

Afghan President Predicts Long NATO Stay

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Baku – APA. Afghan President Hamid Karzai warned Thursday that foreign troops must stay in his country for another decade, as world powers agreed on an exit map including a plan to persuade Taliban fighters to disarm in exchange for jobs and homes, APA reports citing “Associated Press”.

Divisions emerged between the U.S. and its partners over Kabul’s willingness to offer peace to Taliban leaders who once harbored al-Qaida, instead of the more limited deal for lower-ranking fighters emphasized by the Americans.

The conference was called to help the U.S. and its allies find a way out of the grinding Afghan war amid rising U.S. and NATO casualties and falling public support. NATO has agreed to accelerate the training of Afghan security forces and gradually transfer more combat responsibility to them.

“With regard to training and equipping the Afghan security forces, five to 10 years will be enough,” Karzai told the BBC. “With regard to sustaining them until Afghanistan is financially able to provide for our forces, the time will be extended to 10 to 15 years.”

In a final communique, the conference said handover of security responsibilities to Afghan forces in more peaceful provinces would begin “by late 2010/early 2011.”

Under the plans, the Afghan National Army would take responsibility of half of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces within three years and assume control of the entire country within five years.

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