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Marine Deployment Supportive of NATO

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 17, 2008 – The Pentagon’s decision to deploy 3,200 Marines to Afghanistan by spring was intended to reinforce the U.S. commitment there and is not intended as a criticism of the efforts of NATO allies in the region, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said today.

“This deployment of Marines does not reflect dissatisfaction about the military performance in Afghanistan of allied forces from other nations,” Gates said in a briefing at the Pentagon. “It reflects the fact that NATO and U.S. commanders believe they need more troops to take advantage of last year’s military successes, to keep pressure on the Taliban and to accelerate the training of the Afghanistan national security forces.”

Gates came out with the comments today after a firestorm of international criticism over quotes appearing this week in a Los Angeles Times article in which it appeared he singled out NATO countries for performing poorly in the country’s counterinsurgency fight.

Gates said any comments referred to NATO as an institution, stating that it still has shortcomings as it transitions from a Cold War orientation to a more global expeditionary posture. The secretary also conceded that the U.S. military and government have had a difficult time adapting to the protracted counterinsurgency campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Gates said the media reports do not reflect “reality.” He said several countries have “stepped up to the plate” and are playing a significant role in Afghanistan.

“They have rolled back the Taliban from previous strongholds in the south. They are taking the fight to the enemy in some of the most grueling conditions imaginable,” he said. “As the result of the valor and sacrifice of these allies, the Taliban has suffered significant losses and no longer holds real estate of any consequence.”

Comments in which Gates was quoted as saying that some troops were “not properly trained” and that some military forces don’t know counterinsurgency operations came from conversations with commanders in theater that specifically addressed operational mentoring and liaison teams. The teams are embedded with Afghan National Army forces and train and mentor these forces. The teams also provide a liaison between the ANA and other forces.

“We’re trying to significantly increase the number of these operational mentoring and liaison teams. And my concern -- what I’ve heard out of the theater, and it’s not just from Americans -- is that some of these groups are not fully trained,” Gates said.

Gates said he expressed to NATO that more troops could be trained at the Combat Maneuver Training Center, in Hohenfels, Germany.

“I just want to make sure that, as we ramp up the number of these ... mentoring teams, that they are fully trained when they go into the theater. And that's true of every country, including the United States,” Gates said.

Gates had spoken with several allied officials this week prior to the announcement of the U.S. Marine deployment. Since then, he has spoken personally only to the Canadian defense minister, he said. A Canadian soldier was killed by a roadside bomb near Kandahar on Jan. 15.

“I wanted to make sure that they understood our respect for their contribution and how much of an impact they are making,” Gates said.

About 2,200 Marines from 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit, based at Camp Lejeune, N.C., and about 1,000 troops from 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, based at the Marine Corps Air-Ground Combat Center, at Twentynine Palms, Calif., will deploy.

The Marines will serve in Afghanistan for seven months. The deployment will boost the total number of U.S. forces in Afghanistan to about 30,000.

About 1,000 of the Marines will deploy as trainers. That battalion-sized element will be tailored to the needs of the training mission there, Joint Chiefs of Staff Vice Chairman Marine Gen. James E. Cartwright said in the same briefing. Its ranks will be filled with older, more senior Marines with combat experience. The others will be deployed to the southern region of Afghanistan to help secure gains made there last year.

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[Marine Gen. James E. Cartwright](#)

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