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Afghan Army Desertion Rates Up, Despite Claims of Progress

By John Glaser

December 18, 2012

Thousands of Afghan soldiers are deserting the army in a sign that the US-led effort to train security forces before the 2014 withdrawal date is not the triumph US officials have been trying to claim.



Around 50,000 Afghan soldiers, or about 26 percent, quit the army each year. Additionally, about 8 percent of Afghan police officers quit each year.

This daily reality in Afghanistan counters the “rosy picture“ Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta and top US military officials have been painting for public consumption, eager to exaggerate the progress report on a war that is supposed to end in less than two years.

General Olivier de Bavinchove, the number three commander in the US-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which trains Afghan security forces, says that while the quitters aren't joining the Taliban in large numbers, the high desertion rates are troubling.

“For the moment, we haven't seen these boys who leave the army early join the ranks of the insurgency...It does happen and it can still occur, but it is altogether marginal,” said Bavinchove.

“On the other hand, this hemorrhage is a mortal risk for a country and an institution which will encounter considerable financial difficulties,” he added, referring to the \$4.1 billion provided to the Afghan army by the international community each year, an allowance that will drop precipitously in 2014.

Most experts predict that either the Afghan government will collapse or the country will descent into civil war following the partial US withdrawal in 2014.