

Pakistan wants 'more clarity' on new US Afghan strategy

AFP, London/Washington

Pakistan wants "more clarity" on US President Barack Obama's new Afghan war strategy, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani said yesterday.

"We are studying that new policy. We need more clarity on it," he said after talks in London with his British counterpart Gordon Brown, referring to Obama's pledge of 30,000 more US troops for Afghanistan.

The Pakistani premier added that US and Nato military commander in Afghanistan US General Stanley McChrystal would be going to Pakistan to discuss "more military cooperation."

"After, when we get more clarity on the situation, then we will see how if we can implement on that plan," he told reporters in a joint press conference with Brown.

A Pakistani foreign ministry statement Wednesday, reacting to Obama's long-awaited announcement, made no mention of welcoming the troop increases,

which many fear could be counterproductive for Pakistan.

Pakistan has raised fears that an influx of soldiers into Afghanistan could again push militants over the border, destabilising an already-troubled region.

In other comments Gilani said Islamabad does not believe al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden is on its territory. "I don't think Osama bin Laden is in Pakistan," he said.

Last weekend Brown called on Pakistan to step up its action against al-Qaeda and hunt down leader bin Laden and his deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri, still at large eight years after the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States.

After Thursday's talks Brown said: "The international community expects much of Pakistan," adding: "What we've all got to do is work together (and) step up our efforts."

In Washington, the Obama administration sought Wednesday to win firmer backing from Islamabad in fighting

extremism by pledging to sharply step up support for Pakistan, a nuclear-armed nation wary of US actions.

Islamabad asked Washington to help ensure "there would be no adverse fallout on Pakistan" after US President Barack Obama announced in a speech Tuesday he would send 30,000 more troops to neighbouring Afghanistan.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton sought Wednesday to reassure Pakistan it would have a long-term partner in Washington as she gave testimony to US lawmakers about the new strategy.

"We will significantly expand support intended for Pakistan to develop the potential of their people," Clinton told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, vowing not to repeat past US mistakes in the region.

The chief US diplomat said those errors had allowed Taliban and al-Qaeda elements to thrive in the border regions of Pakistan, a country she warned that had a nuclear arsenal.



PHOTO: AFP

Britain's Prime Minister Gordon Brown (L) and Pakistan's Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani attend a joint press conference at 10 Downing Street, in London yesterday. Pakistan wants "more clarity" on US President Barack Obama's new Afghan war strategy, Gilani said Thursday.



PHOTO: AFP

US general Stanley McChrystal (C), the top US commander in Afghanistan, listens to a translation on headphones while flanked by Afghan parliament members Mirwais Yasini (R) and Mohammad Almas at the parliament in Kabul yesterday.

Pullout deadline not fixed

US defends Afghan strategy as Nato meets to consider more troops

AFP, Washington

Top US officials defended Barack Obama's new strategy to win the Afghan war, denying that a timeline for departure was set in stone as Nato met yesterday to consider his call for more troops.

Following Obama's announcement that he would send 30,000 more troops to combat, Italy said that it could send up to 1,500 reinforcements while Germany's parliament held a debate on extending its mission in Afghanistan.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Defence Secretary Robert Gates and US armed forces chief of staff Admiral Michael Mullen trooped to

Capitol Hill on Wednesday and told Congress that any timetable for an eventual pullout was flexible, as they fielded questions from sceptical legislators.

The presentations came after Obama late Tuesday unveiled a plan for turning around the war with a surge of 30,000 more US soldiers -- but adding that a US troop withdrawal should begin in July 2011.

Legislators, including Obama's former White House rival John McCain, said such a timetable made no sense. Senior administration officials however said the timing was flexible.

"I do not believe we have locked ourselves into leaving,"

said Clinton, who added the goal was "to signal very clearly to all audiences that the United States is not interested in occupying Afghanistan."

Gates said the extra troops would be in place in July 2010, and that a December 2010 review could affect the target withdrawal date.

"I think the president, as commander in chief, always has the option to adjust his decisions," he told McCain, a Republican senator.

While US allies have been generally supportive of Obama's new strategy, few have so far committed new troops to the war against the former ruling Taliban militia, which is now in its ninth year.

The deal that may prove costly for Zardari

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, Karachi

All eyes in Pakistan are turning towards the Supreme Court as a larger bench has been constituted to take up all cases relating to the controversial National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO).

The bench will begin hearing from December 7 when it will take up all petitions that relate to the ordinance. Many of Pakistan's ruling politicians took benefit from the NRO, which was promulgated by former President General Pervez Musharraf as part of deal under which the country returned to democracy in 2008.

Under the deal, Musharraf allowed politicians to stand for elections in exchange for amnesty for his government's actions. Some of the high

profile beneficiaries include President Asif Zardari and interior minister Rehman Malik.

The NRO allowed people with pending court cases against them to stand for elections and be allowed to hold a public office. However, the legislation has been unpopular in Pakistan and the ruling Pakistan Peoples Party did not present it to parliament in November after its political allies announced that they would vote against its passage.

This has emerged as a major headache for the Zardari government as the challenge to the party has started to grow. With the Court taking up hearing on petitions that relate to the NRO, there are fears that many public officials and politicians in power will be removed from office.

Obama war plan may get Congress backing

AP, Washington

President Barack Obama appears to have secured what President George W Bush couldn't: bipartisan support for an unpopular and faltering war.

Despite expressing an uneasiness about the details, lawmakers are poised to back Obama's plan to send 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan after getting assurances that some soldiers and Marines will begin withdrawing in July 2011.

The strategy marks the largest expansion of the war since it began eight years ago. Critics conceded that Obama will have little trouble early next year getting Congress to provide an added \$30 billion or \$40 billion to carry it out.

The president's chief military and diplomatic advisers faced more questioning from lawmakers Thursday after encountering only tepid criticism Wednesday from members of the Senate Armed Services and House Foreign Affairs committees.

Anti-war Democrats, who rose to power because of voter opposition to Bush's

strategy in Iraq, said they are sceptical that the troop buildup is necessary or will work. But at the same time, party leaders who were among Obama's biggest supporters in his campaign for president said it was unlikely that they would try to block the deployments or the money he wants.

Critical to winning Democratic support was a July 2011 deadline that Obama set to begin troop withdrawals.

Michigan Sen Carl Levin, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said setting the date will "produce the sense of urgency in the Afghan government that has been lacking up to now."

Republicans won assurances from Defence Secretary Robert Gates that the 2011 withdrawal date was flexible. They otherwise supported the troop buildup because it fulfils a request by US commanders in Afghanistan for more soldiers and Marines.

"Once we achieve our objectives an Afghanistan that can defend itself, govern itself, control its borders and remain an ally in the war on

terror then we can reasonably discuss withdrawal, a withdrawal based on conditions, not timelines," said Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky.

Sen Joe Lieberman, a Connecticut independent, told Gates, "You've struck exactly the right balance."

Gates said the president was committed to begin pulling at least some troops out by the target date. But the president will have the authority to change gears after the Defence Department conducts a formal assessment in December 2010.

"We're not just going to throw these guys in the swimming pool and walk away," Gates said of the Afghan security force.

Rep John Murtha, D-Pennsylvania, chairman of a military spending panel, told reporters he anticipates the Pentagon asking for \$40 billion for the war early next year and Congress approving it.

"It's not likely that there would be any circumstances where the president would lose this battle," he said.

Pak HC rejects LeT chief's plea against indictment

PTI, Islamabad/Lahore

Pakistan-based LeT's operations chief and Mumbai attacks mastermind Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi yesterday failed to get any reprieve from the Lahore High Court, which disposed of his two petitions challenging his indictment for involvement in the 26/11 strikes.

While disposing of the petitions, a Rawalpindi-based bench of the Lahore High Court only directed the anti-terrorism court, which had formally charged him along with six other suspects last month with involvement in the 26/11 strikes, to consider Lakhvi's objections against his indictment under provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code.

Lakhvi's lawyer Khwaja Sultan Ahmed claimed during proceedings that the prosecution had no incriminating evidence against his client. He also said the statement given to Indian authorities by Ajmal Amir Kasab, the lone attacker captured in Mumbai, is not admissible in the anti-terrorism court.

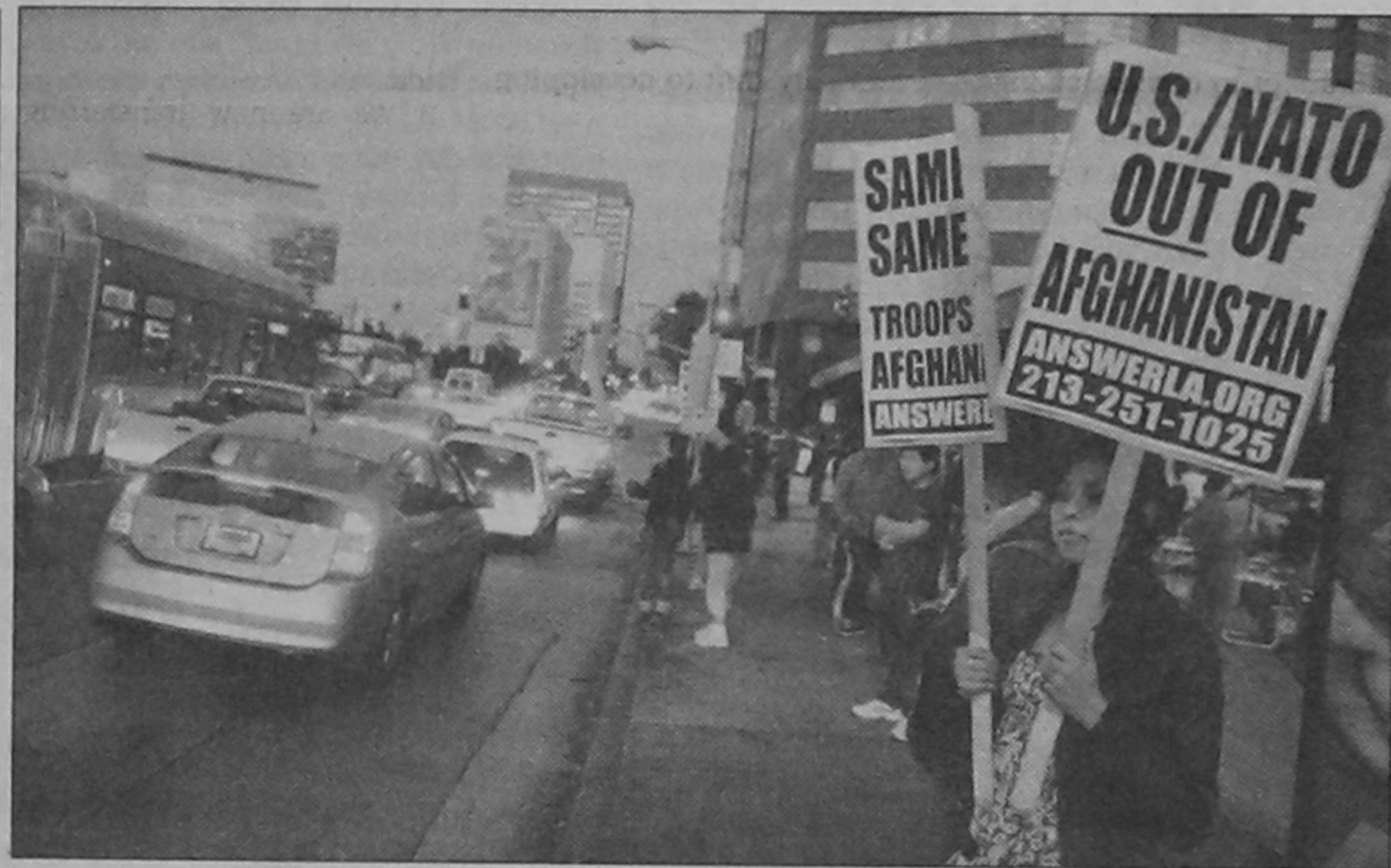


PHOTO: AFP

Anti-war demonstrators protest against the announcement of a US troop increase for Afghanistan at a rally outside the Federal Building in Los Angeles on Wednesday. President Barack Obama has ordered 30,000 extra troops to Afghanistan and the Nato chief said other countries would send 5,000 soldiers, amid growing pressure to find a way out of the unpopular war.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Obama borrows Soviet's Afghan endgame

AP, Moscow

The US-led war in Afghanistan bears ominous similarities to the disastrous Soviet war there 20 years ago, when a modern army was humbled by small guerrilla bands and the invaders struggled to prop up an unpopular government in Kabul.

But comparisons like these, often cited by critics of US President Barack Obama's planned surge, have emphasised similarities while ignoring key differences in the position of the Soviet Union then and the US and Nato today. A close reading of history suggests there is still a chance that the allies can succeed where the Soviet Union failed.

While more than 850 members of the US military have died as a result of the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, those losses still represent a fraction of 14,500 Soviet deaths in Moscow's Afghan adventure.

During the ten years the USSR fought in Afghanistan, the country was a Cold War battleground, pitting a Kremlin-backed atheist government against Muslim fighters clandestinely supported by the US, Pakistan, Iran, China and Saudi Arabia.

By the late 1980s, the US

and the others were supplying the rebels with everything from transport mules to advanced weaponry, including the Stinger anti-aircraft missiles that played a crucial role in neutralising Soviet air power.

Today the Western allies face an insurgency in Afghanistan that is largely homegrown and self-financed, in part through opium production. No government in the world publicly supports the Taliban.

Dark assessments of the West's chances in Afghanistan typically dwell on Moscow's reverses while ignoring its successes, including the creation of a relatively stable Afghan government and a 300,000-strong army.

Afghanistan's Communist regime defied all predictions and outlasted the Soviet Union, collapsing only after post-Soviet Russia halted massive economic aid.

In the current conflict militants have turned parts of Pakistan into sanctuaries, as they did during the Soviet war. But unlike the Soviets the US has been able to extend its airpower into these ungoverned regions.

The US has alienated many Afghans through its bombing raids, which have caused numerous civilian casualties.

But US and Western troops

have tread far more lightly than Soviet military forces, some of whom robbed farmers, looted markets and used air power indiscriminately, sometimes wiping out villages.

Russian veterans of the Soviet Afghan war have long predicted that the US-led battle against the Taliban was doomed, based on their own experience fighting among the arid peaks of the Hindu Kush. But these judgments perhaps are coloured by bitterness over the Soviet defeat.

While mindful of Soviet failures, Western forces have been slow to learn from Moscow's successes.

Kabul's Kremlin-backed Communist regime was generally brutal, corrupt and represented a small minority of the population.

But the Afghan Communist leaders arguably had far more control of their country than the government of President Hamid Karzai.

After the mid-1980s the Soviet Union implemented a strategy of securing cities and the roads between them, strengthening the central government's grip.

And to some extent this approach worked, creating islands of stability where the government could run schools and hospitals, organise police and train soldiers.

Maldives seeks climate summit cash to adapt and survive

AFP, Colombo

The president of the Maldives said yesterday that he would use the UN climate summit in Copenhagen to appeal for immediate cash to fend off the rising sea levels that threaten his atoll nation.

Mohamed Nasheed has repeatedly argued that the 330,000 people living on hundreds of tiny islands could soon become environmental refugees, driven from their homes by the effects of climate change.

He said the Copenhagen summit must "ensure that most immediate and urgent adaptation needs of the most vulnerable countries are adequately funded".

Look at her feet to know if she likes you

ANI, London

Searching for the twinkle in her eye to tell if she is head over heels in love with you? Well, it's time you turn your attention towards her feet, suggests a new study.

The research says the way to tell if a woman likes a man is to look at her feet.

It is believed that our feet gestures are the most powerful form of body language because we are less conscious of what we are doing with them.

As for how to know if a woman has a thing for you: if the female moves her feet away from her body while giggling, to adopt a more open-legged stance, then she is attracted to you. But if her legs are crossed or tucked under her body, then you should forget about her.

Bad news for women: the rules do not apply to men, reports The Telegraph.

Professor Geoff Beattie, one of Britain's leading psychologists, made the findings after examining how people move their feet in response to different situations.

Prof Beattie, who is Dean of psychological sciences at the University of Manchester, said: "Whilst people might know what their facial expression or hands might be imparting, they will often have no idea whether their feet are moving or the messages their feet are sending out."



PHOTO: AFP

Survivors and mourners hold torches during a rally around the memorial statue of a mother and child, erected in memory of poison gas victims, on the 25th anniversary of the world's worst industrial accident outside the old Union Carbide factory in Bhopal on Wednesday.