

Gates scolds NATO, Europe on Afghanistan

by UPI

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates said NATO members, particularly in Europe, are failing their military obligations in Afghanistan. Speaking Tuesday to the House Armed Services Committee in Washington, Gates said al-Qaida and Taliban violence has escalated by 27 percent as the call for more combat troops, helicopters and trainers is going unheeded, The Washington Post reported Wednesday. "I am not ready to let NATO off the hook in Afghanistan at this point," Gates said. The United States has about 26,000 troops in Afghanistan, while NATO provides most of the remaining 28,000 foreign troops. Despite his criticism of several European countries' participation, Gates praised British, Canadian, Australian and Dutch forces, which he said have "more than stepped up" in combat, the report said. "We should not use a brush that paints too broadly in terms of speaking of our allies and friends," he said. Gates was scheduled to depart Wednesday for Scotland for a meeting of defense ministers from countries with troops in southern Afghanistan.

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