



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on September 3, 2012

Afghan Insider Attacks Force Suspension of Recruit Training

The “insider” attacks by Afghan trainees on U.S. and NATO troops have forced the suspension of the training program for new recruits, while officials in charge of the NATO training mission reassess the vetting process used to weed out Afghan troops with ties to the Taliban or other insurgents. This year’s insider attacks have killed 45 troops, most of them American. One U.S. official told the [Washington Post](#) that the guidelines for screening Afghan recruits had been “cast aside” in order to accelerate the build-up of the Afghan army and police.



“Everyone admits there was a lot of international pressure to grow these forces, and the vetting of these individuals was cast aside as an inhibitor,” the official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told the *Post*. Another official said the problem was not in the initial screening of recruits, but the lack of an effective follow-up to spot trainees who had since turned against the government and come under the influence of the insurgents.

“We have a very good vetting process,” a senior Special Operations official told the *Post*, which first reported the story online. “What we learned is that you just can’t take it for granted. We probably should have had a mechanism to follow up with recruits from the beginning.”

Security measures were ignored or applied inconsistently, NATO officials said, including the “Guardian Angel” program, requiring one or two soldiers to monitor the Afghans in every meeting or mission, with orders to shoot anyone who tries to kill a coalition member. Limits on the off-duty time spent with Afghan troops have also not been followed, NATO officials said, as they were regarded as an impediment to relationship building. An Insider Threat Working Group has been established by NATO leaders to promote enforcement of existing rules and solicit suggestions for new security measures from commanders across the country.

The suspension of training for new recruits is expected to last about a month while Afghan officials, working with U.S. Special Operations troops, are “re-vetting” some 8,000 Afghan commandos and 3,000 Afghan army special forces soldiers fighting alongside American Special Operations troops. About 1,100 Afghan Local Police officers have been vetted anew, and five have been removed from the program. The re-screening of all 27,000 Afghan troops now working with Special Operations forces is expected to take about two months. On average, 7,000 Afghan soldiers and 3,700 Afghan police graduate from training every month, according to the [Daily Mail](#) of London. British forces make up about 9,500 of the 130,000 NATO troops in Afghanistan, along with a reported 350,000 Afghan military and police.

A spokesman for the American military command in Kabul emphasized that the move “should not in any way be perceived as we’re backing away from our Afghan partners. We’re not,” Col. Thomas Collins told the [New York Times](#). “We have suspended training of the new recruits and we are revetting current



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members,” he said. “But we are not suspending operations involving those who have completed training and are currently in the field.”

The decision followed the August 17 shooting of two American Special Forces members by a new Afghan Local Police recruit at a small outpost in western Afghanistan. A week earlier, three U.S. Marines in Special Operations were killed by an Afghan wearing a national police uniform. In an effort to stop infiltration by Taliban members, new security measures will make it illegal to sell Afghan military and police uniforms.

Insider attacks have accounted for nearly 15 percent of all coalition fatalities in this, the 11th year of a war that has so far claimed more than 2,000 American lives. But attacks by insurgents and Afghan insiders are not the only problems facing the United States and allied nations in Afghanistan. Accusations of large-scale corruption by President Hamid Karzai and other government officials have led to further charges of efforts by Karzai to impede the investigation by the U.S. corruption unit called the Major Crimes Task Force. The burning of at least four copies of the Koran among books being destroyed by American soldiers near a detention center in Parwan sparked riots that killed 29 Afghans and 6 U.S. soldiers.

Relations between the two countries suffered further damage when a U.S. Army soldier went on a shooting rampage, killing 16 civilians, including nine children in a village in Kandahar Province. Though President Obama and Defense Secretary Leon Panetta repeatedly apologized and promised to bring the shooter to justice, outraged Afghan officials were further incensed when the United States moved the soldier out of the country, rather than let him stand trial in Afghanistan.

“Let’s pray for God to rescue us from these two demons,” Karzai [said](#) in a meeting with relatives of the massacre victims. “There are two demons in our country now,” he said in an apparent reference to both the Americans and the Taliban.

Karzai also called for the end of combat operations by U.S. and NATO forces by next year, a year earlier than the Obama timetable. No one has said publicly where the “internal pressure” came from to “cast aside” guidelines for screening Afghan recruits, but a rapid buildup of Afghan security forces would appear to serve the interests of both Kabul and Washington. President Obama has tied the ability of the Afghans to provide for their own security to his plan for withdrawing American combat troops by the end of 2014, while leaving an undetermined number of military trainers and advisers for an indefinite time beyond that. Mitt Romney, John McCain, and other Republicans have opposed the idea of setting a deadline or timetable for withdrawal, though Romney spoke of the end of 2014 as a “goal” when he [addressed](#) the Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention in Reno, Nevada on July 24:

As president, my goal in Afghanistan will be to complete a successful transition to Afghan security forces by the end of 2014. I will evaluate conditions on the ground and solicit the best advice of our military commanders. And I will affirm that my duty is not to my political prospects, but to the security of the nation.

Despite the similarity of the candidates’ positions, the war in Afghanistan has already become at least a minor issue in a presidential campaign dominated by debate and accusations over jobs and the economy. Democrats have been chiding Romney for neglecting to even mention Afghanistan in his acceptance speech at last week’s Republican convention. Romney campaign advisors were on the TV talk-show circuit Sunday, noting that the candidate had addressed Afghanistan the day before his acceptance speech when he spoke to the American Legion Convention in Indianapolis. But the mention



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of Afghanistan was brief in Romney's remarks to the Legion, consisting entirely of the following two [sentences](#): "And we are still at war in Afghanistan. We still have uniformed men and women in conflict, risking their lives just as you once did."

The only one at last week's convention who called for withdrawing Americans from Iraq earlier than 2014 was actor-director Clint Eastwood, who wrongly attributed the call to Romney in his rambling, semi-coherent [speech](#). "I think Mr. Romney asked the only sensible question," Eastwood said, addressing an imaginary Obama in an empty chair next to him. "You know, he says, 'Why are you giving the date out now? Why don't you just bring them home tomorrow morning?'"

That's not what Romney says, but it did draw applause from the delegates.

Photo of Afghan soldier walking behind bullet-riddled wooden target at a firing range in Afghanistan: AP Images



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