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The Frontier Post

Afghanistan's doomed occupation

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“A preventive war, to my mind, is an impossibility today. How could you have one, if one of its features would be several cities lying in ruins, several cities where many, many thousands of people would be dead and injured and mangled.... That isn't preventive war; that is war. It seems to me that when, by definition, a term is just ridiculous in itself, there is no use in going any further.” (Eisenhower at a news conference on November 8, 1954). All American interventions that end up in occupations stem from a fundamental ignorance of history. These post-colonial wars are not susceptible to Western imposed ‘democracies’ and military solutions. They can only be perceived by those subjected to their destructive power as occupiers violating the sovereignty and territorial sanctity of their lands. President Lyndon B Johnson invaded Vietnam with his contrived “Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.” In reality, suffering a civil war, North Vietnam was of no threat whatsoever to the United States. After millions perished, a mauled America vacated Vietnam accomplishing absolutely nothing. For his part, President Johnson, when he absorbed the enormity of his mistake, died a deeply depressed and broken man. Forty years later, President George W. Bush started the Afghanistan/Iraq Wars with his post-September 11 preemptive war charade. In the lust for blood and oil, it was forgotten that the flying clubs of Florida and not the madrassahs of Pakistan made 9/11 possible. The American policies regarding Pakistan are often crafted with the expectation that their dictates be met with little or no resistance. That we have remained servile for so long eliminates whatsoever little inhibitions they may have had in this regard. In his recent report General Stanley McChrystal warned that Indian activities and their increasing influence in Afghanistan was likely to exacerbate regional tensions. In the same report asking for a troops' surge in Afghanistan, he further warned that the coalition forces were in danger of losing the war within a year unless this was done. Richard Holbrook recently said when asked about what success will look like in Afghanistan: “We'll know it when we see it.” Without an iota of legitimacy and any semblance of the rule of law, all such military ventures become clueless adventures. After eight years of occupation these lines epitomize American gains in this region. The Pakistani people and army have long had an extremely suspicious view of the United States and its motives in this region. A recent survey by the Washington based Pew Research Centre, recorded that 64 per cent Pakistanis regard the US “as an enemy.” These sentiments are grounded in the reality that making Pakistan a perpetual proxy battle-ground has cost us dearly with ‘fueled’ insurrections in two

provinces. It has also further strengthened an ever belligerent enemy on the eastern front by 'providing' new-found havens across the (once secure) western border too. The Kashmir cause has been abandoned and our economy ruined. This mindset further strengthened immensely when a \$1 billion plan was revealed by McClatchy in May and confirmed by US officials. This was to build a citadel by massively increasing the size of the American embassy in the heart of Islamabad. Embassies of yore were designed to enhance interaction with the people of a country. Diplomats visited local officials, shopped at local market places, socialized with community leaders and interacted with the general public. Diplomacy was seen as an art loath to be done by remote control. What this planned massive fiefdom brought home to all Pakistanis was that, in the present policy context, the United States planned an extremely unwelcome, extensive and long-term presence in the country. There are indications that the government and our lame-duck politicians are encouraging the Americans to get involved in domestic issues especially as a hedge against the Pak Army. There are reports about the infamous Blackwater (Xe - what's in a name!), import of hundreds of Hummers, Americans riding rough shod with sophisticated automatic weapons in Islamabad (and elsewhere), stockpiles of illegal weapons and ammunition and a presence of US personnel at the Police Training Camp Sihala and armed American 'diplomats' verbally and physically assaulting Pakistani police officers. President Obama has thus far proven unwilling to take charge of the war from US military and national security elites. His reappointment of Robert Gates as defence secretary and appointment of former Marine Corps General James L. Jones as national security adviser shows how deeply militarized American foreign policy remains. Things can change through broad-ranging diplomacy that compliments the Obama emphasis on global engagement and diplomacy. This can clearly be a welcome manifestation of the President's campaign slogans of change. Only this can do away with the futile quest for purely military solutions. The engagement should start by reining in India to address Pakistan's genuine security concern and the resolution of Kashmir issue consistent with the dreams and aspirations of the Kashmiri people. Israel should be pressured to the point of cutting off all economic and military aid if it does not end its brutal policies; to halt and remove West Bank settlements and accept a viable Palestinian state. With a functioning government in Iraq, the occupation there should end and Iran should be engaged diplomatically as a dignified sovereign state and not a vanquished feeble foe. The visible shifting of the war theater within Pakistan is imminent given the disunity and the spineless conduct of our political class. This, not defeat by the Taliban, is the real threat to Pakistan. Continued US intervention in our politics and border regions will only serve as an issue to further alienate the people. Accepting financial 'support' in the shape of Biden-Lugar Bills, tailor-made for an enemy rather an ally, is akin to selling our souls. The US has limited options in Afghanistan. Financial constraints along with a resurgent Russia and rising China, loath to the growing American regional occupations, may well negate these limited options too. In the end the coalition forces will be compelled to abandon the attempt to occupy Afghanistan. All they will leave behind is a trail of death and destruction and a legacy of hatred and bitterness that will last generations, if not forever. If President Obama accepts the prevalent War on Terror framework by pumping up the war in Afghanistan or shifting the cross-hairs to Pakistan; he may find himself a prisoner, like Lyndon Johnson, of a no-win situation. Prudence, ground realities and his promised change call for a total re-focus of American policies instead of escalating an inherited doomed war.