

British PM announces shift in Afghanistan

by UPI

LONDON -- British Prime Minister Gordon Brown shifted policy on Afghanistan by backing plans to reintegrate some Taliban, curb poppy cultivation and support NATO forces. The prime minister told the House of Commons that British strategy would back plans to support the integration of "tier two" and "tier three" Taliban into the Afghanistan reconstruction effort, keep nearly 8,000 U.K. troops in the country and eliminate the aerial spraying of poppy fields, the Times of London said Thursday. Critics oppose the eradication of opium through aerial spraying in favor of subsidizing farmers for halting cultivation. Brown said he approved plans to release nearly \$920 million in war funding to support training measures for Afghanistan's armed forces. The move comes as international leaders expressed frustration over the lack of cohesion in the effort in Afghanistan. U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates told the U.S. Congress that NATO allies were "unable to step up to the plate," while British officials counter U.S. operations leave British forces to "pick up the pieces."

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