

Afghanistan war 'tougher than Iraq'

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THE war in Afghanistan will be "much tougher than Iraq", President Barack Obama's special representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan has told a security conference.

"There is no magic formula in Afghanistan," Richard Holbrooke warned an audience of European policymakers and military planners.

Mr Holbrooke was part of a high-level US delegation at the annual Munich Security Conference over the weekend. The group, led by Vice-President Joe Biden and including General James Jones, the national security adviser, and General David Petraeus, the head of the US Central Command, did not paint a rosy picture of the situation in Afghanistan.

The US view of Afghanistan's problems differed from that of the country's President, Hamid Karzai, who also spoke Sunday.

While Mr Karzai acknowledged the security problems, he said great progress had been made.

In an address that at times sounded defensive, he said Afghanistan was neither a "narco-state" nor a "failed state", as critics have labelled it.

He called again for reconciliation with Taliban forces "who are not part of al-Qaeda, who are not part of terrorist

networks, who want to return to their country".

He also criticised NATO over the number of civilian casualties that it has caused in the course of battling the insurgency.

US officials at the conference questioned the gap between Mr Karzai's presentation and what they see as the facts.

General Petraeus' comments were greatly anticipated as the final day of the conference got under way.

"There has been nothing easy about Afghanistan," General Petraeus said, adding that he "would be remiss if I did not ask individual countries to examine very closely what forces and other contributions they can provide" before the elections in August. He said needs included not only ground forces but intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, military police, special operations, cargo and attack helicopters and more. President Obama is planning to send as many as 30,000 extra troops.