

U.S. will hand lead role in Afghanistan to NATO



AP PHOTO
Afghanistan's Minister of Defense Abdul Rahim Wardak speaks during a news conference at NATO headquarters in Brussels, Belgium, on Monday. NATO forces will take over the U.S.-led mission in Afghanistan this summer.

British will take command starting in the summer

By JIM KRANE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

KABUL, Afghanistan

The American mission to bring order to Afghanistan is being handed to a multinational force led by the NATO alliance, a move that will subordinate U.S. troops under foreign command in a combat situation for the first time since World War II.

NATO's ambitious mission could inject the flagging European-North American alliance with a sense of purpose and also might take the heat off Washington, seen in this region as too eager to fight Muslims.

But there are questions whe-

ther NATO will engage in the type of offensive operations the U.S.-led coalition has.

"NATO needs to grab hold of this mission for NATO's sake," U.S. Central Command chief Gen. John Abizaid said.

Jumping outside European boundaries is "where the alliance needs to go to stay relevant for the future."

Abizaid and others have said the Afghanistan mission marks a historic expansion for NATO that could see the alliance taking further missions in Africa or elsewhere.

Even after the takeover, however, the United States is expected

to maintain a separate counterinsurgency force in Afghanistan to hunt Taliban and al-Qaida holdouts.

British Army Lt. Gen. David Richards is to take command in Afghanistan this summer, the first time U.S. ground troops at war would be placed under foreign leadership in more than 50 years.

Americans won't be far from the top, however. Richards' deputy will be Maj. Gen. Benjamin Freakley, now commander of the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division.

"It has always been a contentious issue. Americans don't

like to be under command of other nations," said Amyas Godfrey, a military analyst with the Royal United Services Institute for Defense and Security Studies in London.

But in this case, he added: "I don't think it'll be a problem. Brits and Americans have been working hand in hand for over three years."

Some 5,000 to 6,000 Americans will join the NATO force in Afghanistan, which will more than double in size by November, from its current 10,000 troops to around 21,000 troops.

NATO is already moving into Afghanistan's rebellious southern provinces with 6,000 troops, mainly from Britain, Canada and the Netherlands.

That deployment is expected to be completed in the summer and will quickly be followed by the alliance moving into the east, considered Afghanistan's most dangerous sector.

IRS warns against tax e-mail scams

By MARY DALRYMPLE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

The Internal Revenue Service, noting an escalation in identity theft scams, is raising alarms about e-mails designed to dupe taxpayers into revealing personal financial information.

IRS and Treasury Department officials have noticed an increase this winter of "phishing" schemes that use the tax agency's logo to lure victims.

"There does seem to be a proliferation of them this filing season,"

said Richard Morgante, commissioner of the IRS wage and investment division.

The Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration, which investigates groups or individuals impersonating the IRS, found 12 separate Web sites hosting such "phishing" schemes operating in 11 different countries, from the United States to Aruba to Korea.

In a "phishing" scam, identity thieves send e-mail masquerading as official communication from a government agency, bank or other institution in an attempt to solicit personal data from victims. The

data could include financial account numbers, passwords, credit card numbers or other information.

The thieves use the information to steal a person's identity and commit financial crimes.

"Phishing" e-mails purporting to come from the IRS often tell taxpayers they're due a refund and direct them to a false IRS Web site. The e-mail address may include "irs.gov," such as tax-refunds@irs.gov or admin@irs.gov.

Those who receive fraudulent IRS e-mail can contact the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration at (800) 366-4484.

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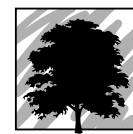
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