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## ASIA PACIFIC

## *U.S. Declassifies Some Information on Afghan Forces*

By MATTHEW ROSENBERG FEB. 2, 2015



Afghan soldiers took an oath before a training exercise in the fall. Security forces continue to struggle against the Taliban. Wakil Kohsar/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

WASHINGTON — The American military command in [Afghanistan](#) on Monday abruptly reversed its decision to classify details about the Afghan Army and police, information that it had said could pose a grave security risk if disclosed.

The data, which includes figures like the number of Afghan soldiers and what it costs to feed them, had been readily available for the past six years. But last week word leaked that the information would be kept [secret going forward](#), a move the American command insisted was needed to safeguard Afghan and American lives.

Many in Kabul and Washington, including members of Congress, expressed skepticism about that rationale.

American officials often call the building of the Afghan security forces — a project that has cost \$65 billion to date — one of the most significant achievements of the American-led coalition. Yet those forces continue to struggle against the Taliban, and about 9,500 American troops and thousands of contractors remain in [Afghanistan](#) to train Afghan soldiers and police officers and to help them battle insurgents.

The data about Afghan forces is one of the few measures that can be used to assess how the American-led project is progressing, or what still needs to be done.

On Monday, the American command did not fully back off its rationale for classifying the information. In a statement, it said the data that it believed could aid Afghan insurgents, such as readiness assessments of Afghan Army and police units, would remain secret. The readiness reports were actually classified late last year, a few months before the more basic data on the composition of Afghan forces and American spending to support them was deemed secret.

But now a range of the more basic data about the security forces will again be public, the command said.

The command, explaining its reversal, said that much of the information had been deemed secret because it was combined with “related classified information.”

But that same information, “when viewed alone, is suitable for public release,” it said.

The command did not specify what it had decided to declassify, referring further inquiries to the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, the American government’s watchdog agency for spending in Afghanistan.

The information was initially classified in early January in response to a query from the inspector general, which was compiling a quarterly report on American spending in Afghanistan for Congress. The reports typically contain a wealth of detail about the billions of dollars the United States is spending in Afghanistan, including the money spent on the Afghan Army and police.

But the security section in the latest [quarterly report](#), which was released Thursday, included only top-line spending figures. For information about Afghan troop numbers, attrition rates, weapons procurement and other facets of the Afghan security forces, the report referred readers to a classified appendix, which is off limits to anyone who lacks a high-level security clearance, a group that includes most congressional staff members.

On Monday, the inspector general's office said it had received a document from the command that was hundreds of pages, detailing what information was now, once again, considered suitable for the public to see.

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"Clearly, they realized they had made a mistake or that they over-classified in this case," Mr. Bronstein-Moffly said.

He added that the coalition had told the inspector general that the freshly declassified information amounted to 91 percent of the data about the Afghan security forces that had been sought by the agency when it was preparing its most recent quarterly report to Congress.

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