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Afghanistan may have direct military support from India: US

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^[1]The US has said it will have no problem if Afghanistan seeks any direct military assistance from India for its armed forces in dealing with security issues born out of insurgent activities in the country, The Indian Express reported Tuesday.

According to a senior US defense official Washington had discussed the issue with the Indian and Afghan officials.

The officials said, “We have had discussions with the Indians about this issue and about the Afghans, and I don’t see any particular problems with the overall approach here at all.”

The official speaking on the condition of anonymity said, Afghan military commanders and intelligence officials have begun urging India to provide direct military assistance to the country’s fledgling armed forces.

According to reports key military equipment including medium trucks with capacity of carrying 2.5-7 tonne cargos, bridge-laying equipment and engineering facilities, light mountain artillery along with ordnance were sought by the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).

Reports also suggest India was also requested to help Afghanistan build close air-support capabilities for its troops in preparation of drastic scaling-down of western forces in 2014.

The official said the US and Afghanistan have jointly developed a “fairly aggressive” plan that includes broad range of support from the international community for developing capabilities that Afghanistan needs to address security issues born out of insurgent activities.

“We think it’s important to continue working on the lines of that agreed plan,” the official quoted by The Indian Express said, praising role played by India in Afghanistan.

“India has been very supportive of Afghanistan in a wide range of areas. We think that’s been very positive,” the official said after the Pentagon submitted to the Congress a bi-yearly report on the progress being made in Afghanistan.

In the meantime as President Obama considers how quickly to withdraw the remaining 68,000 American troops in Afghanistan and turn over the war to Afghan security forces, a bleak new Pentagon report has found that only one of the Afghan National Army’s 23 brigades is able to operate independently without air or other military support from the United States and NATO partners.

The report, released Monday, also found that violence in Afghanistan is higher than it was before the surge of American forces into the country two years ago, although it is down from a high in the summer of 2010.

But a defense official who briefed reporters at the Pentagon sought to offer a more positive picture of the Afghan security forces’ abilities than the report would suggest. Acknowledging that the progress of the security forces had been “incremental,” the official said that many of the forces patrol and carry out some operations independently, without help from NATO. “They often don’t rely on any assistance from us at all,” said the official, who declined to be named under ground rules imposed by the Pentagon.