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Item Type	Article
Authors	Bakhsh Baloch, Qadar
Publisher	Qurtuba University
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Download date	2026-06-10 11:00:31
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/187899

Afghanistan: A Nightmare of Imperialism

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Abstract

This article presents a detailed account of the U.S. misadventures in Iraq and Afghanistan causing untold miseries to humankind besides adversely affecting its own image and severe melt down of its own economy. The author also grapples with a question: Can Obama prove himself a statesman and a leader who can reinvent U.S. policy that can arrest its decline and enhance its image as a nation that claims to stand for peace, non-partisan approach on international issues and poverty alleviation around the world.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Imperialism, Afghan War, War on Terror, United States

Afghanistan is just becoming another Vietnam for America.¹ Since October 7, 2001 this ravaged and devastated country has sucked not only the American & NATO troops, but also its resources, diplomacy and attention as well but have also put them their heels. Seeing the morale of the Taliban and the momentum that they have gained over the years and the disappointing state of affairs being portrayed by the NATO and American military command on ground, it seems obvious that the initiative has been snatched by the resistance forces. An unbiased audit of eight years of U.S war and violence presents a balance sheet marred by illegitimate occupation, governance hampered by corruption, drug trade and insufficient security, lacking will to fight on one side and courage, grit and perseverance on the other. The night marish story of eight year

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Afghan war presents irrefutable evidence that the U.S. occupation forces lack requisite will to fight and capacity to train and partner with Afghan security forces. For America alone the economic cost of war has surpassed \$171 billions and human cost includes 929 dead and 4334 injured until November 2009.²

The rising number of flag draped body bags returning back home and alarming rise in suicides amongst the deployed troops points towards the gravity of the reality. According to Voice of America in the first eleven months of 2009 about 211 soldiers have lost their lives by attempting suicides.³ The year wise coalition military fatalities from 10th October 2001 till 10th December 2009 tabulated below may serve an eye opener to those who are critical of the unfolding scenario:⁴

Year	US	UK	Other	Total
2001	12	0	0	12
2002	49	3	17	69
2003	48	0	9	57
2004	52	1	7	60
2005	99	1	31	131
2006	98	39	54	191
2007	117	42	73	232
2008	155	51	89	295
2009	304	100	87	491
Total	934	237	367	1538

Source: *iCasualties.org*

There are divergent reports on the dead and injured soldiers as well as financial costs of these reckless wars.^{5, 6} But the most acceptable figures are of the Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes of Harvard University in their co-authored book *The Three Trillion Dollar War: The True Cost of the Iraq Conflict*.⁷ These estimates include over million Iraqi deaths, and as many disabilities besides the material losses including important archeological artifacts. As for the true cost of U.S. invasion and occupation is concerned that has crossed over \$ 3 trillion as calculated. The cost goes off far from imagination if we challenge the real cost of rebuilding Iraq at present dollar value from the USAID estimates of 2003 around \$1.7 billion.⁸ According to these estimates the Iraq War has become the second-most expensive war in US history, after World War II. America is still marinating its force level in Iraq with the deployment of 120,000 US combat troops and 100,000 or so contractors. Having ongoing level of violence in Iraq as yard stick one fears that how will Iraq fare when the US reduces its troops down to the 50,000 non-combat level as scheduled for June 2010.⁹

Presuming that the cost of Iraq and Afghanistan wars that America was paying till 2009 was the Bush legacy and the new Afghan strategy unveiled on 2nd December 2009 will define Obama's legacy in time to come. Instead, asking the questions, "is this war necessary, is it winnable and is it worth the cost -both in human lives and financial resources? Obama's new Afghan strategy came up with a decision to another surge of additional 30,000 troops, bringing the total American strength in Afghanistan to over 105,000. Seeing the war performance of last eight years it is not difficult to conclude that surge is another attempt to reinforce the failure. Will this surge decision bring the promised results in Afghanistan? Or, will it result in America getting caught up in the

quagmire of another Vietnam? Furthermore, Obama confesses himself that the new approach will cost \$30 billion for the military thereby putting more deficits on the already depressed economy.¹⁰

While spending more on the surge in Afghanistan, the American President needs to think for a while that he is stretching like later days of Roman Empire without inner strength to sustain home. You would think that we don't have enough to do here at home," Ohio Congressman Dennis Kucinich rightly reminds Obama that America does not have enough to do at home when; 47 million Americans go to bed hungry, 47 million don't have any health care, 15 million Americans are out of work, and 10 million Americans homes are threatened with foreclosure, people going bankrupt, business failures.¹¹ Over one million living with HIV/AIDS make the state of affairs further worst.¹² There are unwritten stories that the U.S. blacks are paying the maximum as the. Economic melt down of these wars is leading to the maximum lay offs of the blacks from their jobs. In fact, elevation of Obama to the seat of Presidency of the U.S. has resurrected the sad memories of the U.S. Civil war(s) between the Whites and the Blacks. And these sad facts may lead to open clashes in the days to come.

Over the past several years especially after the demise of Soviet Union America has lost balance between national security and the economy, between coercion and diplomacy. Obama has to challenge this all because future of America as a nation is at stake and continuity in militarization will end up in losing civil liberties, and shrinking capacity in meeting needs at home. In hand recipe of borrowing money to prosecute wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and bailing out financial institutions is pushing America deeper and deeper into debt. The new strategy in Afghanistan underscores that American empire has money for

war but doesn't have money for health care, for work etc. It is astonishing to note that of the 192 UN member states, America alone is spending more on defence expenditures than the rest of 191 member states.¹³ It points out the administration's priority for war vis-à-vis the basic needs of the American people. For how long this process of mortgaging Americans future will continue? The title page caption of the News Week of December 7, 2009 is worth pondering when it reads:

“Steep debt, slow growth, and high spending kill empires and America could be next”.¹⁴

Foregoing discussion in view, the question that bugs ones mind is why the US and NATO alliance are getting embroiled in a needless war? Imagine the phenomenal costs involved in this misadventure. Is it only for wielding influence in the region to gain access to the resource rich Central Asian Republics and contain the might of Russia, China besides strangulating Iran, and Pakistan? Could America not ensure its influence over the region through even handed approach and generous economic packages instead of physical occupation? More surprisingly, why are the NATO countries facilitating the US designs without any possible gains?

The World has become a global village. Interdependence of nations has increased manifolds. The manner of conquests has changed radically through a process of evolution that is based solely and purely on economic warfare. Strong and powerful nations do not have to physically invade weaker nations to win over their allegiance or support. Economic encroachment or coercion can do the job much more efficiently and adequately than physical occupation. Winning the support of the governments is no longer a tenable option; a more viable and sustainable option is to win over the people. Unfortunately, it is this change in reality and perception that the American administration has failed to notice. The

US think tanks are a conglomeration of mostly old hawks and adventurists who still stick to the old doctrines and designs of international domination through physical occupation of territories with crusaders mindset and zealot outfits.

Obama was and still is, seen as a new hope for securing peace and tranquility in the world. He has not delivered so far. On the contrary, he seems to pursue the aggressive policies of Bush administration; the same policies for which the people voted the Republicans out of power. His election was seen as a change for the better. It was thought that he would bring about drastic changes in his policies towards Iraq, Afghanistan and the world at large. The only visible change (which is worse) is his decision to shift the battleground to Afghanistan while still holding a tight grip on Iraq. His much awaited New Afghan Policy contains nothing more than another surge of 30,000 troops (plus 7000 from NATO) that would cause further dismay to the already dismal situation in Afghanistan. The policy aims at winning the war in eighteen months that had not been won in 8 years. The long awaited strategy unfurled by President Obama at West Point Military Academy on 1st December 2009, sounded like a war time address, has three pronged focus; power, reconciliation and reconstruction. The strategy revolves around cultivating people's sympathy through reconstruction and social development, containing Taliban reconciliation, and defeating Al Qaida with power. In other words the strategy is conceptualized on skillful use of power and reconciliation with the projected aim of degrading Taliban forces and preventing Al-Qaeda from re-establishing a terrorist foothold in the war torn nation. The salient are:

- Deployment of additional 30000 or plus Americans and over 7000 troops from NATO countries. The reinforcement to be in

position by June 2010 and withdrawal from Afghanistan to be commenced after 18 months (tentatively June 2011)

- To build capacity of Afghan security forces to stand up against Taliban in next three years time frame. However, first handover of security responsibility to Afghan security forces shall take place within eighteen months.
- Capacity building of Afghan government shall include; quadrupling of Afghan army, eradicating corruption and uplifting of farmers and downtrodden people of the hinterland.
- Creating fault lines amongst resistance forces and isolating senior Taliban leadership by cultivating their lower echelons through underhand deals.
- Winning common Afghan's loyalty through massive civilian aid
- Pledges to help protect Pakistan's nuclear weapons and help prevent any possibility of Taleban's take over of Islamabad. And stabilize Pakistan through provision of direct aid and by bringing stability in Afghanistan. Though Obama remained silent on Pakistan's security apprehensions on Indian activities in Afghanistan, but tried to rebuild environment of trust by stating:

"We are committed to partnership with Pakistan that is built as a formation of mutual interests, mutual respect and mutual trust Pakistani people must know that America will remain a strong supporter of Pakistan's security and prosperity long after the guns have fallen silent".¹⁵

- Though effectiveness of the strategy would appear in July 2010 but as of now Pakistan should have number of apprehensions. The immediate concern should be the surge in deployment in

Kandhar, and Helmand etc. that would push insurgents across Pakistan's border in Balochistan and FATA thereby adding further in to instability there. Other alarming overtures in the strategy for Pakistan could be:

- Linking Pakistan with Afghanistan as the epicenter of terrorism
- Making mention of 'safe havens for Al Qaeda in Pakistan' for almost five times
- Claiming that al Qaeda is in pursuit of Pakistan nuclear arsenals thereby establishing link of Al Qaeda with Pakistan's nuclear weapons

While Obama partly praised Pakistan for launching operations in Swat and FATA, his address did convey, in implied terms, his intentions to extend his covert and overt operations inside Pakistan to eliminate Al-Qaeda and forestall an imagined (falsely exaggerated) threat of militants gaining access to the nuclear assets. Whereas the general public impression in Pakistan is that there is no imminent threat to Pakistan's nuclear assets from al-Qaeda. Instead, they apprehend that the U.S through its Black Water's Crusaders was sniffing around to find our nuclear assets. And God forbid, if and when they are able to trace them out Pakistan is likely to be attacked by Indo-U.S-Israel nexus. This is clearly pressure tactics to force Pakistan to take on groups headed by Siraj Haqani, Maulvi Nazir and Gul Bahadur. Pakistan must not only strongly resist this pressure but also convey to America, in no uncertain terms, that we can not and shall not take actions that are detrimental to our national interests. Simultaneously, we must prepare a detailed and firm response to convince America that their intelligence about Al-Qaeda using our soil for masterminding terrorist acts in US and West is as faulty, baseless and exaggerated as it was in the case of Iraq developing weapons of mass

destruction. Pakistan's leadership has so far shown reluctance and even timidity in dissociating from the American war due to loss of covert US support in the formation of our governments or discontinuation of aid flow. Without having any question on the sincerity of Obama's intentions, to nip the evil, if any, there is need to re-negotiate the US-Pak partnership ensuring mutual interest, mutual respect and mutual trust. There is also dire need to realize that envisaged placement of Indian troops in Afghanistan to fill the void once NATO forces leave Afghanistan would be a perfect recipe for regional disaster.

Seeing the past performance of high tech US / NATO forces during the last eight years Afghan war it is difficult to fathom how these forces can achieve the stated aim and objectives especially when seen in the context of a graduated pull out beginning in July 2011. The strategy is flawed when further viewed in the backdrop of troop's induction within six months against the 12 – 18 months time envisioned by the military.¹⁶ The policy also conflicts with the singleness of aim by also setting impracticable and non-pragmatic diversionary objectives such as enabling the Afghan security forces through training, to effectively handle and fight the Taliban forces in the post withdrawal period, rooting out corruption, undertaking development works and uplifting of farmers and pocketing the second / third tiers of Taliban commanders from the top Taliban leadership. Ironically all this in about 18 months or, more precisely, in about 12 months considering the time required for induction, deployment and logistic buildup.

To be over courteous to Mr. Obama, one would only call it wishful thinking. Whom is Mr. President then trying to kid, the Democrats or the Republicans? Apparently, it is to kid (please/appease) both; the Democrats by announcing a time frame for pull out, and

Republicans and Pentagon by sending more troops. The new policy gives strength to rumours that while he might be sincere in his resolve for peace, he is facing stiff resistance from the hawks, media and the think tanks. If rumours are to be believed, he is at war with the Pentagon and some hawks in the State Department. He seems to be in a quandary. However, it is in such situations where a leader's ability is truly tested.

Can he rise to the occasion by exerting his authority? Can he come up with a more enduring and durable peace strategy by taking steps such as initiating a peace dialogue with Afghan Taliban after announcing an early time frame for withdrawal, to be replaced by UN force comprising contingents from Muslim countries tasked with reconstruction /rehabilitation works and creating conducive environment for holding fair, free and transparent elections and providing level playing field to all Afghan factions including Pukhtoons. Why don't America and the West try to understand the will of the Afghan people that they do not want to be saved by them but they want to be saved from them. Afghans have been at war for over 30 years and seem to be in no hurry compared to Mr. Obama who is up against time which is running fast. Instead of finding excuses for his failures after one or two years, he must see the writing on the wall, and opt for a saner approach to ensure peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region. Leaders get rare opportunities in life to change the course of history. Those with vision and nerves of steel can surmount any formidable challenge; it is only the weak willed who cow down in the face of daunting challenges. Why is the US President Abraham Lincoln remembered and eulogized for his determined resolve to abolish slavery. He fought against all odds and carved a name in history. Obama is a man who can give America a new found look of a nation which not only stands for peace but can contribute towards global

well being and prosperity. He is a man who is expected to put an end to the highly polarized anti US sentiments of the world in general and Islamic Ummah in particular. This is very much possible and within his powers. He only has to firmly stand his ground.

For Obama to deliver peace to the world, he has to develop the knack of identifying the hawks that are out to undermine the world peace and stay away from them. He must seek counsel from the moderates and human rights activists who strongly favour even handed approach in the resolution of conflicts. He must seriously revisit the US foreign policy which thus far has magnified the crises instead of curtailing them. The US lust for securing access to the world resources, through invasions and establishment of bases all over the world besides round the clock presence of its naval fleets and quick reaction forces at colossal costs, has landed the American nation into heavy debts in the process causing frustration and discontentment among its citizens. Redirecting the cost of war in Afghanistan would have brought nearly 24 million children's head start, to 51 million health care and to 178 millions provided for electricity for one year.¹⁷ The burden is crippling its states. Should Obama persist with these policies as a war president, the 50 American States will soon start fragmenting causing its demise / break up like the erstwhile USSR. This possibility might appear far fetched, but it will happen sooner or later. Is this not enough of a reason to ring alarm bells in the US administration? The sooner he realizes that, the better.

A true leader has to be a visionary. He must have foresight to look into the future. Leaders with myopic vision are no better than ordinary men with fixated minds and short term goals. Obama must learn from China whose leadership has stayed away from international conspiracies and needless adventures. No wonder why it is regarded as

the future economic giant. USSR lost its vast empire, Japan faced devastation, and Germany was cut into two halves mainly due to their hegemonic designs. Wise leaders learn from history. Those who disregard lessons of history are doomed to destruction. Obama must learn lessons from history and review the US foreign policy in keeping with the demands of time. He must look inward instead of looking out and concentrate more on his domestic policies. The corner stone of his foreign policy must revolve only around securing peace in the world¹⁸ and helping the third world countries to overcome poverty and deprivation. Creating false threat perceptions to the US main land will not help. Al-Qaeda has been falsely portrayed as a serious threat to the world peace knowing fully well that it is too small a network (if at all it still exists) to pose any threat with its depleted resources.

US administration seems to have realized that Taliban are a reality who must be engaged in peace process. Afghanistan is a quagmire which will swallow any number of surges in the troop's induction. Already the increase from time to time has not worked. Any further increase in troops will also not help. Extending support to a puppet Karzai is like reinforcing the failure which is against the universally accepted concept / strategy. He is corrupt, highly unpopular and inefficient to the core, and his authority does not extend beyond his palace, or (to give him the maximum) the inner perimeter of Kabul city which is shrinking with every passing day. The Americans are insanely and naively betting on a wrong horse and they are sure to lose their bet. Taliban must therefore, be engaged and brought into the main stream politics. The two sides must sit together, through mediators, to arrive at acceptable agenda. Apparently, arrangement such as US announcing a time table for pull out and Taliban dissociating themselves from Al-

Qaeda could form the basis of an agreement. Once this issue has been sorted out, other modalities can be worked out to the satisfaction of both parties. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia must be co-opted into the peace deal. However, expecting Pakistan to help US strike a peace agreement while asking it to extend its operations to all parts of FATA is against all norms of diplomacy, justice and fair play. As a quid pro quo, Pakistan too must be given a chance and encouraged to rethink and modify its strategy from one of conflict to that of conflict resolution. America should seriously consider the reconstruction and rehabilitation of war torn FATA and Afghanistan while forcing India to stop fomenting any more trouble inside Pakistan. It must be asked to dismantle its several consulates from Pak-Afghan borders and only engage in reconstruction activities. There shall be an end to conspiracies, subversions and sabotage activities being organized by RAW, CIA, Dino Corps and Black water etc inside Pakistan especially in FATA and Balochistan.

Pakistan has demonstrated its sincere resolve to fight back terrorism and eradicate extremism in Sawat, South Waziristan and beyond. The sacrifices in men and material it rendered during the war against terror are more than any country fighting this war. Pakistan has not only provided the United States access for launching of Operation Enduring Freedom but also intelligence and logistic facilities to support the operation towards its success.¹⁹ Pakistan has not only denied sanctuary to the terrorist on its soil but also interdicted their financing and apprehended terrorists for prosecution in Pakistan and abroad.²⁰ During the period government of Pakistan on number of occasions went against the wishes of its people in partnering this war.²¹ Pakistan has ensured security and safety of NATO supply route from Karachi to Afghanistan. Despite all these massive involvements Pakistan's sincerity has always

been questioned. There has always been a constant rhetoric of 'do more'. Drone attacks are consistently challenging Pakistan's territorial sovereignty and Black Waters and similar other security outfits are flouting diplomatic immunities at their will. Is it the way to dealt with an ally of war effort? America has to demonstrate that it reciprocate the cooperation and is willing to acknowledge Pakistan sacrifices rendered while fighting (essentially an American) war. Respecting the demand of Pakistan's parliament drone operations must be ceased forthwith. Rather it would be appropriate that Pakistan should be given the drone technology for its use against the terrorist operating in FATA and elsewhere in Pakistan. Economic cost of the losses of men and material suffered by War against Terror in NWFP, FATA and elsewhere in Pakistan has surpassed over \$70 billion. The economic relief being provided in the Kerry Lugar bill is like a peanut against the losses suffered and that too with conditions undermining our national honour and respect. This policy, I am afraid, is likely to be counter-productive.

Pakistan became a nuclear power out of sheer compulsion. The level of its nuclear power potential is restricted to mere deterrence against the over whelming superior Indian conventional forces. While America has forged a strategic partnership including nuclear arms deal with India, it has out rightly disregarded Pakistan's dire need for achieving a minimum defence capability. A nuclear Pakistan has been falsely projected as a serious threat to the world peace. These fears are largely based on unfounded perceptions. The Indo-Zionist nexus has been largely instrumental in fabricating this threat. It must be appreciated that whereas Pakistan supports the legitimate rights of Palestinians to independent and sovereign state, it holds no grudge against Israel and is not in the least bit likely to enter into a direct or indirect conflict with Jewish state.

Acknowledging the Pakistan's role as an ally, America shall facilitate Pakistan in getting declared a nuclear state and atomic power under NPT. Simultaneously, India too must not feel threatened if it has no intentions of undermining the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Pakistan, and does not cross the threshold. A peaceful India posing no threat to Pakistan must feel safe and secure from Pakistani nation which not only wants to co-exist peacefully with India but also maintain long enduring relations of friendship and free movement/ trade across the borders. However, it has to be recognized that road to peaceful South Asia passes through Kashmir and respect for the sovereignty and integrity of each other. This desire of cordiality and harmonious relations by Pakistan, if acknowledged in its true perspective, must put the Indian suspicions to rest. America instead of taking sides must persuade India to recommence composite dialogue that has been stopped under the guise of Bombay attacks. Occasional acts of terrorism by the non-state actors must not be allowed to derail the peace process.

Post 9/11 world is in a state of civilizational conflict and inter faith gap has been widening with every passing year. Crusaders are out in the field and Islam is under attack. It brought ray of hope when we heard Obama proclaiming: 'It is easier to start wars than to end them. It is easier to blame others than to look inward, to see what is different about someone than to find the things we share'.²² This change in attitude was something humanity was waiting anxiously after Bush's 'either you are with us or against us' or threatening beat of sending the non complier nations to the Stone Age. Now, it is believed, that a black in Whitehouse is likely to avert the clash of civilizations. It gave a strong message to the Muslims around the world that America is turning to bridge the gap between them and the West, and reversing the perceptions that Islam is

under attack. These words if translated into action would help keeping crusaders and religious zealots at bay. However, American occupation of Iraq and Afghans, Israeli occupation of Palestine, Indian occupation of Kashmir, American drone attacks in Pakistan, containment of Iran and Sudan are some of the test cases where Obama has to prove his sincerity and his resolve. Having experienced the Bush Administration's outright hypocrisy, while lies and blatant disregards toward the plight of the Palestinians, Iraqis and Afghans, people are in a state of wait and see as to how President Obama would honour his commitment. Obama's seven-point manifesto, stated in Cairo, for bridging the gap between the United States and the Muslim world can only be realized if the Israeli militarism is contained, and its belligerence forestalled, and it relinquishes occupied lands seized in 1967 and in 1973.

In all probability this change is pointing towards a new beginning of relations between the Muslim world and the America, and may set a new pace to the inter faith dialogue. Obama gave new turn to the prevailing perceptions when he refuted the existence of any clash of civilizations and called the on going conflict 'clash of ignorance'- Muslims are ignorant of the West the same way the west is ignorant of the Muslims However, this change in mindset has to be transformed with a view to reversing perception, and reviving trust at gross root level. And for this both the warring sides have to overemphasize upon the commonalities that exist in our civilizations.

America has all along proclaimed their country stands for peace in the world. A glance at history of the American adventures reveals that it created false sense of insecurity to its homeland and elsewhere, and undertook intense diplomatic lobbying and massive propaganda to justify its invasions regardless of the reservations of international community.

The Korean war in 50's, the Vietnam War in mid 60's till mid 70's; extending the parameter of operations to Cambodia and Laos, followed by invasion of Iraq in 90's till now, and Afghanistan in October 2001 till date in the process killing about 10 million people are glaring examples of the evil intent and misadventures of America. The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki add another sad chapter to the inglorious undertakings of America. What has it gained from these wars except earning the image of an evil empire besides causing massive devastation, and further compounding the miseries of many nations? America is being viewed as a bad, arrogant, violent and aggressive nation with its leaders acting as the cold blooded old time English movies cow boys killing people indiscriminately. If this image has to be rectified, which it must, the new American administration under Obama has to emerge as the deliverers of peace and progress in the world, and resolve all the burning issues amicably and even handedly. It has to shun its neo-con or unilateral approach and involve all the stake holders into the peace process. The peace process must aim at restoring the confidence of comity of nations in the sincerity of US in resolving issues, while simultaneously taking concrete mega socio-economic steps to assure the world that America no longer desires to achieve domination of the world through unilateral physical means. A lot has to be done to secure its credibility through mutual trust and confidence building measures. America should be rest assured that extending legitimate support to all nations will strengthen its domination and influence through the hearts and minds of people. No government can ensure sustained and desirable relations with America; it is the people of the nations who must be won over for long enduring relationship. This in nutshell is the philosophy and thinking that the US

administration must develop. Its aims and objectives of wielding influence over the world will follow automatically.

Bush used to show concern and surprise at the growing anti-US sentiments in the world. He would often wonder why all this despite the American aid packages doled out to the underdeveloped nations. He never dug deep into the 'Why' aspect or so to say the underlying causes of disenchantment of the people with the US policies. This reality came to fore once again when the Pakistani nation strongly resented against the conditionalities of Kerry Lugar bill taking the American Administration by surprise. This apparent expression of surprise is either phony or it indicates their total lack of understanding of feelings or perceptions of Pakistani nation which view this bill as having ulterior motives against the vital interests and strategic assets of Pakistan. There is a common adage that at times 'Good faith also paves way to hell'. This is how the Pakistani nation looks at the so called good faith which belies the American claims of long enduring friendship. The conditionalities also amply speak of the American insensitivities to the concerns of other nations.

Obama is still perceived as a leader with positive thinking mind. He only needs to choose a team which must possess sagacity and prudence to ponder at length at the core issues of anti US sentiments and take steps to redress them. The team having done its home work must educate the members of the Parliament whose opinions are based only on the input they get from the media and the lobbyists. American lobbyists are a community who do not have their own opinion and only influence the decision makers, right or wrong – they don't care, for making fortunes. Thus, they wittingly or unwittingly, cause serious dent to the American image. Their ambit of influence must be curtailed drastically

which is possible through awareness and education of the members of the Parliament with the ground realities and perceptions of other nations. It may also be seen that the American MPs, and more so the Political parties, depend heavily on funding from various lobbies with vested interests. Their views are a hostage to these fund donors and, therefore, not independent of influence. This gives way to compulsions and even dictation from the powerful quarters. Obama must revisit the modalities of election process to eliminate, or at least substantially curtail, the negative role of heavy spending during elections. As the saying goes that the old habits die hard, and the easiest course is to follow the traditional path, but then the leaders with outstanding abilities and sterling qualities do not tamely submit to the resistance offered to them during the course of their struggle to effect changes for the better. Obama apparently seems to have the tenacity, will power and determination to achieve the impossible. Let us wait & see.

America now has the knowledge and experience of hindsight which it must put to good use if it has to avoid another waterloo like situation in Afghanistan. Obama must not repeat the blunders of Bush, Dick Cheney and Rumsfeld, and listen more attentively to the more pragmatic Joe Bidden and his likes. America under Obama leadership shall not wage wars rather show its moral strength in the way that ends wars and prevent conflicts.

Lastly, a few words depicting Pakistan's predicament. It may be emphasized that while America had only one 9 / 11 (and none thereafter), we have it on almost daily basis. We have had 297 suicide attacks till 12/8 killing thousands of people and creating wide spread feelings of insecurity. Imagine if only 5% of this were to happen in America (and I sincerely hope it does not), the American public would have forced its

Government to wind up all its bases and deployments abroad. So, Mr. President, have a heart and reserve your self the title of a benign leader in history, unlike the savages of the past.

Obama seems to be a statesman with a thinking mind. There is no reason to doubt his intentions that he wishes to see a more prosperous world, free of conflicts and hegemonic designs. His speeches and statements show adequate resolve.

Foregoing in view, Mr. Obama must seriously address the following questions and many more to find appropriate response:-

- Why are the US defence spending, more than the total defence expenditure of 191 UN member states? What are the objectives of this massive military build-ups?
- Is America so insecure that it has to venture into needless misadventures to ensure its security? Remember that it has peaceful neighbours like Canada and Mexico on its East and West while its other two sides are flanked by the Adriatic Sea, and Pacific Ocean. So what then is the fear?
- The only threat (which is false and grossly exaggerated) could be a terrorist attack which can be easily averted by sound intelligence, and regard for human freedom. Assuming this threat to be real, does it still provide sufficient justification to create havoc in the world like no one has ever done before. The atrocities of even the known tyrants like Hitler etc pale into insignificance in the face of American onslaught of mass destruction.
- What is the basis of the American fear to a terrorist threat? Remove the root causes, be fair, even handed and stop covert and

overt operations and have due regard for human values and freedom. The fear shall disappear automatically.

- Heavy defence expenditures have put every US citizen under debt, including the new born babies. How long can the American public put up with the economic recession, increasing joblessness, curtailment of civil liberties and lack of sound health facilities? Can this amount, or even 15-20 % of this needless expenditure, not be spent on economic well being of its own citizens besides taking adequate inland security measures?
- Do sovereign nations not have the right to resist against the occupation forces? If George Washington is remembered as a freedom fighter (and rightly so), why freedom fighters resisting elsewhere against the invading forces are branded as terrorists.
- The United States has long been known as a 'Melting Pot' because many of its people descended from settlers who came from all over the world. American citizens are basically peace loving people and possess tremendous spirit of accommodation which is why they have shown enormous capacity to absorb multi-nationals into their society. It is only their leaders, particularly the hawks who need to display similar capacity of peace, love and accommodation. It may be understood that the international community including Muslim countries do not hold any grudge against them. It is only their leaders whose hegemonic lust has created anti-US sentiments.
- American Army may be the best equipped force in the world with all the air and naval facilities available to support its operations, but it must be understood that training alone is worth nothing in the absence of a justifiable cause, and consequent will and

motivation to fight. The American and NATO forces lack both; the cause and motivation / will to fight.

- The recent overtures of peace through negotiations with Taliban are indicative of the realization by saner groups in the US administration that they are fighting a lost war. That they seem to be convinced of the futility of fighting the Afghan war is a positive thinking and should be taken in good grace. Sound strategy to include early exit with simultaneously arranged substitute UN forces acceptable to Afghans, tasked with restoration of peace, holding free and fair elections, and participating in reconstruction / rehabilitation of Afghanistan shall be a win win situation for America and Afghans. There will be no losers, so no question of hurt egos. The negotiations with Taliban must, however, insist on guarantee that all elements of Al-Qaeda shall be driven out and that no such elements shall be allowed ingress inside Afghanistan in future as well.
- In case of any doubt, the US President may hold a referendum in Iraq and Afghanistan to determine whether the Iraqis and Afghans want to be saved by America or saved from them.

Now the big question is: whether Obama can rise to the occasion. My hunch is that he can. Let us see how the future unfolds itself!

End Notes

¹ Vietnam War continued for nearly 9 years (1964-73) and Afghan war has entered in its 9th year with no sign of its end in foreseeable future.

² Anwar Iqbal, "Obama gets strong support for New afghan Strategy", *The Dawn*, Islamabad, December 3rd, 2009, p.1

³ Tariq Ch. "Obama New Strategy (in Urdu), *Daily Nawa-e- Waqt*, Rawalpindi, 5th December, 2009

⁴ "Operation Enduring freedom", iCasualties.org: Operation Enduring Freedom. Available at: <http://icasualties.org/oef/> (accessed 10-12-2009)

⁵ Americans Friends Service Committee's estimates for War in Afghanistan are far fetched high including; \$198 billion in budgetary expenses, \$0.5 trillion for future operation's veteran benefits plus \$200 billions for interest payment. See: Anwar Iqbal, "Obama gets strong support for New afghan Strategy", *The Dawn*, Islamabad, December 3rd, 2009, p.1

⁶ James A. Baker concluded that by December 2006 over 3000 were dead and more than 21000 were wounded in Iraq and financial expenses were as high as \$ 2 trillion. See: James A. Baker, et al, *The Iraq Study Group Report*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2006) p.76, 32

⁷ Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes, , *The Three Trillion Dollar War: The True Cost of the Iraq Conflict*, 2008

⁸ Andrew Natsios, former head of USID in an interview with Ann Curry on the *Today Show*. Available at: http://www.democracynow.org/2008/2/29/exclusive_the_three_trillion_dollar_war (accessed 5-12-09)

⁹ By Anthony Shadid, "Bombings rock Iraq's political landscape", *The Washington Post*, October, 26th, 2009. Available at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/10/25/AR2009102500811.html> (5-12-09)

¹⁰ U.S. President speaks at the U.S. military Academy at West Point, (New York, December 1st. 2009), "The way forward in Afghanistan & Pakistan"

¹¹ John Dear Sj, "Our new war president", *National Catholic Reporter*, Available at: <http://ncronline.org/blogs/road-peace/our-new-war-president>. (Accessed 18-12-09)

¹² 'USA People', Available at: http://www.globaldetail.com/usa_people (Accessed 18-12-09)

¹³ Farukh Saleem, 'O America', *The News*, Islamabad, December 6, 2009, p.6

¹⁴ *News Week*, December 7, 2009

¹⁵ President Speech at West Point, 1st December 2009

¹⁶ "Big new US deployment to Afghanistan could take nearly a year, not six months, general says", Available at: <http://news.therecord.com/article/644233> (Accessed 18-12-09)

¹⁷ "The Cost of war in Afghanistan', The Americans Friends Service Committee, op. cit

¹⁸ Mr Obama was awarded Nobel Price on 10th December 2009. Now the Nobel Prize for peace brings more responsibility upon him in this regards.

¹⁹ Pervez Musharaf, *In the Line of Fire*, New York, (Simon & Schuster, 2006), pp.204-205

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid

²² President Obama's speech to the Muslim World, Cairo, Egypt. 5th June 2009