

NATO allies back President Obama's Afghan plan



President Barack Obama (on the right) and his Turkish counterpart Abdullah Gul review an honor guard during a welcoming ceremony at Cankaya Palace in Ankara. Obama has said he wants to build ties with the nation of Turkey on the "strong foundation" between the two NATO allies.

Castro

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Obama improve bilateral relations.

He did not spell out exactly what they recommended, but applauded "the interest and depth with which they expounded on their points of view and the quality of their simple and profound words."

"The three reflected transparency, pride in their work, their organization and the fight for their country," Castro wrote. "It's evident that they know Obama and have confidence and security in, and sympathy for him."

Among the last U.S. officials to see him face-to-face were state governors visiting the island separately on farm trade missions in 2005: Dave Heineman of Nebraska and Kathleen Blanco of Louisiana.

Lee's group was in Cuba five days on a trip meant to encourage dialogue between the United States and Cuba.

Jeffrey Davidow, the White House adviser for this month's Summit of the Americas, which Obama will attend, says the U.S. president has no plans to lift the 47-year-old trade embargo against Cuba. But he says Obama will soon ease travel and financial restrictions affecting the island as his administration reviews its Cuban policy.

Lee's delegation is sympathetic to Cuba, with most of its members openly praising the country's communist government while decrying U.S. policy.

Before the meeting with Fidel Castro was revealed, Lee said her group's talks with Raul Castro left lawmakers "convinced that President Castro sees normalization of relations and an end to the embargo as a benefit to both countries."

Bills in both houses of the U.S. Congress would effectively bar any president from prohibiting Americans from traveling to Cuba except in extreme cases such as war.

Lee predicted the measures will be approved, but said that will not spell the end of the embargo.

"This would be a wonderful step, allowing American citizens the right to travel to Cuba, but much would follow after that," she said in an interview. The lawmakers' meeting with Raul Castro touched on few specific issues, especially thorny ones like Cuba's checkered human rights record.

Special to Sentinel-Voice (NNPA) — President Obama has won commitments from NATO allies for an additional 5,000 troops, trainers and mentors in Afghanistan, according to wire reports.

The president expressed satisfaction with the result, even though the promises don't come close to matching the planned addition of 21,000 U.S. troops.

Obama also won a strong endorsement for his new policy in Afghanistan, which

is focused on rooting out al-Qaeda from the border with Pakistan, stepping up training for Afghan military and police forces, and working closely with Afghanistan's neighbors, according to the Associated Press.

The president called pledges from Britain, France, Germany and others to help in Afghanistan — "the kinds of commitments that historically you don't see at a conference like this," adding, "What was pledged here today was significant."

NATO officials said more than 10 countries had promised additional troops, trainers or money. "Many of us have stepped up to the plate this morning," said NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer. "When it comes to Afghanistan, this summit and this alliance have delivered."

French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who co-hosted the conference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, said Obama made a strong case for the assistance in out-

lining his new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. The strategy focuses more resources than in the past on rooting out al-Qaeda havens between the two countries.

"It was so easy to work with him," Sarkozy said of Obama. "He showed his leadership. He showed how committed he was."

NATO countries currently have about 30,000 troops in Afghanistan. In contrast, U.S. forces number about 38,000, and Obama is adding

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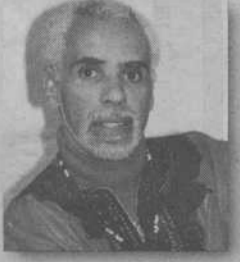
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