

## Afghan Leader Pleads For More Security And Aid

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By Ahmed Rashid/ Lahore

The Afghan president, Hamid Karzai, goes to Downing Street today with his country in crisis and will urge Tony Blair to push the international community to send more peacekeepers and money.

Hamid Karzai

Mr Karzai's government is at a critical stage. "The truth about Afghanistan is that the US and British strategy for stabilising and reconstructing that country will fail without major changes and soon," said a European ambassador in Kabul.

Experts believe America's refusal or inability to take the lead in providing Afghans with greater security is pushing the country back to the anarchy and lawlessness that gave rise to the Taliban and allowed al-Qa'eda to base itself there.

Regrouped Taliban are rocketing, bombing or ambushing United States and Afghan government forces in the south and east where humanitarian aid and reconstruction, which has barely started, are grinding to a halt.

Afghan leaders, aid agency officials and Lakhdar Brahimi, the United Nations special representative, have called for an expansion of the 5,500-strong security force (ISAF) that operates only in Kabul.

But Donald Rumsfeld, the US defence secretary, said in Kabul last month that "the bulk of Afghanistan is permissive and secure" and declined to support an expansion of peacekeepers.

Instead the Americans have adopted a patchwork policy of creating provincial reconstruction teams, or PRTs. Groups of up to 100 Special Forces, aid workers and technicians are being deployed in urban centres across Afghanistan.

America has so far deployed three PRTs and this month Britain will deploy its first team to the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif, which has been torn apart by ethnic in-fighting.

Officials said the British team would be different from its American counterpart, trying to provide security by mediating disputes. American PRTs are limited to providing security to their own aid efforts. Aid agencies say the PRTs cannot provide real security for the people.

Mr Karzai also desperately needs more aid. Yesterday, Asharf Ghani, the finance minister, said Afghanistan needed at least \$15 billion (£9.2 billion) over the next five years, rather than the \$4.5 billion (£2.7 billion) pledged last year.

Mr Ghani said if that was matched with \$15 billion in investment by Afghanistan's private sector, then that would help push Afghanistan's rate of growth to "12-14 per cent every year for five years to get out of poverty and current deprivation".

In the past few weeks Mr Karzai has stood up to the warlords who dominate the provinces outside Kabul. He has demanded that they pay the central government the taxes and customs duties they collect, rather than spend the money on their own militias.

This week he got a response from the toughest warlord, Ismail Khan, who controls the western provinces. He handed over \$20 million (£12.2 million) to Kabul and the government said it had collected enough money to pay long-overdue salaries to 100,000 soldiers and policemen.

