

## Afghanistan to expand its army size

*by UPI*

KABUL, Afghanistan -- Afghanistan reportedly plans to boost the size of its army nearly three times to improve internal security and discourage any interference from neighbors. The defense ministry wants to increase the size from about 70,000 expected to be reached by year-end to about 200,000, the BBC reported, quoting spokesman, Gen. Mohammed Zahir Azimi. After the overthrow of the Taliban regime in 2001, the Bonn conference decided a 70,000-size army would be sufficient but that is no longer seen as being sufficient because of the rising level of insurgency. Azimi was quoted as saying a bigger army would be cheaper than using foreign forces to fight the growing violence. He said it would also help maintain regional balance of forces. Azimi said the army will soon have U.S.-made M-16 rifles, as well as 27 German-made Leopard tanks and 22 military helicopters, the BBC report said.

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