



### Events & Issues

#### **Obama's New Afghan Strategy**

**DANGEROUS FALLOUT FOR REGION?**

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One of the US biggest engagements in West and South Asia in the post-Cold War period is in Iraq and Afghanistan. The two have actually revealed the war fatigue of a super military power hitherto unseen before. The fatigue may not be in terms of resources and military capabilities, but certainly in constant delusion over the desired objectives and outcomes. Perhaps, the worst of it is yet to come once Washington decides upon the timeline for making an exit from Afghanistan.

The initial agenda of 9/11 was to make Afghanistan free of the Taliban, maintain a pro-US state and get a strategic foothold in South Asia. And perhaps also keep an eye over India's rising power in order to balance its geopolitical strategy vis-à-vis China and the Indian Ocean Rim. The success against the Taliban epidemic was chest high in the initial years, but it soon started sinking.

In fact, 2006, 2007 and 2008 have been the most tiring in these terms. The effort to secure goodwill among the Afghans received an initial boost with large sections being given aid and development assistance.

But, the failure to establish an indigenous structure and overall NGOisation of the aid has created one of the worst problems for the US in Afghanistan. The State spends less than 5 per cent of the donor aid received of which more than 95 per cent is through the NGOs. Which has created not only a serious corruption issue but has become a big threat to the rebuilding process.

Recall, the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) were appended to the International Security Assistance Force's (ISAF) search and security programmes, which actually did much harm to the development process. Though the disarmament and reintegration was one of the important areas of work, these PRTs went on to provide all sort of elementary stuff, which actually needed more civilian participation under the increased UN framework.

Resulting in a stress on military resources particularly those that are crucial to securing a foothold in South-East Afghanistan. More. The war fatigue has also gripped NATO and other allies in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT).

The biggest problem is getting allies to contribute an increase in troops in the GWOT. The civilian killings has also given Afghanistan an opportunity to off load its own inefficiencies in the overall perception of strategic failure by the US and NATO.

Worse, Washington's simultaneous aspiration to extend its geopolitical design to the Central Asian countries has actually backfired wherein it has approached Russia for success in Afghanistan. The peace is more illusory and the battle zone has extended in to Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). So, much so that the whole initiative is now being termed as an Afghan-Pak thing.

President Obama's new strategy has some vital elements to steer the war in another direction. The endeavour is to pin the enemy in its home, but the question is the overall morale of Pakistan, which is taking a serious toll at the hands of a new shade of cooperation between jihadi groups all across Pakistan.

The resources made available highlight the pressure on the Allied forces to make a humble exit with the successful staging of the upcoming Presidential elections. But, the fear of increased Americanisation of the Afghan war is creating restlessness among the coalition partners.

Consequently, the most important question before the Obama Administration is to look for new partners. Thus, in this fiasco the lookout for Iran and Russia is perhaps one of most crucial strategic directions that this war would be heading. It would be no surprise if the whole war alliance is carefully buttressed with the oil geopolitics of the region.

Iran and Russia might be offered significant participation in the Trans-Afghanistan Pipeline (TAP) and Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipelines. Thus, opening a new chapter of cooperation.

The second most important area is the increased presence of US troops along the Durand line. There is a possibility that this war might intensify in the FATA regions with American ground forces seeking a strategic base in Baluchistan and perhaps going for an increasing presence in South Asia. India seems to concede this as a timely strategic gain over Pakistan. This would make the US presence in South Asia a permanent feature.

The intensive struggle against the jihadi groups is both in the interest of India and the US, but Pakistan's gains too have to be looked in to. If democracy in Pakistan is endangered by this, then it could lead to disorder for a longer duration, which would be inimical to India's democracy. Wherein its minority population might find it extremely difficult to stay a mute observer to the situation across the border to which New Delhi is not sensitizing itself.

The new strategy of Obama is fraught with some of the extreme dangerous fallouts for the region in the event of the failure to achieve the desired results. Washington is being adventurous in outlining its multi-tier strategic interest in the region. Not only does the US want to tackle the Al-Qaeda and its alliance, but it also sees a future presence in Pakistan to serve its nuclear security goals, both vis-à-vis South Asia and West Asia.

Resulting in the Indian intelligentsia having qualms about the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton not making a stop-over in New Delhi on her visit to China, or how many hours the US President's special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke spent in Islamabad.

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