

## Accept Defeat by Taliban, Pakistan tells Nato

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By Ahmed Rashid in Islamabad

Senior Pakistani officials are urging Nato countries to accept the Taliban and work towards a new coalition government in Kabul that might exclude the Afghan president Hamid Karzai.

Pakistan's foreign minister, Khurshid Kasuri, has said in private briefings to foreign ministers of some Nato member states that the Taliban are winning the war in Afghanistan and Nato is bound to fail. He has advised against sending more troops.

Western ministers have been stunned. "Kasuri is basically asking Nato to surrender and to negotiate with the Taliban," said one Western official who met the minister recently.

The remarks were made on the eve of Nato's critical summit in Latvia. Lt Gen David Richards, the British general and Nato's force commander in Afghanistan, and the Dutch ambassador Daan Everts, its chief diplomat there, have spent five days in the Pakistani capital, Islamabad, urging the Pakistani military to do more to reign in the Taliban. But they have received mixed messages.

Mr Karzai has long insisted that the Taliban sanctuaries and logistics bases are in Pakistan while Gen James Jones, the Supreme Commander of Nato, told the US Congress in September that the Taliban leadership is headquartered in the Pakistani city of Quetta.

Lt Gen Ali Mohammed Jan Orakzai, governor of the volatile North West Frontier Province has stated publicly that the US, Britain and Nato have already failed in Afghanistan. "Either it is a lack of understanding or it is a lack of courage to admit their failures," he said recently.

Gen Orakzai insists that the Taliban represent the Pashtun population, Afghanistan's largest and Pakistan's second largest ethnic group, and they now lead a "national resistance" movement to throw out Western occupation forces, just as there is in Iraq.

But his comments have deeply angered many Pakistani and Afghan Pashtuns, who consider the Taliban as pariahs and a negation of Pashtun values. Gen Orakzai is the mastermind of "peace deals" between the army and the heavily Talibanised Pashtun tribes on the Pakistani side of the border, but these agreements have failed because they continue to allow the Taliban to attack Nato forces inside Afghanistan and leave the Taliban in place, free to run a mini-Islamic state.

Gen Orakzai is expected to urge the British Army to strike similar deals in Helmand province. Meanwhile aides to President Pervez Musharraf say he has virtually "given up" on Mr Karzai and is awaiting a change of face in Kabul before he offers more help.

Many Afghans fear that Pakistan is deliberately trying to undermine Mr Karzai and Nato's commitment to his government in an attempt to reinstall its Taliban proxies in Kabul - almost certainly leading to all-out civil war and possible partition of the country.

To progress in Riga, Nato will have to enlist US support to call Pakistan's bluff, put pressure on Islamabad to hand over the Taliban leadership and put more troops in to fight the insurgency while persuading Mr Karzai to become more pro-active.