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AFP

Taliban condemns Obama's Nobel Peace Prize

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The Taliban Friday condemned Barack Obama's Nobel Peace Prize, saying rather than bring peace to Afghanistan he had boosted troop numbers and continued the aggressive policies of his predecessor.

"We have seen no change in his strategy for peace. He has done nothing for peace in Afghanistan," Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told AFP.

"We condemn the award of the Nobel Peace Prize for Obama," he said by telephone from an undisclosed location.

"When Obama was elected president, we were hopeful he would keep his promise to bring change. But he brought no change, he has continued the same old strategy as (President George W.) Bush.

"He reinforces the war in Afghanistan, he sent more troops to Afghanistan and is considering sending yet more. He has shed Afghan blood and he continues to bleed Afghans and to boost the war here," he said.

Obama won the award less than a year after he took office with the jury hailing his "extraordinary" diplomatic efforts.

Obama, 48, took office in January and has since sought to restore US standing in the world after widespread criticism over the war in Iraq and the superpower's attitude to efforts to control global warming.

He is currently considering a request from his military commanders to send another 40,000 troops to Afghanistan, where a Taliban insurgency is gaining strength, and the death toll of foreign soldiers has surged.

Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai, whose government is supported by the US and NATO allies, welcomed the award as "appropriate".

"His hard work and his new vision on global relations, his will and efforts for creating friendly and good relations at global level and global peace make him the appropriate recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize," Karzai's spokesman Siamak Hirai said.

A prominent Afghan candidate for the prize, women's and human rights activist Sima Samar, told AFP she respected the Nobel committee's decision.

Through her spokesman, Nader Nadery, she said she was happy her candidacy had "brought major recognition to Afghanistan's women" and to her own work.

As Obama considers escalating the US troop presence in Afghanistan, he is expected to meet with senior military advisers again on Friday as speculation is rising that he may not opt for an increased counter-insurgency force.

The senior commander of the more than 100,000 US and NATO troops in Afghanistan, US General Stanley McChrystal, has warned that the war against the Taliban could fail without reinforcements.

Speculation is rising that Obama may see the Taliban, which is spreading its footprint across Afghanistan, posing less of a threat to US security than Al-Qaeda and may choose to concentrate efforts on Pakistan instead.

On the streets of Kabul, Afghans said they did not believe Obama's policies had improved the situation in their war-ravaged country.

Indeed, said shopkeeper Ahamd Tawab, "the situation is getting worse here".

Abdul Hakeem, an 18-year-old tailor, said: "At least I can say that he is better than George Bush."

In the volatile south of the country, where the Taliban maintain a strong influence eight years after their repressive regime was overthrown in a US-led invasion, US soldiers expressed disbelief at Obama's win.

At Spin Boldak Forward Operating Base (FOB) near the border with Pakistan, a couple welcomed the news with shock.

"For what?" one said, while another asked "What has he done?"

One soldier was unable to conceal his contempt. "President Obama got the Nobel Prize and my ass is still sitting in Afghanistan. It's not fair," he said.