

Afghan Minister Dismisses US Claims about Iranian aid to the Taliban

By [Global Research](#)

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Afghanistan's defense minister on Thursday dismissed claims by a top US State Department official that there was "irrefutable evidence" that the Iranian government was providing arms to Taliban rebels.

Actually, throughout, we have had good relations with Iran and we believe that the security and stability of Afghanistan are also in the interests of Iran," Abdul Rahim Wardak told AP.

On Wednesday, US Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns said in Paris that Tehran was directly supplying weapons to the Taliban. He told CNN there was "irrefutable evidence" that arms shipments were coming from Iran's government.

The State Department later appeared to step back from Burns' assertion, but stressed that the United States has proof that weapons from Iran were reaching Taliban fighters in Afghanistan.

The United States has so far made many similar allegations about Iran's intervention in Iraq, but it had never presented any of its alleged evidence and proofs about Iran's role in unrests in either country.

Tehran has denied the accusations. Wardak, who is attending a NATO defense ministers' meeting in Brussels, also played down suggestions that Iranian authorities were sending arms shipments to the Taliban.

"There has been evidence of weapons, but it is difficult to link it to Iran," Wardak said. "It is possible that (they) might be from al-Qaida, from the drug mafia or from other sources."

Defense Secretary Robert Gates, who is attending the Brussels meeting, also mentioned the alleged weapons transfers from Iran.

"The irony is the Afghan government and the Iranian government have pretty good relationships," Gates told reporters. Gates, who was in Afghanistan last week, said Afghan President Hamid Karzai talked to him about the good relationship the two countries have.

In a wide-ranging interview with The Associated Press, Wardak said he would appeal to the defense ministers of NATO and allied countries to provide greater assistance in the training of Afghan security forces.

He said the establishment of an effective Afghan air force was a top priority because air

support would enable the army to conduct independent operations without having to rely so heavily on the international forces.

It currently operates a handful of Czech-built L-39 jet trainers, together with some old Soviet Mi-17 helicopters and Antonov An-26 twin-engine transports.

"We have all agreed that the only sustainable way to secure Afghanistan is to enable the Afghans themselves to defend the country as they have done for thousands of years. Based on that I would like to have further acceleration of the Afghan national security forces both in numbers and capabilities," Wardak said.

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