


Obama's troop surge stirs mixed reactions **STORY HIGHLIGHTS**

- Obama's new Afghan strategy has stirred skepticism and limited support from home.
- With additional troops, close to 100,000 U.S. troops will be deployed to Afghanistan.
- Gates said U.S. troops may not begin their withdrawal in July 2011, if situation dictates.

by Xinhua writers Wang Fengfeng, Jiang Guopeng

WASHINGTON, Dec. 2 (Xinhua) -- U.S. President Barack Obama's Tuesday announcement to deploy 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan has stirred skepticism and limited support from home on Wednesday, and the question whether U.S. troops can come home as promised has created anxiety among the U.S. public.



A CH-47F Chinook transport helicopter prepares to land at FOB Salerno in Afghanistan Dec. 2, 2009. U.S. President Barack Obama said on Tuesday he is ordering 30,000 more U.S. troops to Afghanistan by next summer to counter a resurgent Taliban and plans to begin a troop withdrawal in 18 months. (Xinhua/Reuters Photo)

[Photo Gallery>>>](#)

Lorraine Burke, a Nevada resident, said she's not sure whether more troops will help to counter the Taliban-led insurgency and stabilize Afghanistan. But she thought the administration didn't have much choice.

"At this point, it's important to try to see what can be done, and as

soon as we can, come back to the USA," she said.

Obama's announcement drew wide attention from home. Burke said she watched almost all of it on Tuesday night, and Barrett Coch, a Texan, said he couldn't catch it live but managed to tape it.

Coch said he wasn't impressed with the new strategy, saying the same thing had happened before: "Everything seemed to go back to normal, then we left, and all of a sudden it's back to the same situation."

He said he would like to see the money spent domestically.

Obama's predecessor, George W. Bush, in 2007 announced a troop surge in Iraq, sending more than 20,000 soldiers to that country. According to government and military officials, the surge led to improvement in Iraqi security.

Christopher A. Preble, foreign policy studies director of the bipartisan think-tank Cato Institute, said Afghanistan is very different from Iraq, and it's not possible for the United States to concentrate its forces in one or two places, such as in Iraq's case.

He said Obama has "invested so much, (and) we have defined success with a set of very ambitious objectives," so anything less would be met with harsh criticism.

## **OBAMA'S WAR**

Obama announced his version of troop surge in a prime time address on Tuesday night at the West Point U.S. Military Academy, saying it will be completed by the summer of 2010.

He also said the withdrawing process is to start in July 2011, before the presidential election in 2012.

With the additional troops, close to 100,000 U.S. troops will be deployed to Afghanistan, many to southern provinces such as Helmand and Kandahar, both Taliban strongholds.

Taliban has played down the significance of Obama's strategy, saying it's "nothing new," in a statement released to the media in Afghanistan.

When Obama assumed office in January, the United States had just over 32,000 troops in Afghanistan. He had ordered to send in 21,000 additional troops in March, and the U.S. troop level there has since grown to 68,000.

However, as the situation in Afghanistan deteriorates, Stanley

McChrystal, top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, has been calling for 40,000 more troops since August to quell the insurgency led by the Taliban.

By sending almost two thirds of the troops stationed in Afghanistan, Obama "assumed full ownership of the war in Afghanistan," commented The Washington Post.

Cato Institute's Preble said the Afghan war is a "war of choice," and suggested the United States should more narrowly target the administration's efforts to "draw down U.S. troop presence, to redefine our objective, to ensure the United States retains the ability to degrade al-Qaeda's ability to carry out future attacks."

He said with al-Qaeda present in over 20 locations, throwing billions of dollars into one is unwise.

### **SELLING THE WAR**

Administration and military officials started selling Obama's Afghan strategy on Wednesday.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, along with Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Mike Mullen appeared before the Senate Armed Services Committee on Wednesday morning, lobbying the lawmakers for support.

Gates said U.S. troops may not begin their withdrawal in July 2011, if situation dictates. The senators grilled the officials with questions ranging from how the United States will help build up capacity of the Afghan government, to whether an arbitrary withdrawal date would send the wrong signal to insurgents.

Gates told lawmakers the troop surge could last 18 to 24 months. Regarding the withdrawal date, he said that "the president always has the freedom to adjust his decisions."

Paradoxically, Obama got more support from his Republican foes such as John McCain from Arizona. But the Republicans are worried U.S. enemies would be emboldened by a timeframe to withdraw.

The officials were also met with several anti-war protesters opposed to the troop surge when they went into the Capitol to face the lawmakers.

Clinton is to fly to NATO headquarters in Brussels on Friday to persuade allies to join the surge, and NATO is hoping allies would contribute 5,000 more troops.

Countries such as Britain have already made pledges, but others are reluctant.

A Norwegian tourist, who declined to be named, said Norway has already contributed enough troops to the war, considering the country's relatively small population.

According to the Norwegian government, the country has 575 troops in Afghanistan, and is unable to contribute more.

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#### **[Russia welcomes Obama's decisions on Afghanistan](#)**

MOSCOW, Dec. 2 (Xinhua) -- Moscow welcomes the revised U.S. strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Russian Foreign Ministry said on Wednesday.

"Moscow has taken a generally positive attitude to the key provisions of the new U.S. strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan announced by U.S. President Barack Obama," a foreign ministry statement said. [Full story](#)

#### **[EU welcomes U.S. to reinforce engagement in Afghanistan](#)**

STOCKHOLM, Dec. 2 (Xinhua) -- The European Union (EU) expressed its welcome on Wednesday to the announcement by President Barack Obama that the United States will further reinforce its engagement in Afghanistan.

"This announcement comes at a time of renewed focus and engagement by the international community as a whole. The European Union stands ready to work closely with the United States and other parts of the international community in addressing the challenges in Afghanistan," Sweden, the current rotating presidency of EU, said in a statement. [Full story](#)

#### **[Afghan gov't welcomes Obama's new strategy](#)**

KABUL, Dec. 2 (Xinhua) -- The government of Afghanistan welcomed Washington's new strategy for the post-Taliban country announced by U.S. President Barack Obama, a press release issued by President Hamid Karzai's office said on Wednesday.

"The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan welcomes the new strategy of United States for Afghanistan and hopes that enhancing troops would help strengthen peace, security and protect the lives of people," the press release added. [Full story](#)

#### **[S Korea plans to send about 350 troops to Afghanistan next year](#)**

SEOUL, Dec. 2 (Xinhua) -- South Korea is planning to dispatch near 350 soldiers to Afghanistan in mid 2010 to serve a two-and-a-half year mission, local media reported Wednesday.

The government and the ruling Grand National Party (GNP) agreed at a policy coordination meeting to present a motion to the National Assembly about the dispatch of 340-350 troops to the war-torn Central Asian country next July for a two-and-a-half years, the country's Yonhap News Agency quoted officials as saying. [Full story](#)

### [Pakistan to closely engage with U.S. on new Afghan strategy](#)

ISLAMABAD, Dec. 2 (Xinhua) -- Pakistan on Wednesday said it would closely engage with the United States in understanding the full import of its new strategy on Afghanistan and to ensure that there would be no adverse fallout on Pakistan.

"There is certainly a need for clarity and coordination on all aspects of the implementation of this strategy," the Foreign Office of Pakistan said in a statement issued here. [Full story](#)

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