the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, “I believe that introducing regular administrations, an honest and capable administration by Pakistan and Afghanistan, is the solution.”

Polenz said the problem is linking security in Western leaders’ countries to the security situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

“We have to take all the efforts to convince our people that still, until today, our security is depending on security in Afghanistan and Pakistan,” Polenz said. “It is a political problem but it takes political leadership.”

Rasoul said that he is confident that the international community has the right “diagnosis” of the situation in his country. “So having the right diagnosis, the treatment will be much easier than before,” he said. “I am very happy that this regional context of what is going on in Afghanistan is fully understood. I am confident that knowing now the problem, we can solve it.”

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*Brussels Forum is an annual high-level meeting of the most influential political, corporate, and intellectual leaders worldwide to address pressing challenges facing both sides of the Atlantic. Participants include heads of state, senior officials from the European Union institutions and member states, U.S. officials, Congressional representatives, Parliamentarians, think tank leaders, academics, corporate executives, and media.*

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