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## Pakistan says new U.S. Afghan policy should not disturb regional balance

By Abdul Hadi Mayar

Pakistan has urged the United States that the new policy of Obama administration on Afghanistan must not disturb balance (of power) in South Asia.

The strongest ever signal from Pakistan was made by Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani in his talks with the CIA Director General, Leon Panetta, who paid a three-day visit to Islamabad on the week-end.

Gilani said increase in number of ISAF (International Security Assistance Forces) forces in Afghanistan can leave negative impact on Pakistan's Baluchistan province.

In past, Islamabad has though expressed its reservations about infiltration of insurgents and shipments of arms from Afghanistan for insurgents operating in its tribal areas and Baluchistan. However, it is for the first time that it has criticized possible "disturbance of regional power" due to military build-up in Afghanistan.

Pakistan has always complained against India's military build-up alleging that it disturbed balance of power in the region.

However, it has never made such complaint about its western neighbor, which has remained shattered by the Soviet invasion and incessant civil wars.

The United States has already deployed 68,000 troops in Afghanistan, besides the 40,000 NATO-led ISAF forces there. U.S. NATO commander in the country, General Stanley McChrystal has called for deployment of up to 40,000 more international forces.

U.S. President Barack Obama is in the final phase of deciding his future strategy in Afghanistan, which will most probably include sending of additional U.S. troops to the country.

Britain, Germany, and Slovakia have already announced sending of more troops to Afghanistan while NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen has indicated surge in alliance troops in the country.

Pakistan shares 2,430-kilometer long rugged border with Afghanistan mostly covered with high-raised mountains, gorges, and valleys, and inhabited on both sides by semi-independent Pashtoon tribes, not bound by Pakistani laws.

In the past, Pakistan and Afghanistan have accused each other of border violations and seepage of militants and arms into either side.

Amir Haider Khan Hoti, the Chief Minister of Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), bordering Afghanistan, alleged on Friday that the militants operating in north-western Pakistan received "planning and funds" from abroad.

He was answering journalists' queries in Peshawar about presence of Pakistani Taliban leader, Maulana Fazlullah in Afghanistan.

In an interaction with BBC, Fazlullah had claimed earlier this week that he had crossed over to Afghanistan.

Hoti said if it was true "then it is the biggest proof of what we have been speaking of external hand in (terrorist activities) in Pakistan."

He called for effectively raising voice at diplomatic level against any country involved in terrorist activities in Pakistan.

Pakistani military officials recently alleged that the insurgents in the Pakistani tribal areas were being armed and financed from across the Afghan border.

Islamabad also alleges that the insurgents in its south-western Baluchistan province are also receiving arms and training in Afghanistan, a claim rejected by Kabul as baseless.

Gilani had, during visit of U.S. National Security Advisor, James Jones to Islamabad earlier this month, also conveyed Pakistan's concern over increase in number of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, "particularly in Helmand province."

Helmand is adjoining Pakistan's Baluchistan province, where Pakistani officials have in the past alleged presence of training camps for Baloch separatist and from where Baloch insurgents have allegedly been receiving arms supplies and financial support.

In his talks with Panetta, the Pakistani Prime Minister emphatically said that the new U.S. policy on Afghanistan should incorporate Pakistan's viewpoint.

He said the United States must fully share and inform Pakistan on its roadmap about Afghanistan so to remove mistrust and build mutual confidence.

U.S. officials, including James Jones and Leon Panetta, have promised to take Pakistan on board while devising new strategy for Afghanistan.

As to how much Washington takes care of Pakistan's concerns in this regard will be seen once President Obama unfolds his new strategy.

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## Afghanistan, Iran dominate at new security forum

by Michel Comte

November 22, 2009

HALIFAX, Canada (AFP) – International political and military officials agreed no exit strategy should be set for troops in Afghanistan, while the United States urged Iran to engage the West at a new security forum that wrapped up Sunday.

"We would prefer that the Iranian regime follow through on the opportunity to engage," Ellen Tauscher, Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security at the US State Department, told delegates in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Tehran "asked for engagement with the United States. It has it. Now what is it going to do? Is it going to stand up and say that they're going to take our deal... or are they going to use some other flimsy excuse to duck," she said.

US State Department deputy spokesman Robert Wood said Friday that the United States and its negotiating partners Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany were not yet "at the point" of closing the window on dialogue.

The six powers have expressed disappointment that Iran has not responded positively to a deal to ship low-grade nuclear fuel abroad or agreed to new talks.

"If persuasion doesn't work, pressure is going to have to be the next line of action," Tauscher warned Sunday, suggesting a further round of sanctions against Iran. "I don't believe (military action against Iran) is on the table now," she added.

Organized jointly by the Canadian government and the German Marshall Fund, a public policy institute for strengthening transatlantic ties, delegates at the inaugural three-day Halifax International Security Forum had earlier agreed that setting an exit date for Afghanistan would only embolden the Taliban.

On Friday, US Senator John McCain predicted an allied win in Afghanistan in one year to 18 months if sufficient troops are sent, as the White House mulls sending tens of thousands of reinforcements.

The future of NATO and international claims on untapped Arctic oil also dominated discussions, largely behind closed doors, between US Defense Secretary Robert Gates and

top officials from Belgium, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, New Zealand, and the Netherlands.

Gates announced Washington aims to boost cooperation with Canada in the Arctic, as Russia and others eye its vast untapped resources.

He also urged the international community to ensure that aid and development projects in Afghanistan do not fuel corruption in war-torn Afghanistan.

On Saturday, Canada's top soldier said that a war would likely never be fought over the Arctic, but its opening up could spark new clashes as far away as the Middle East and between trading nations.

"There is no conventional military threat to the Arctic," General Walter Natynczyk told the summit. "If someone were to invade the Canadian Arctic, my first task would be to rescue them.

"The Arctic is a very harsh environment," he said. "This is not an easy environment of the world to operate in."

Stephen Carmel of Maersk Line said the opening of new Arctic shipping routes would impact global trade, making some countries' products relatively cheaper and redrawing trade pattern.

"The result will be trade friction in anything that dramatically changes relative costs," he said.

"That is the sort of thing that leads to conflict," Carmel concluded. "These sort of trade effects are what will really change the world, not whether we get a few more barrels of oil from the Arctic."

A key difference of this event from similar summits held previously in Europe is that guests were invited from New Zealand, Japan, India and elsewhere, not just from Canada, the United States and European nations.

This marks an evolution to broader involvement in security matters of concern to NATO, said Will Bohlen, a spokesman for the German Marshall Fund, told AFP.

"A lot of security challenges are not limited to the transatlantic sphere," he said. "And there's greater cooperation and partnerships around the world now to deal with new security threats."

Delegates also talked about nuclear proliferation, Pakistan, Iraq and the Middle East, China and North Korea, pandemics, energy security, piracy and port security, and the geopolitical consequences of the economic crisis.