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Afghanistan: Obama's nightmare

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The deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan due to Taliban-led insurgency has become a dreaded nightmare for International Coalition (IC) to deal with. A serious split seems to have occurred among the coalition war partners on the issue of setting troops exit deadline. Canada, the third largest troop shareholder after US and UK and Netherlands, a key member of NATO alliance, is planning to pull back its troops from this “Graveyard of Empires” where war has become increasingly unwinnable. “Enough is enough; time for the troops to come home”, Canadian conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper declared on Friday. Dutch government comprising coalition partners Labour and the orthodox Christian ChristenUnie decided on Sep 30th in an intense debate in parliament regarding Dutch participation in Afghan war to stop any move in the parliament asking for extension of its mission in Afghanistan beyond 2010. This could be the beginning of the end for the NATO mission in Afghanistan. On the other hand, Japan, a key US East Asian ally is also going to end its refueling mission in Afghanistan after expiry of its legal mandate in January 2010. “The law will expire in January. We will solemnly withdraw based on the law,” Defence Minister Toshimi Kitazawa said on Tuesday. US President Barack Obama is also skeptical of troops increase in Afghanistan despite persistent requests from Gen. McChrystal, Coalition commander in Afghanistan. Serious division has occurred among the members of Obama's Afghan war council on the issue of troops surge in Afghanistan. The Associated Press (AP) in its recent report quoting an unnamed top ranking White House official revealed that during recently summoned Obama war council meeting on Afghanistan, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Richard Holbrooke, Adm. Mike Mullen and Gen. David Petraeus, appeared to be leaning toward supporting a troop increase in Afghanistan. While President Obama, Vice President Joe Biden, White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel and Gen., national security adviser James Jones were reluctant and stressed for specific target oriented operations across Pak-Afghan borders. In this scenario the deployment of Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) — the secret assassination and sabotage US armed Unit working directly under US President in Helmand, close to Pak-Afghan border might be the part of this strategy. Economic meltdown, growing diplomatic isolation, emergence of multi-polarity and involvement in protracted and meaningless wars are factors seriously undermining American global supremacy. The unilateral decision of

Obama's administration of adjourning deployment of missile shield programme in Czech Republic and Poland to defend her East European allies against possible Russian aggression in future has been widely perceived in diplomatic circles as a humiliating blow to US international standing. Last year Moscow invasion of Georgia has rekindled the expansionist designs of former Soviet Union. Once non-compromising America is now bending down on every single stance. Obama administration is also considering a policy shift to isolate Taliban from al-Qaeda. Taliban with limited objectives confined to Afghanistan have been considered in the West as less-dangerous in contrast to al-Qaeda which has transnational reach and working on the agenda to overthrow Western sponsored Muslim governments and drive out Western bases from Arabian Peninsula in order to establish a Caliphate across the Muslim world. "They're (Taliban) not the same type of group (al-Qaeda)," White House press secretary Robert Gibbs recently described. But the question arises whether this policy will be feasible? So far Taliban fighters have never disassociated themselves from al-Qaeda, both ideologically and operationally. They have been supportive of each other. Al-Qaeda is seen as a major financial aide to Taliban in their fight against International Coalition in Afghanistan. Al-Qaeda is equally being involved in strategic and operational planning in Afghanistan. Improvised Explosive Device (IED), the most lethal weapon so far proved against the western forces in Afghanistan, was basically introduced by al-Qaeda in its different and very simplistic forms to Taliban. Al-Qaeda generally known as a bunch of Arab fighters is now recruiting members from Central Asian Republics (CARs), North Africa, South Asia, Europe etc. This global posture has made it a potent threat to the West. But if the above approach does not work, the second strategy US might probably be opted for is the phased withdrawal of its forces from Afghanistan after enabling Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) to tackle the threat. This will be an attempt to "Afghanise" the war as historically foreign forces have never been welcomed in Afghanistan. Paul Pillar, a former CIA veteran for almost 30 years and national intelligence officer for the Near East and South Asia during the invasions of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) recently commented on the policy of phased withdrawal of Western forces from Afghanistan: "If general McChrystal gets his way - I understand he wants 45,000 extra troops - then the US will reach the level of the Russians at the peak of their deployment in the eighties: more than 100,000. You don't want to go there. I'm not in favour of a precipitate withdrawal. I would envision something parallel to what is going on in Iraq, where we're pulling out all the troops by the end of 2011. A timetable for withdrawal." Ironically so far all these policy shifts adopted in Afghanistan to dismantle the rapidly mounting threat of Insurgency have appallingly failed. US is now between a hard place and a rock and seems confused how to get rid of this menace. Growing US public resentments over Afghan war also undermines Obama's war efforts. Mr. Obama unlike his predecessor G.W Bush seems a reasonable person and will certainly take steps to end nearly a decade long illegal occupation of Afghanistan.