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## Pakistan's Rebuff Over New Offensives Rankles U.S.

By ERIC SCHMITT and DAVID E. SANGER  
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The Pakistani Army's announcement last week that it planned no new offensive against militants for as long as a year has deeply frustrated senior American military officers, and chipped away at one of the cornerstones of [President Obama's](#) strategy to reverse the [Taliban's](#) gains in Afghanistan and [Pakistan](#).

When Mr. Obama announced his decision in December [to send 30,000 additional troops to Afghanistan](#), he and his aides made clear that the chances of success hinged significantly on Pakistan's willingness to eliminate militants' havens in its territory, including in the tribal region of North Waziristan. United States officials described the American and [NATO](#) surge of troops as a hammer, but they said it required a Pakistani anvil on the other side of the border to prevent the Taliban from retreating to the mountains.

Now that strategy appears imperiled by Pakistan's latest statement. On Thursday, soon after Defense Secretary [Robert M. Gates](#) arrived on a two-day trip to the country, the Pakistani Army's chief spokesman, Maj. Gen. Athar Abbas, [rebuffed American pressure to step up attacks](#) in North Waziristan. That area is the main base of operations for the Haqqani network, which

stages operations against American and Afghan forces in Afghanistan. It is believed to be responsible for many of the attacks on Kabul, including [a devastating assault early last week near the presidential palace](#).

Fighters from [Al Qaeda](#) and the Pakistani Taliban have also been concentrated in North Waziristan, including many who were driven out of their positions in South Waziristan by recent Pakistani Army operations.

“This has become the center,” a senior administration official said, speaking anonymously because he was not authorized to discuss American strategy publicly.

American officials said they had not been surprised by the Pakistani announcement. Since the last two years of the Bush administration, the United States has been arguing for a far more active Pakistani military presence in North Waziristan. But some said they had been surprised that the rebuff was issued while Mr. Gates was in the country, rather than after he left.

General Abbas told reporters it could be 6 to 12 months before the army consolidated its current operations and began any new offensive. Some American officials think it could be longer.

The critical question is how much the Pakistani decision will undercut Mr. Obama’s strategy. During a speech at [West Point](#) on Dec. 1, he said his administration would reassess the plan at the end of 2010, after all the troops deployed as part of the increase were in place. But if the Pakistani position does not change, the operations on Pakistan’s side of the border will not have begun by the time Mr. Obama has made his assessment.

Mr. Obama made no public demands on Islamabad when he announced the troop increase at West Point, but he said he was acting “with the full recognition that our success in Afghanistan is inextricably linked to our partnership with Pakistan.” He quickly added: “We need a strategy that works on both sides of the border.”

Mr. Obama praised the Pakistani Army for waging an offensive in Swat and South Waziristan, where the Pakistani Taliban were taking aim at the country’s fragile government. He promised to work with the Pakistanis to strengthen their ability to combat the militants, but he said the United States had “made it clear that we cannot tolerate a safe haven for terrorists whose location is known and whose intentions are clear.”

Pakistani officials have not refused to go after Qaeda or Taliban fighters in North Waziristan. But they have made it clear that their forces are too tied up now to conduct new, larger operations on Washington's schedule.

As a practical matter, American officials said, Pakistan's inability or reluctance to open a new front in North Waziristan will increase the reliance on missile strikes from [drones](#) operated by the [C.I.A.](#) to disrupt attacks aimed at Afghanistan.

American officials said that Pakistani military leaders had never promised a specific timetable for beginning a new offensive, but that announcing a delay of as much as 12 months could aid the militants' planning and morale on both sides of the border.

"It's disappointing, but not entirely surprising," said a senior Defense Department official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to avoid jeopardizing his ties with Pakistani counterparts.

Mr. Gates and other American officials sought to put the best face on the situation last week, saying that the Pakistani Army was stretched thin from its previous offensives against militants.

"Pakistani leadership will make its own decisions about what the best timing for their military operations is, about when they are ready to do something or whether they are going to do it at all," Mr. Gates told Pakistani journalists on Friday, the day after General Abbas's comments.

"The way I like to express it is, we're in this car together, but the Pakistanis are in the driver's seat and have their foot on the accelerator," Mr. Gates said. "And that's just fine with me."

Gen. [David H. Petraeus](#), the head of the military's Central Command, said at a conference in Washington on Friday that American officials must be mindful of the limitations facing Pakistan's military.

General Petraeus said that the Pakistani leaders would need to negotiate agreements with local tribal leaders to hold the gains that the Pakistani military has achieved in places like Swat and South Waziristan. But he emphasized that any deals must be more resilient than previous pacts in the tribal areas, which fell apart and allowed the militants to regain control.

Senior American officers in the region said that cooperation with their Pakistani counterparts had improved in recent months.

NATO military leaders, for instance, recently provided a detailed briefing on the campaign in Afghanistan to Gen. [Ashfaq Parvez Kayani](#), the Pakistani army chief of staff, a senior American officer said. Pakistani officers reciprocated last week with a briefing for NATO officers on their campaign plans, the American officer said.

#### 7 Bodies Found With Warnings

PESHAWAR, Pakistan — The bodies of seven people accused by the Taliban of spying for the United States were found in North Waziristan on Sunday, officials and residents said.

Notes attached to the bullet-ridden bodies accused the victims of working with the United States as it carries out a wave of drone strikes in the region, and warned that anyone else who did so would meet the same end.

Drone attacks in the region have increased significantly since the bombing of a C.I.A. base in Khost, Afghanistan, that killed seven Americans on Dec. 30.