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Withdraw, southern residents say

Omaid Khpalwak, Nadem & Stanikzai - Dec 2, 2009 - 20:30

LASHKARGAH/ KANDAHAR CITY(PAN): The US should withdraw its current troops, not increase them, say some residents of the southern zone of Afghanistan.

Announcing his Afghan strategy, US President Barack Obama said he would send 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan immediately and, if certain benchmarks are met, would start withdrawing troops in 18 months. He will start the buildup in Helmand and other areas of southern Afghanistan.

Pajhwok Afghan News reporters across the country interviewed a wide range of Afghans to hear their views about Obama's strategy.

A tribal elder in Kandahar, Muhammad Isa, said that the Americans should be asked whether they came here for reconstruction and development of Afghanistan or only to threaten the lives of Afghans.

"The Afghans have no confidence in Americans, because they suffered too much cruelty from them," Isa said.

But then he added that the NATO-led soldiers should try to prevent the interference of Pakistan in Afghanistan.

Isa said deployment of the additional troops in two provinces of Kandahar and Helmand was wrong. Instead they should be deployed in areas bordering Pakistan, he said.

A female human rights activist in Kandahar also disagreed with the dispatch of addition US troops.

Shahida Hussain told Pajhwok that unless the US soldiers act sensitively toward Afghans, all the struggles would be in vain.

She added that the recent additional troops dispatched to Afghanistan were unable even to control a single district, which indicates that sending more troops could not solve the problems.

Around 68,000 US troops are already involved in the country in the war on terror.

Expressing her disagreement about the timeline of the withdrawal of US troops, Hussain said that before troops plan to leave the country they should be certain that the Afghan National Army (ANA) soldiers are strong enough to secure the entire country.

"Please train and equip our soldiers and prevent the interference of Pakistan," she said in her message to Obama.

In the neighbouring province of Uruzgan, people have also complained about the killing of innocent people by US airstrikes.

A tribal elder, Amanullah, said that irresponsible raids on the houses of locals have driven a wedge between ordinary Afghans and NATO troops.

This strategy of increased troops would once again fail, if an end to such raids and coordination between ANA and NATO soldiers were not included in the new strategy, he said.

"I ask the American troops, please do not take the Russian guns from our soldiers, and providing them the fake Kalashnikovs, Amanullah said.

They should give ANA soldiers new pick-up vehicles, and equip them," he added.

He thinks that the US troops would face the same problems as the Russian did, if the troops leave Afghanistan without training and equipping ANA soldiers.

Obama explicitly said in his speech that training and strengthening Afghan soldiers was a pre-requisite to US withdrawal.

Another Uruzgan resident, Faizullah, also said, "Afghanistan will be more destabilized if the Americans leave Afghan government (forces) alone" without first training them.

Faizullah, 25, left Farah province and sheltered in Uruzgan province, because of the airstrike of US soldiers which destroyed his home.

"For God's sake please do not bomb our homes anymore" - this was his message to the US President.

A tribal elder in Musa Qala district of Helmand, Zahir Khan, said it was the right of Afghans to ask the international community to solve the ongoing crisis, before they withdraw troops.

Zahir Khan added that the US troops should provide sophisticated weapons to the ANA soldiers and train them well. If there are no trained police and army in Afghanistan all the residents would not trust the Afghan government, he pointed out.

Residents of the southern Helmand, the hotbed of Taliban insurgents, also asked the US government to stop the interference of Pakistan.

"Pakistan uses all the world leaders as a pistol in favor of its own benefits," Zahir Khan said.

Pajhwok Photo Service



KABUL, Dec 02, 2009: A disable man is busy on a machine making artificial legs for disable people here on Wednesday. The International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) officials said that 90,000 disables had been benefited by the services. PAJHWOK/Nilab Habibi

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