

# War in Afghanistan longer than expected

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**KABUL,** — Nine years have passed since the ouster of Taliban regime by U.S.-led coalition in late 2001, but the war on terror in Afghanistan could take more time than they expected.

On Oct. 7, 2001, "Operation Enduring Freedom" kicked off with the aim to topple Taliban regime for harboring al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden, who is alleged the architect of Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States.

The Taliban regime was toppled easily but Bin Laden and the Afghan Taliban chief Mullah Mohammad Omar are still at large. Furthermore, a stiff resistance by Taliban militants has forced a surge in U.S. and allied troops.

Taliban has repeatedly rejected peace talks with the U.S.-backed government before the foreign troops end their occupation.

Last December, U.S. President Barack Obama announced to send an additional 30,000 U.S. troops to bring down the Taliban momentum and set July 2011 as the date to begin withdrawing forces from Afghani-

stan. But Obama admitted that the strategy had made slow progress in curbing the growing insurgency during a surprise visit to Afghanistan on Dec. 3.

Obama also told U.S. troops in the Bagram Air Base north of the capital Kabul that the U.S. forces were suffering more casualties in Afghanistan where 467 soldiers have been killed so far this year, the deadliest year in the past nine years. Support for the war in Afghanistan is waning in the U.S. and other troop-contributing countries as the death toll continues to rise.

The number of foreign troops killed since the 2001 invasion has risen to 2,253 including 1,424 Americans, according to iCasualties website monitoring NATO-led forces casualties in Afghanistan.

A total of 683 foreign troops have been killed so far this year, compared with 521 in 2009.

"It is difficult to win a war when you are unable to locate the enemy's command and control center," Waheed Mujda, political analyst at the Afghan Research Center for Strategy Studies, told Xinhua.

"Since the root of militancy

is beyond Afghan borders, the war can not win unless the Taliban sanctuaries and their financial resources are choked outside Afghan," said Mujda, an official of the former Taliban regime and expert on al-Qaeda network.

"A lasting peace would not return to Afghanistan unless the legitimate interests of all stakeholders in the game are guaranteed," said Waqef Hakimi, a veteran of war against the occupation of former Soviet Union.

"In fact, a proxy war among rival powers is going on in Afghanistan. Iran is opposed to the U.S. presence in Afghanistan. India and Pakistan are also vying for their interest in Afghanistan," Mujda maintained.

"Parallel to mounting pressure on Taliban, the U.S. and its allies should focus on ensuring good governance, improving living conditions by creating jobs and Afghanize the war on terror by properly equipping Afghan security forces to win local support," Hakimi told Xinhua.

The Nato-led forces have ignored Afghan culture to raid houses at night and indiscriminately kill civilians, which has



proved counterproductive and enabled Taliban to recruit new fighters constantly from victims' families to avenge, Hakimi said.

Obama replaced General Stanley McChrystal with Iraq war veteran General David Petraeus as top commander of over 140,000-strong NATO-led forces in July as the former mocked the Obama administration.

Observers believe, however, that increase in troops and replacement of the top commander would not help to annihilate Taliban and associated militants in Afghanistan unless their sanctuaries are smashed in neighboring Pakistan.

In addition to strengthening ground offensive to rid Taliban of their stronghold in southern Afghanistan, the United States has dramatically intensified drone attacks in Pakistan's semi-autonomous tribal areas bordering Afghanistan, seen as safe haven of militants.

But the security situation has not improved significantly as Taliban insurgency extended from restive southern to relatively calm northern and eastern Afghanistan.

According to observers, the war on terror would continue for years to come until and unless the U.S.-led troops drastically change the strategy to win the hearts and minds of

Afghans which is definitely a challenging mission.

U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates said after meeting Afghan president Hamid Karzai on Dec. 7 that he was "convinced" that the U.S. strategy in Afghanistan was working, and that the goal of pulling American troops out of major combat role by 2014 could be met.

But General David Petraeus has said he might advise President Obama to delay the exit plan because of slow progress on the battle field, not to mention the tough mission of training enough Afghan national army and police to take full responsibility for defending on their own. (Xinhua)

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