

US will not abandon Afghanistan and Pakistan again, says Gates

By [Global Research](#)

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LAHORE: Afghanistan and Pakistan “can count on us for the long term”, US Defence Secretary Robert Gates has said.

In an interview with Al Jazeera television, Gates said the US had made a “serious strategic mistake” in turning its focus away from Afghanistan after the Soviet occupation forces were defeated. He said it would not repeat the mistake. “I believe we’ve learned our lesson.”

As US government weighs whether to deploy more US troops to Afghanistan, he said he remained undecided, “There are issues on both sides of [the argument] and, frankly, I haven’t made up my own mind at this point in terms of whether more forces are needed.”

Gates was scheduled to meet US President Barack Obama on Tuesday to briefly discuss the assessment provided last week by the top US commander in Afghanistan, Gen Stanley McChrystal. Defence officials said he had received comments on the assessment from senior military leaders including Adm Michael Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Gen David Petraeus, head of the Central Command. Gates acknowledged that the growing number of casualties in Afghanistan have weakened public support for the war. He added, though, that an early withdrawal is out of the question. He said the US military had recognised as early as 2005 that violence was escalating in Afghanistan but was unable to bolster forces there because of troop commitments in Iraq. “As we have drawn down in Iraq, more capability has become available.”

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