



The Afghan National Army, a pillar of the U.S. strategy for stabilizing Afghanistan and withdrawing U.S. troops next year, is riddled with corruption, ethnic friction and rivalries among its highest leaders that are hampering its ability to fight the Taliban-led insurgency, according to a new study.

"Ethnic frictions and political factionalism among high-level players in the Ministry of Defense (MOD) and the general staff have . . . stunted the army's growth," says the report by the International Crisis Group, a respected independent crisis monitoring organization. "As a result, the army is a fragmented force, serving disparate interests, and far from attaining the unified national character needed to confront numerous security threats."

The report, a copy of which was obtained by McClatchy, is set to be issued later this week as Afghan President Hamid Karzai and many of his top officials are on a four-day visit to Washington to sooth serious friction with the Obama administration.

Karzai and his delegation spent much of the day Tuesday at the State Department meeting with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and other senior U.S. civilian and defense officials involved in overseeing policy toward Afghanistan.

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