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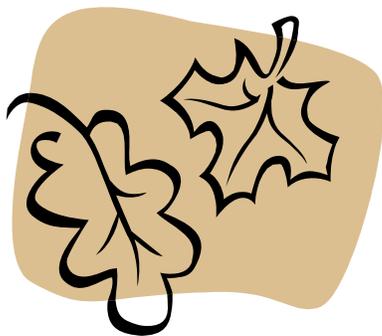
**Security and development in the region: the new US strategy for
Pakistan and Afghanistan**

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I- Salient features of Obama's speech.

The US president, Barak Obama, delineated the main features of his administration's strategy for Pakistan and Afghanistan in his speech on March 27 2009. The salient features are as follows:

- 1- Border region of Pakistan and Afghanistan has become the most dangerous place in the world. It is an international security challenge of the highest order.
- 2- A clear and focused goal is to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future.
- 3- To enhance the military, governance, and economic capacity of Afghanistan and Pakistan, we (the US) have to marshal international support....and integrate our civilian and military efforts.
- 4- And after years of mixed results, we (the US) will not provide a blank check. Pakistan must demonstrate its commitment to rooting out al Qaeda and the violent extremists within its borders.
- 5- We (the US) must pursue constructive diplomacy with both India and Pakistan.
- 6- To avoid the mistakes of the past, we (the US) must make clear that our relationship with Pakistan is grounded in support for Pakistan's democratic institutions and the Pakistani people. And to demonstrate through deeds as well as words a commitment that is enduring, we must stand for lasting opportunity.
- 7- I (the US president) am calling upon Congress to pass a bipartisan bill co-sponsored by John Kerry and Richard Lugar that authorizes \$1.5 billion in direct support to the Pakistani people every year over the next five years - resources that will build schools, roads, and hospitals, and strengthen Pakistan's democracy. I'm also calling on Congress to pass a bipartisan bill co-sponsored by Maria Cantwell, Chris Van Hollen and Peter Hoekstra that creates opportunity zones in the border region to develop the economy and bring hope to places plagued by violence. And we will ask our friends and allies to do their part - including at the donors conference in Tokyo next month.
- 8- That is why we (the US) will launch a standing, trilateral dialogue among the United States, Afghanistan and Pakistan. To succeed, we and our friends and allies must reverse the Taliban's gains, and promote a more capable and accountable Afghan government.
- 9- Afghanistan has been denied the resources that it demands because of the war in Iraq .At the same time; we will shift the emphasis of our mission to training and increasing the size of Afghan Security Forces.... The additional troops that we deployed have already increased our training capacity. Later this spring we will deploy approximately 4,000 U.S. troops to train Afghan Security Forces.... We will accelerate our efforts to build an Afghan Army of 134,000 and a police force of 82,000 so that we can meet these goals by 2011 - and increases in Afghan forces may very well be needed as our plans to turn over security responsibility to the Afghans go forward....

- 10- Afghanistan has an elected government, but it is undermined by corruption and has difficulty delivering basic services to its people. The economy is undercut by a booming narcotics trade that encourages criminality and funds the insurgency. We need agricultural specialists and educators; engineers and lawyers. That is how we can help the Afghan government serve its people, and develop an economy that isn't dominated by illicit drugs. That is why I am ordering a substantial increase in our civilians on the ground....
- 11- There will also be no peace without reconciliation among former enemies. I have no illusions that this will be easy. In Iraq, we had success in reaching out to former adversaries to isolate and target al Qaeda. We must pursue a similar process in Afghanistan ,
- 12- There is an uncompromising core of the Taliban. They must be met with force, and they must be defeated. But there are also those who have taken up arms because of coercion, or simply for a price. These Afghans must have the option to choose a different course. That is why we will work with local leaders, the Afghan government, and international partners to have a reconciliation process.
- 13- None of the steps that I have outlined will be easy, and none should be taken by America alone.... That was the founding cause of NATO six decades ago. That must be our common purpose today.... For the United Nations, we seek greater progress for its mandate to coordinate international action and assistance, and to strengthen Afghan institutions. And finally, together with the United Nations, we will forge a new Contact Group for Afghanistan and Pakistan that brings together all who should have a stake in the security of the region - our NATO allies and other partners, but also the Central Asian states, the Gulf nations and Iran; Russia, India and China.¹

II- Afghanistan's reaction

Afghan president Karzai, while welcoming the Obama administration's review of the Afghanistan Pakistan strategy, says that "It is exactly what the Afghan people were hoping for, and we're seeking...Therefore, it has our full support and backing... and we'll be working very, very closely with the US government to prepare for and to work on implementing all that was laid out in this strategy"².

The Afghan government's unconditional support to the strategy is understandable keeping in view the needs and requirements of the Afghan government and the Afghan people. The Afghan government needs economic, political and strategic support to win legitimacy within Afghanistan. There are provisions in the strategy which fulfill the requirements of that legitimacy. Firstly, the Afghan government will be supported to identify, lure and facilitate the process of mainstreaming of the non-ideological elements within the ranks of the Taliban. Secondly, the Afghan security apparatus will be strengthened and boosted to replace the ISAF forces in maintaining the rule of law. Thirdly, the US will give a long-lasting commitment to establish state institutions for smooth participatory governance in Afghanistan. Moreover, the "diplomatic,

¹President Obama's Afghanistan Speech, by: Chris Bowers

Fri Mar 27, 2009, <http://www.openleft.com/showDiary.do?diaryId=12515>

² Afghan leader welcomes US review. See http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/7969636.stm

informational, military and economic”³ aspects covered by the strategy may provide a favorable politico-economic and strategic environment around Afghanistan in which she may emerge as a stable democracy on the junction of South Asia and Central Asia.

The provision of the strategy to take regional powers like China, Iran and Russia on board is another positive sign for the establishment of a durable state structure in Afghanistan. And hence this explains president Karzai’s excitement when he says, “This is better than we were expecting, as a matter of fact”⁴. According to analysts the Afghan government might also be delighted by Obama’s announcement that the Pakistan side of the Durand line was the most dangerous place in the world and that terrorism emanates from this region.

The Taliban in Afghanistan seem to have articulated their reaction to Obama’s new policy for Afghanistan on the basis of Obama’s announcement in the increase of troops. They are of the opinion that increase in the troops will increase the complexity of issues on ground. The Taliban in Afghanistan had initially welcomed the election victory of President Barack Obama, saying that, “The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan reminds the newly-elected leadership of USA that the presence of thousands of NATO and US forces in Afghanistan and the policy of intransigence and bellicose neither had any achievement nor brought about security and peace to the people of Afghanistan. With the people of Afghanistan having now been fused into one against the foreign invading forces and determined to force their withdrawal from the country, such belligerent policies will never spell expected results, despite the arrival of more contingents. Nor will they achieve results better than Bush’s and his cronies. The ground realities in Afghanistan and the expectations of the people of America expressed through their votes demand that Obama should shun all policies followed by Bush once and for all. He should respect the rights of the people to independence and observe the norms of human rights. In short, he should set out on a policy that will have a message of peace for the war-stricken world which has been victimized by the arrogance and tyranny of USA.”⁵

The civil society organizations have raised a few points regarding the new policy. First, they are of the opinion that sources of terrorism have to be identified and that a mechanism for dialogue has to be devised along with the parameters and conditions for dialogue with those who are ‘moderate’ among the Taliban.

III- Pakistan’s reaction

A day after the speech, the Pakistan’s President’s spokesman, Farhatullah Babar, expressed his concerns on the ‘blank cheques’ issue.⁶ This was the disapproving sign from any Pakistani official regarding the New Afghan Policy by President Barack Obama. Previously the president, prime minister and other officials were cautious enough to send any unwelcome gesture. The government as well as the recently became independent media in Pakistan apparently welcomed the policy and president Zardari has even gone to

³ World Security Network reporting from Washington DC, March 29, 2009

⁴ Afghan leader welcomes US review. See http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/7969636.stm

⁵ Taliban reaction to Obama victory. See www.nefafoundation.org

⁶ Islamabad not happy with Obama strategy, By Baqir Sajjad Syed, Sunday, 29 Mar, 2009
<http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/Dawn%20Content%20Library/dawn/news/pakistan/islamabad-not-happy-with-obama-strategy--bi>

the extent of admitting his prior consent to the policy. The Pakistan foreign ministry and security establishment are of the opinion that additional forces and drone attacks might increase the influx of militants across the border, may increase vulnerability of the NATO supply route through Khyber Agency, more refugee influx, and a spree of violence as vengeance by the militants⁷.

What perception this strategy created in Pakistan and how will it affect the war against terrorism in the subsequent days besides analysis of the policy from the perspective of people in the Pashtun belt is discussed in the following lines.

Three issues in the new strategy might have alarmed the security establishment of Pakistan and the rightists who have been quite irritated with the new Af-Pak policy by Obama administration. The right wingers since then have been busy lambasting the policy under age-old assumptions⁸. Firstly, according to the right wing Pakistani writers, anchors and right wing analysts, there is nothing new in the new policy and that the strategy is in fact a continuation of the Bush administration's aggressive policy with respect to Pakistan⁹. According to this assumption, the US intervention in Afghanistan and her drone attacks across the border have actually caused a full-fledged insurgency inside Pakistan. This line of argument seems to have been taken in response to the US official's statements regarding the Pakistan security agencies' engagement with some Taliban insurgent groups¹⁰. Most of the Pakistani analysts including some of the retired army men still consider Taliban as a liberation army, and favors a change in the apparent pro-US policy lines of the government which would ultimately end in disengaging Pakistan from the coalition in the war against terror.

What the rightists in Pakistan tend to forget is the fact that religious militancy in Pakistan's tribal regions and other parts had started spreading its tentacles long before the US intervened in Afghanistan in 2001 to dislodge the Taliban government¹¹. Jaish-i-Mohammad was established in 2000 and Tahreek-i-Nifaz-i-Shariat-i-Mohammadi was formed in 1989. These and other organizations in Southern Punjab, FATA and North West Frontier Province (NWFP) were working when the US was busy in Balkans and in the Middle east after the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in 1989 and after the fall of Dr. Najib's government in Afghanistan in 1992.

Secondly, the security establishment of Pakistan finds it a bitter pill to swallow that the US would provide funds through the Kerry-Lugar Bill on the condition of performance. The Pakistan's government's perpetual stance that it has the will but little capability to counter insurgency that has started spreading to the heartland of Pakistan seems to be asking for financial support without any pre-condition. The government and political parties of Pakistan have gradually started realizing the fact that it is increasingly becoming difficult for the security apparatus of Pakistan to counter assaults from the tribal regions as well as from Southern Punjab¹². The military of Pakistan has already ceded Waziristan in FATA and the provincial government has surrendered Swat in the NWFP to Taliban as a last option after the military could not achieve those targets which

⁷ Concerns in Pakistan over US plan, says Lodhi. *Dawn*, April 2 2009

⁸ Press conference by Imran Khan on April 1, 2009 in Lahore telecast by Geo News.

⁹ Shireen Mazari. A Pakistani centric understanding of militancy. *The News*. April 1, 2009.

¹⁰ Afghan strikes by Taliban get Pakistan help. *The News York Times*. March 26 2009.

¹¹ Taliban influence to spread in Pakistan. *Dawn*, Nov 17 1998.

¹² Pakistan militants strengthen in heartland. Associated Press, March 24 2009

the democratic government desperately desired. In the wake of alliances by different factions of the Taliban, the waves emanating from the tribal belt of Pakistan have not only posed threat to the regional and international states but also to Pakistan and Afghanistan¹³. The violent extremist movement has started not only revitalizing their strategic and operational links in FATA, NWFP, Southern and Eastern Afghanistan but has also opened several fronts in the recent past that shows that the insurgents are quite aware of the emphasis on cooperation among the regional states, and hence they have started isolating the regional states from one another¹⁴.

IV- Analysis

According to New York Times, three factors contributed to the New Afghan Policy. First, Obama seems to have brought about a compromise between his political and military advisors. While the military official favored a considerable increase in troops, the political advisor was reluctant to convince a “skeptical Congress”. Mr. Obama, who was in favour of doubling the number of military personnel to Afghanistan, finally decided to send additional 4,000 troops other than the 17000 he had already promised. Second, there was a realization in the White House to set some “benchmarks” for increasing aid to Pakistan in fighting against Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Part of the consultative process included [Hillary Rodham Clinton](#) and [Richard C. Holbrooke](#) ‘s efforts for eradicating corruption in Afghanistan and Admiral Mullen’s 13 recommendations like expanding the counter narcotics efforts and increasing “the ability of Pakistan’s military to carry out counterinsurgency operations.” Third, there was an insight from Vice President Biden's visit and his personal observations regarding narrowing the American goals in Afghanistan.¹⁵

The US newly announced strategy seems to have taken a holistic approach to counter insurgency in Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is, therefore, of utmost importance in this regard that the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan take up holistic approaches to effectively tackle the issues of security and development not only within their states but also adopt an approach that fosters regional understanding of the issues. The denial line taken by the rightists and the security establishment of Pakistan may be harmful in the long run for two reasons. First, no body around the world as well as no body in the high conflict zones in FATA and NWFP may take the denial story any more. Second, religious militancy is fast spreading into the heartland of Pakistan. Until the government and the security establishment of Pakistan develop a comprehensive strategy to tackle the issues of security and development in the country and stop looking for regional scapegoats, the issues will get more complicated with the passage of time. Moreover, the age-old assumption under which the Pakistani establishment preferred state security over human security has to be revisited because the approach has actually brought Pakistan to the verge of a virtual disaster.

A sincere democratic effort on the part of Pakistan to reverse the ideological discourse of religious militancy both on state and societal level should be started without any delay.

¹³ Shaukat Khattak and Irfan Ashraf. New Afghan policy and Fata politics. *Dawn*, March 31 2009

¹⁴ Syed Saleem Shahzad. The rise and rise of neo-taliban. *Asia Times*, April 4 2009

¹⁵ White House Debate Led to Plan to Widen Afghan Effort, By [HELENE COOPER](#) and [ERIC SCHMITT](#), March 27, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/28/us/politics/28prexy.html?_r=1&ref=politics

The process of Islamization started by the former President of Pakistan General Zia ul Haq has virtually made Pakistan vulnerable to this discourse. What Musharaf did in his tenure was to dupe the international community by presenting himself as Zia in reverse by apparently undoing the process of the so-called Islamization. Huge funds were swallowed in the name of Madrassa Reforms, action against the militant organizations, the so-called basic democracy, changing the curriculum, police reforms and legislation, etc. Back in 1990's, historian like K.K.Aziz ¹⁶ had pinpointed the loopholes in the education system but his recommendations were not taken seriously by the successive controlled democracies and military governments. Similarly, the electronic media revolution in Pakistan did not break the so-many stereotypes of its predecessors like PTV and Radio Pakistan. What Musharaf left as legacy to the democratic government is myriads of institutional disharmonies which resulted in a lack of trust on any secular leadership. The recent alliance of the religious and the secular in the Lawyer's Movement is testimony to the fact how the religious discourse tries to seek popular support.

Another aspect which feeds this discourse is the structural imbalances within the state. The strong centralist approach towards the state is imbedded in an ideology that can be traced back to the partition of India. The initial idea of building a nation on the concept of a true federation was set aside and a religious identity (hate-Hindus) was put in place which best suited the concept of a garrison state. This concept served well the interests of one nation (Punjab) at the expense of other nations like Pashtuns, Sindhis and Baluchis. While those demanding a federation remained secular at large till this day, the centralist political forces use religion to further their political ends. The ideological discourse can be reversed if the state structure is revisited on the basis of autonomous federating units. There seems to be a realization on the part of the federal government and the security establishment that the centralist approach works no more. Whether it is a twist or a genuine desire by the establishment is yet to be seen.

One is tempted to point out a few missing links in the newly announced US policy for Pakistan and Afghanistan. Though religious militancy in Pakistan is a threat to Pakistan, Afghanistan, Europe and the US, those who bear the major brunt of this insurgency are the people living in FATA, NWFP and Northern Baluchistan besides Southern and Eastern Afghanistan. The newly announced US strategy is silent on the issue of how much these people can help make the new strategy succeed or fail. There is no provision in the new strategy or any other strategy developed by Pakistan and Afghanistan to take these people into confidence. The provincial government of NWFP, the cultural organizations in the Pashtun belt and the civil society within the Pashtun belt have to be engaged in a 'strategic communication system' and in the regional consultations on the implementation of the newly announced policy.

The problems in Pashtun areas are the cumulative effect of the politics by different powers in the Central-South Asian region since early 19th Century. Example of this can be found in the imperial politics of the 'Great Game' between Britain and Czarist Russia, which resulted in the political division of the Pashtuns in Federally Administered Area (FATA), Provincially Administered Area (PATA) of Pakistan, NWFP, Pashtun part of Baluchistan, and Pashtun areas of Afghanistan. The bipolar and ideological conflict of the 'Cold War' further disturbed the power-balance between nationalities in Pakistan

¹⁶, K.K.Aziz, *The Murder of History*. Vanguard Lahore, 2004.

strengthening some nationalities while undermining others. The making of one unit of West and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and the inability of Pakistan to evolve into a genuine federal democracy that would represent the interests and political aspirations of all nationalities are the consequences of the cold war politics. This process left huge vacuum in the state structure of Pakistan both on vertical and horizontal levels.

Afghan War which started in 1979, in reality was a war between Western capitalism and Russian communism, had adverse impact on Pashtuns. It was during this time that the genuine political forces of the Pashtuns were marginalized and their society and values were manipulated in an extreme way to create conditions for a protracted war with Russia. This war served the interests of the Pakistani power-elite, which predominantly comes from the province of Punjab, to counter Pashtun nationalist sentiments with Pan-Islamic ideology and Wahabi doctrine of Islam. It was also during this period that the overgrowth of the power of Punjab in Pakistan to the detriment of others. After the collapse of former Soviet Union (Russia), Pakistani elite, in pursuance of their 'strategic depth' doctrine, created the proxy force of Taliban and imposed it on Afghans/Pashtuns. This had a further negative impact on the society and politics of Pashtuns. The Taliban, networking later with the pan-Wahabi Islamist Al-Qaeda, disrupted the social fabric, cultural values and behavioral system of the Pashtuns leaving their identity, history, culture and existence at the mercy of Taliban and Al-Qaeda militants.

The militants under a well-thought out strategy isolate the Pashtun community taking the help of vacuums in state structure and then control the whole society through the perpetuation of fear (see the writ of religious radicals in the Pashtun belt—factors and implications (see <http://www.airra.org/presentations.htm> and <http://www.airra.org/Papers/AbstractTerrorism%20in%20the%20Pashtun%20belt.pdf>)

All this has resulted in the disempowerment of the Pashtuns. The current 'War on Terror' has further marginalized the Pashtuns because this war does not address the real causes of the present problem rooted in the ideological foundations and direction, and state structure of Pakistan but aggravates the situation by destroying the economic, social, and other infrastructures of the Pashtun society. Pashtuns are of the view that until ideological, strategic, military, and logistical support basis of Jihad in Pakistani state structures are neutralized and Pashtuns are empowered, this problem cannot be solved.

V- Conclusion

The governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan have to take a holistic approach to the issues of militancy, security and development in the region. The approach must be able to address ideological, developmental, military, and diplomatic paradigms into consideration. For this to happen, the government and security establishment of Pakistan have to 1) revisit the worn-out security paradigm that necessitates the use of ethnic Pashtuns for 'strategic depth' into Central Asia through Afghanistan on the one hand and cure the India-phobia on the other hand, 2) develop a comprehensive long term counter insurgency strategy that incorporates ideological, economic, diplomatic and strategic aspects, 3) The governments of Pakistan, India, Iran, Afghanistan, Russia and China

have to join hands to counter threats emanating from extremism and terrorism in the region to their states (it is a well-thought strategy of the terrorist organizations to keep the regional states isolated which gives them a leverage to strike at each one of them separately), 4) both Pakistan and Afghanistan have to work towards strengthening their civilian institutions of governance and security apparatus working under the civilian authority, 5) lastly and most importantly, the people in the Pashtun belt on both sides of the Durand Line are to be taken into confidence, and hence to develop an institutional structure for the perpetuation of effective dialogue process on a long term basis.

We ask President Obama's administration, NATO allies, the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan, the international community and regional nations that they should help Pashtuns and other people in the region reverse the extremist tendencies and transform its real support basis for the greater benefit of all while implementing new Af-Pak policy framework. We urge all the stake holders for regional cooperation and mutual trust to defeat terrorism with all its root causes mentioned above. In this regard, democratic institutions and political parties must be strengthened and the need for institutionalization must be emphasized. Secondly, the use of coercive means to curb terrorism must be targeted, answerable to the civilian elected governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan and the NWFP government and accountable to elected parliamentary committees. Thirdly, the security forces working under the civilian administration, such as police and Frontier Constabulary, must be equipped and trained on an emergency basis.