

DIRECTOR, UNITED SERVICE INSTITUTION OF INDIA AT THE 28TH INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP ON GLOBAL SECURITY, PARIS, 16-18 JUNE 2011, AS MEMBER OF INVITED PANEL ON "DEALING WITH CRISES IN AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN - INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES"

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1. We are meeting here today in the aftermath of tectonic shifts that have taken place not just in the Middle East and North African Region (MENA) but also in the AfPak Region. The situation in both these regions is yet unfolding but what is certain is that irreversible changes are taking place and new opportunities and challenges have cropped up with the killing of Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan and the change of regimes in the MENA region.

2. Any discussion on Af-Pak today has to take into account the following points :-

- First and foremost is that the 2014 timeline set by the US Administration is not a mirage. What is more important is that not only USA / ISAF and Afghanistan have endorsed this timeline, even the international community has endorsed it. This deadline which is over 3 years away signals that there will neither be a precipitous withdrawal nor will a vacuum be created which can be filled by the Taliban or other opportunistic players. NATO and USA are having strategic arrangements with Afghanistan and will stay beyond 2014 so we have three years now in which countries in the region like China and India have to think how we can contribute to peace and stability in Afghanistan after 2014.

- Killing of Osama Bin Laden in Abbotabad has exposed Pakistan's double game of being an ally in the anti-terrorist operations while at the same time providing sanctuary and support to the Al Qaeda, Taliban, Lashkar-e-Taiba etc. This duplicity must not be allowed to continue.

- Killing of Osama Bin Laden and other senior functionaries on Pakistani soil would have convinced the Taliban that they can no longer count on Pakistan ISI protection and support to stage a triumphant re - entry into Kabul. I believe that the Taliban are getting into secret talks with USA not because of any change in heart but because they have been weakened militarily by US/ISAF operations. The military pressure must be kept up on the Al Qaeda, Taliban etc and at the same time effective measures taken to cut the umbilical chords that bind Pakistan ISI and the Taliban.

- The solution to the global war on terror cannot be found in Afghanistan alone. Whether we like it or not, we will have to address the problem of global terrorism emanating from the Af-Pak region. Therefore, staying the course in Pakistan is as important as staying the course in Afghanistan. I hope the distinguished panelists will address the issue of terrorism emanating from Pakistan and what we can do to convince Pakistan that terrorist organisations can neither be strategic assets nor be used as instruments of State policy.

3. To an audience such as is present in this room I do not have to spell out the challenges faced in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a strong society but a weak State. It can either have strong war lords, who at times create localised violence to safeguard their power and position or have a strong Central government, but not both. Reconciling this won't be easy. All of us have been watching events unfold in Afghanistan over the last decade. Contrary to what many believe and write, great accomplishments have been made in Afghanistan. Let us not forget that a great democratic space has been created and this would not have been possible without successful operations being carried out by US/ISAF troops supported by other countries who have contributed to nation building in Afghanistan. The challenge of creating effective organs of State functioning along with an effective Afghan National Army and Police are Herculean tasks.

4. However the truth is that neither will be able to stand on their own feet even by the end of 2014. Training and mentoring of ANA and Police by USA / ISAF or others may not be enough to fill the void created by the drawdown or withdrawal of US/ISAF troops. Will China, India, Saudi Arabia, Turkey etc step in to fill this void? Or will we look for a UN mandated Peacekeeping Force? Of course, UN Peacekeepers will have to be prepared to fight.

5. Another crucial issue is that of international funding for Afghanistan's social, political and security needs. This will have to be a long term commitment - is that possible? More importantly, will this funding not dry up should the Taliban regime come back to power again? So the challenge is to re-integrate the Taliban into the government without letting them take over the Government.

6. As per some Afghan interlocutors, Pakistan supports instability in Afghanistan for two reasons. Firstly, with instability there, the Afghans will not have time to think about Pashtun irredentism. Don't forget that the Afghans do not recognise the Durand Line. The other is a Corrolary; instability in Afghanistan creates refugees etc and gives Pakistan a reason to interfere in the internal affairs of Afghanistan.

7. Now I will turn my attention to Pakistan. As the recent events surrounding the killing of Osama Bin Laden make clear, Pakistan is passing through a grave period of instability. Instability in Pakistan is a self-inflicted wound, where a massive growth in militancy has spilled over from the periphery to the Pakistani heartland. So what is Pakistan doing to contain this Frankenstein? While Pakistan is fighting insurgency, it is still doing so selectively. It has deployed over 120,000 troops but as I had mentioned at the 2010 Berlin Conference, this number is not enough and the fight cannot be won in a short period of time. It will be a long haul and will require at least 250,000 troops. Pakistan has over 600,000 troops and it can find the resources if it so desires. Pakistan is still neither a hopeless case nor in terminal decline. The challenge is to convince Pakistan to throw its full weight in its fight against terrorism and give up its selectivity in this regard. I believe that USA and China can convince Pakistan about the futility of its calculus of treating the Taliban, Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Haqqani network as strategic assets - you have enough levers in your hands but the moot question is "Will you use it"

8. Creation of the Taliban to defeat Soviet forces led to Pakistan acquiring a veto power over US policies in Afghanistan as well as Pakistan. Acquiring nuclear weapons and perceived Chinese strategic support emboldens Pakistan even further. The challenge now is to ensure that Pakistan does not have a veto over US policies at least in Afghanistan, I think the operation to kill Osama Bin Laden was a good beginning and needs to be followed up.

9. I was recently in Tashkent for the 6th SCO Forum Meeting held on 27-28 May 2011. Let me just give you a feel of what I perceive was the message emanating from that meeting :-

- The CAR abhor Islamic extremism / terrorism and would like to see the jihadist surge not only contained but defeated. They do not want the contagion of extremism and terrorism to spread to their country.

- They fear that a fatigue has set in, in the international community and should Islamic extremism and terrorism spread to CAR, nobody in the Western World or for that matter, China or Russia would invest their money or blood to save them - in other words, there will not be another Global War on Terror !

- A regional solution to Afghanistan must include USA and NATO along with Russia, China, India and all neighbours of Afghanistan.

10. In conclusion I would like to say that Bin Laden is dead and gone and will fade away from memory but what will remain will be terrorist groups like the Al Qaeda and the Lashkar-e-Taiba. The threat of nuclear proliferation and the continued fear that some militant or radical organisation will obtain fissile material to make a dirty bomb or the nightmarish scenario of one of them obtaining a nuclear weapon cannot be simply wished away - and if Pakistan cannot be convinced to change course, the likelihood of this scenario unfolding there cannot be ruled out.

11. Finally I would like to salute all countries which have given their blood and money in the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan. As you are aware India too has made a humble contribution, both in blood and money, to bring peace and stability in Afghanistan. During the visit of the Indian Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh to Afghanistan in May 2011, India and Afghanistan decided to establish a “strategic partnership covering all areas of mutual interest” and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President Karzai shared their vision of Afghanistan as an “independent, democratic, stable and prosperous country”. That is indeed a noble vision, let us all help Afghanistan achieve it.

12. Thank you for your attention.

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