

LEADERSHIP CHANGE AND ITS IMPACT ON GWOT: AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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Background to GWOT

The catastrophic events of September 2001 (9/11) dramatically changed the world. United States (US) for the first time faced the threat directly on its soil despite its unique geography, overwhelming military superiority and economic strength. For American leadership the most pressing issue was the security of the homeland and protection of its global interests. The United States strategic community that had remained preoccupied with the Cold War found a new focus – “war on terror”.

President Bush with his team of neo-conservatives, using America’s enormous military might first invaded Afghanistan that was followed by an attack on Iraq to make the world supposedly a safer place. The invasion of Iraq was cloaked under the false pretext that President Saddam Hussein was building Weapons of Mass Destruction. In fact it was meant to advance America’s strategic interests in the energy rich Middle East and strengthen the security of Israel. Iraq was a convenient target as it was not only an Arab country rich in oil resources but Saddam was intensely detested by President Bush. Iraq’s invasion also meant completion of another unfinished mission that senior Bush had undertaken when Iraq was invaded in the First Gulf War in 1991. It had failed to reach the logical conclusion of removing Saddam and bringing in regime change. Moreover, America’s military impulse was not satisfied by invading Afghanistan it needed to hit some country in the Arab-Muslim world, as 9/11 hijackers were Arabs. President Bush also proclaimed that he would transform the politics and culture of the entire Islamic world.

Military confrontations may have partially served some of United States strategic and economic objectives, but surely has destabilized the region and made lives of millions of people of Iraq

and Afghanistan as well as countries adjoining the region and brought Pakistan into the war zone.

The invasion of Afghanistan was meant to dislodge the Taliban and to capture and kill Al-Qaeda. United States did succeed in removing the government of Taliban but after seven years they have reemerged as a major force especially in the Pusthun belt. There is now a growing sense among US and NATO that war against the Taliban cannot be won and the aim should be to bring it down to manageable limits.¹

Failure of US and NATO to block routes on the Pak-Afghan border has enabled the Taliban and Al-Qaeda also to create sanctuaries in Pakistan's tribal belt. This partly facilitated Al-Qaeda and Taliban operatives to keep crisscrossing the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

In the last one year there has been a sharp resurgence of insurgency in Afghanistan. It essentially resulted from United States shifting its focus in 2003 to Iraq from Afghanistan. Initially, when United States invaded Afghanistan and brought massive fire power, pulverizing southern and eastern provinces of Afghanistan Taliban leadership went into hiding and their structures collapsed. As Washington's attention deflected toward Iraq objective conditions in Afghanistan further deteriorated.² Since 2003 Taliban have been making a come back and insurgency is on the rise and now in 2008 they are threatening allied forces on many fronts.

Meanwhile, in Pakistan's tribal belt and several districts of NWFP militant groups and local Taliban have become powerful entities and challenging the writ of the state. Pakistan's regular forces and militia are engaged in military operations to drive out militants from their hideouts. United States and NATO's view that militants have been able to find sanctuary in Pakistan, and Taliban leaders operate from Pakistani hide outs though exaggerated is partly true. Moreover, in both countries Taliban are increasingly turning to terrorism directed against security forces and the people. The year 2009 could well be decisive in case the insurgency in Afghanistan and Pakistan keeps rising. American presence in the

Persian Gulf and Central Asia and occupation of Iraq and of Afghanistan will largely depend on the success of stabilizing these countries.

New US Leadership

Presidential elections in the United States that were held in November 2008 are going to bring in a new leadership and new administration to power in Washington in early 2009. With Mr. Barack Obama's convincing victory and Democratic Party majority in both houses of Congress it is clear that Global War on Terror (GWOT) would remain among the highest priorities of American leadership. Notwithstanding that a deep economic crisis, resurgence of Russia and ascending Chinese power would be major challenges that the President elect Barack Obama will be giving equal if not greater attention. Policies pursued by the new American leadership would greatly influence and determine the future course of the GWOT.

There is by and large bipartisan consensus on the war on terror and no radical change in direction and policy is expected at least initially when the new President assumes office in January 2009. There could of course be stylistic and nuanced changes in approach and possible rearrangement of priorities. Terrorism will remain the foremost threat and central concern of the next American Administration. Al Qaeda and the growing wide network of radical Islamist organizations whose capabilities and support is increasing at least in soft Muslim states would be the prime focus of attention. Al Qaeda is devoid of a state and from United States and Western perspective weak states such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and the tribal belt and parts of Pakistan will remain vulnerable where they could continue to expand influence and even capture power. Of course there are other Muslim countries such as Somalia, Sudan, Yemen and Algeria that are considered as potential threats from a US perspective.

Bush Administration and both presidential candidates have shifted focus on Pakistan's tribal belt claiming that it poses the greatest threat to the US and the world.³ The next U.S. President and

Congress want Pakistan to firm up on its counterterrorism commitment.

The two presidential candidates have repeatedly expressed fears that militant entities operating autonomously in the tribal belt are capable of launching terrorist attacks. Barack Obama has been more explicit that he will attack hideouts in Pakistan if there was actionable intelligence. Senator McCain has been more discreet diplomatically, but his policy is no different.

They would continue to pressurize Pakistan that it should be more aggressive against militants and deny them safe havens. On ISI and other intelligence agencies the pressure would remain that they should not protect militant organizations. The pressure would also continue in Pakistan for removing the alleged tilt of the lower echelons of the ISI and other intelligence agencies towards the Taliban and other militant groups. This clearly is the message that President Zardari and Prime Minister Gilani brought back from United States after their meetings in 2008 with both Republican and Democratic leadership.

Fast growing influence of Taliban and militant groups in Pakistan is a source of great concern to the international community and the incoming American leadership. American's perceive Pakistan as a major Muslim country that is densely populated, strategically located and is a nuclear power. If Pakistan's democratic government fails to stabilize and Pakistan- Afghanistan border turns into a protracted battle zone it will have far reaching impact on south and Central Asia and the Middle East. As it is, some of these Muslim countries though on surface appear stable are simmering from within and have the potential of undergoing a social and political change.

Growing influence of Al-Qaeda

A host of external and internal factors contribute to the radicalization of Muslim populace. Grave injustices brought upon the people of Palestine, Kashmir, Lebanon and more recently on Iraq and Afghanistan by United States and Western powers are

deeply resented by the masses. Poor governance, seeping corruption and gross human rights violations of rulers and their subservience to foreign powers is humiliating and cause of deep anguish that finds expression in violence. By capitalizing on these grievances Al Qaeda and other radical Islamist groups have cultivated sympathy and support in many Muslim countries. And have found havens in weakly governed states or areas of Afghanistan, Yemen and tribal belt of Pakistan.

Al-Qaeda is loose amorphous organization and more a movement and a political philosophy with pan Islamic overtones. Its origins could be traced back to an Egyptian Islamic scholar Sayyid Qutub of the Muslim Brotherhood who wanted to create a Muslim caliphate and the rule of Islamic Sharia. Osama was also greatly influenced by Abdallah Azzam's thinking. Osama bin Laden and his most trusted colleague al-Zawahiri gave the theory an operational content by waging Jihad, a struggle or "war", not only against the United States and the West but also against the Muslim regimes that they perceived as corrupt, "un-Islamic" and subservient to foreign dictates. In 1998 bin Laden issued a fatwa for the killing of American and allied civilians and soldiers.⁴

The invasion of Iraq by the United States deflected world attention away from Afghanistan to Iraq. Al-Qaeda that was non-existent at the time of Saddam Hussein also moved their focus to Iraq. Al-Qaeda tried to capture the sympathy and support of not only their narrow band of adherents but all the nationalists and moderate forces which otherwise had an adversarial ideological relationship. A new generation of Al-Qaeda leadership indigenous to Iraq and oriented to the region came into being. It expanded influence and supported the resistance movement. The American and the coalition forces after six years of raining death and destruction on the country have been able to bring about relative calm and fragile government. This provides an opportunity for the United States to gradually withdraw its forces from Iraq. It would be for the new American leadership to learn lessons from the mistakes and formulate a more comprehensive and effective policy to combat terrorism.

In many ways United States invasion of Iraq did great

damage to the image to America's value system and discredited the war on terror. This has resulted in a global slide in public's faith in democracy as a system and in leadership of Bush and his allies of the coalition of the willing.⁵

Moving towards Multilateral Approaches

President elect Barack Obama is likely to gradually terminate the war in Iraq by phased and orderly withdrawal and shift focus on Afghanistan and Pakistan as the real centers of war on terrorism. Both Democrats and Republicans agree with US intelligence estimates that radical Islamic extremism is the "transcendent threat of the 21st century".

Despite the priorities and inclinations of the new administration it will nonetheless, find its foreign policy very much influenced by domestic politics, the overall state of economy and the international environment. A new administration would probably like to build a consensus of major powers and adopt multilateral approaches to GWOT. They are likely to work in concert and more closely with NATO countries, always prepared in the end to take unilateral action to defend the vital interests of the country. In pursuing this approach United States would expect from its allies far more robust and effective multilateral action. It is likely to assert pressure on them for sharing the burden by contributing troops and financial costs, especially now that US economy is on the down slide.

Apart from terrorism there are other strategic and economic motivations for United States to retain its presence in Iraq and Afghanistan even if it were to thin out its military presence. Energy resources of Central Asia and Middle East, containment of China and Iran and security of Israel are factors that no President can ignore.

United States and ISAF have a dual role in Afghanistan. They are engaged in counter-insurgency operations against insurgents. To reduce American casualties they have been exploiting ethnic and tribal rivalries and making different groups in

Afghanistan fight each other. The requirement for nation building on the contrary is just the opposite. The problem becomes difficult as insurgency demands fighting people that take cover among innocent people that results in collateral damage to the civilian population. The question is to what extent the new American leadership will focus on political engagement and strike a balance between these conflicting demands to succeed in the war on terror.

Focus on Pakistan

There is a growing perception in the strategic community of the United States and it was being reflected in the statements of the two presidential candidates as well as President Bush that the real emerging crisis is centered round Pakistan. The National Intelligence Estimate also came out with a similar assessment in July 2007 that Al- Qaeda has protected and regenerated key elements of its capability to attack US and found Pakistan's tribal areas as a safe haven for its leaders. And Pakistan's government is too weak and the military is more interested in peace deals and less in fighting the militants. Although in view of the more aggressive stand taken by the government since mid July 2008 and intense counterinsurgency operations taking place in Bajaur and other parts of tribal belt and Swat this perception should change.

President elect Barrak Obama opposed the war in Iraq in the Senate and voted against the resolution. In all his references he has all along maintained that Iraq is the wrong war and Afghanistan the right one that has been neglected. He has already called for increase of force levels by shifting two U.S. combat brigades of 10,000 troops from Iraq to Afghanistan.⁶ Barak Obama is emphatic that US should militarily intervene in Pakistan's tribal belt if there is evidence of high value targets if its military lacks the capacity and will.⁷ This policy would be no different since President Bush has already sanctioned cross border incursions in FATA to destroy sanctuaries and safe havens since July 2008. This change in policy was reiterated in a meeting of top US and Pakistani military leadership in August 2008 which US defense officials expressed their deep concern over Pakistan's inability or unwillingness to take action to rein in Taliban in FATA. United States has conducted

several drone operated assaults in the last few months including one land operation led by US Navy Seals in a Pakistani village of Angoor Adda. These violations have given rise to deep resentment and fueled further anti-Americanism in Pakistan.

Republican presidential candidate John McCain had taken a more nuanced approach toward attacking militants in the tribal belt. In fact he wants to pursue the same policy either with tacit approval of Pakistan, or failing which in a more clandestine manner that could turn out to be even worse from a Pakistani perspective. Barack Obama during electioneering has to show especially to the Washington establishment and defense industrial complex that he is more resolute on issues of security and would make a powerful and effective Commander-in Chief. President elect Obama may see things differently and will find himself far more constrained.

Moreover, even if additional forces in Afghanistan are inducted it is unlikely that it would resolve its myriad problems and bring peace and stability to the region. If we go by historical evidence, lay of land and Pashtun characteristics of resisting foreign domination the chances of success by relying on enhanced military capability alone would not work. After all the Soviets had sent one hundred and fifteen thousand troops and yet failed miserably in turning the tide against them. Notwithstanding that United States, most of the western European countries, China and Pakistan were supporting the Afghan Jihad against the Soviets and that contributed to its downfall.

Afghanistan is far more complex and solutions more difficult than Iraq. Human and physical structure in Afghanistan is very weak or totally absent. The strong linkages of the Pashtun communities on both sides of the Pak-Afghan border reinforce insurgency that becomes difficult to contain. United States may find itself bogged down in a quagmire. It is most likely that as Pentagon shifts its forces from Iraq to Afghanistan Al-Qaida would also move resources to Afghanistan and according to General David Petraeus, commander US Central Command the movement has already started.

Complexities of the Conflict

After seven years of occupation Americans and NATO have little to show in Afghanistan. There are also hardly any political forces that have a wide appeal and broad acceptance among the people and on whom the United States and international community could rely. President Karzai's regime exercises very limited control over the country and it is not sure if the change in leadership, if any, after the presidential elections in Afghanistan in 2010 would make a difference. More than sixty percent of the Afghan economy is criminalized and is heavily depended on poppy cultivation. The next president of the United States will have to deal with the elimination or at least minimizing poppy cultivation on a high priority, as it constitutes the major source of revenue for the Taliban.

United States invasion and the current occupation although sanctioned by the UNSC, have given rise to a strong nationalistic impulse that has combined with Islamic radicalism, a highly explosive mix.

The strong nationalistic and ethnic impulse of Pashtun elements in Afghanistan that has always resisted foreign domination will be a great dilemma for the next president. How will they deal with the upsurge of nationalist impulse and growing influence of Taliban in Afghanistan that it be satisfied?

In Pakistan's tribal belt too, pashtun nationalism and religious fervor is combining to and giving rise to insurgency.⁸ As a result Taliban and other militant groups have increased their influence in Pakistan's tribal belt and are creating instability not only in Pakistan but affecting the security of Afghanistan. The basic problem undoubtedly lies in Afghanistan and unless stability returns to Afghanistan the region as a whole will remain in turmoil.

President Karzai's writ is confined to Kabul, the state structures are non-existent and Taliban are emerging as a major force especially in South, South East and South West of Afghanistan. President Karzai's shortsighted policy of shifting responsibility for the poor security situation in Afghanistan on

Pakistan is counter productive. New civilian leadership of Pakistan is, however, taking several initiatives to develop a more cooperative and broad based relationship with their counterparts in Afghanistan. President Karzai has expressed similar feelings for Pakistan and it is to be seen how these sentiments are transformed into action. President Karzai is also making conciliatory overtures for engagement with Taliban leadership. Pakistan Army's recent intensification of military operations in FATA and political engagement only with reconcilable elements has also helped in allaying Afghanistan's fears.

Role of General Petraeus as chief of CENTCOM could bring change in the situation in Afghanistan. The cerebral General is likely to apply some of the successful policies that he applied in Iraq, although in the two countries objective conditions are very different. Afghanistan has very limited infrastructure, extreme terrain, widespread poverty and illiteracy and absence of credible political system. Iraq is relatively more developed, enormous oil and gas reserves and a significant educated class.

General Petraeus, as commander of the American forces in Iraq won over the Sunni tribes by pursuing an astute policy in which he was able to convince them that the best course was to get rid of Al-Qaeda and those groups, who support their agenda. In this way the Sunni's could maintain a more balanced relationship with the Shia community and not allow Iran's influence to dominate over Iraq.

Major Issues of the Muslim Countries and impact on GWOT

The policies adopted by the next president of the United States on major issues affecting the Muslim world would be crucial in reducing terrorism at the global level. Settlement of Palestinian-Israeli conflict, attitude toward Iran, Syria and Lebanon and treatment by United States and Western leadership of Muslim countries and Islamic sensitivities would be crucial in combating terrorism. European media continues to ridicule Islamic tenets and publishes blasphemous cartoons and articles on the holy prophet Mohamed, peace be on him, causing outrage and violence among

Muslims.

Barak Obama has gone out of his way to please the Jewish community by re-assuring them of full political support and guarantee to protect Israel's security. In his choice of Senator Biden as Vice-President, apart from other considerations such as his firm grip on foreign affairs, his proximity to Israel and Jewish community would have been a major factor. Support of the Jewish community is crucial for financial and political considerations as well. Barak Obama went to assure the Jews that Jerusalem will remain the capital of Israel eternally. This statement was far stronger even by American standards and went far beyond what President Bush or any United States Administration had ever stated. If after coming to office he would adhere to this policy then the rise of radicalism and terrorism in the Middle East and Muslim world will continue. Policies that have discredited U.S. in the eyes of the Muslim world are its Middle East policy. The genesis of terrorism in Muslim countries finds its roots in the injustices committed to the Palestinians. Its resolution on the basis of justice and international norms is the only way of resolving it. From what emerges from the statements of both the presidential candidates it does not seem to be the case.

The Arab and Muslim countries fully empathize with the sufferings and aspirations of the Palestinians and United States completely identifies itself with Israel. This polarization is highly detrimental and it is doubtful if the new leadership in United States could bring about any fundamental shift in this one sided policy. Perhaps there is no other issue that central in promoting radicalism as denial of justice and basic human rights to Palestinians. Without alleviating the basic cause of grievance anti- Americanism will continue to be on the rise and radical Islam will find resonance among broad segments of society.

The next President will have to be more equitable and just to Palestinians and give recognition to Hamas who are the genuine representatives of the people. Unless U.S. does not put pressure on Israel to accede to a viable two nation state, one of the major sources of alienation, it will keep fueling unrest and radicalism. In order to seriously address the Palestinian problem the next President will

have to take it up within a few months of his assumption of office. Deferring it to the end of the presidential term has invariably made the task of U.S. playing any effective role practically impossible due to the Jewish factor in American elections.

Israel's 2006 bombing of Lebanon civilians with United States blessing did great damage to its image in the Muslim world. There is a wide perception among Muslims that the war on terror is primarily directed against Islam and is a clash between Christian and Islamic civilizations. It is a major factor in increasing anti-Americanism and helping Al-Qaeda and other militant groups to promote radicalism and terrorism. This perception can only be removed if the leaders of the Western world especially the U.S. adopt fair and equitable policies and review their general attitude toward towards the Muslim countries and people.

In this context a peaceful resolution of the current US-Iran impasse over the nuclear issue would be a significant breakthrough. It is generally perceived that Washington is selective in its non-proliferation policies. In respect of Iran and Pakistan it applies different standards as compared to how it treats Israel and India. United States along with its European partners has been pressurizing Iran and has been successful in moving UNSC to apply a set of economic sanctions three times with increasing severity so that it abandons its uranium enrichment program. Moreover, United States and Israel have been frequently threatening military action and building pressure by projection of military power in the Gulf and conducting military exercises in the vicinity. On the other hand United States completely ignores Israel's nuclear weapons program and the inventory of hundreds of nuclear weapons. Republican candidate McCain is taking a more hawkish stand on Iran and is not very different from the existing Bush Administration policy.

Obama has said in his speeches that he will engage Iran and is likely to take a less aggressive attitude towards it. Better relations with Iran can reduce the tension in the gulf region and help in the management of Iraq. There is a better appreciation in the Obama camp of the role that Iran can play in the region, especially in the context of Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon.

Obama's father was a Kenyan, has lived in Indonesia for four years in the early part of his life and traveled to many countries. Whereas, it is expected that he should have a better understanding of the social and cultural aspects of Muslim and developed countries. Similarly, United States has followed a highly exceptional policy with India by signing the U.S- India nuclear deal. In a recent development, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Nuclear Suppliers Group have also approved the deal. Washington's diplomatic clout has been a major factor in India getting this approval. Pakistan despite being a close ally of U.S. on the war on terror and a strategic partner and its energy requirements are substantial has been denied a similar deal. On the grounds of its recent history of proliferation and that relationship with India is on a different plane.

The Indian national elections are due in 2009. Policies formulated by the next leadership of India on the treatment of Muslims and especially the issue of Jammu and Kashmir will greatly determine the future stability and level of militancy in the region. The fear is that if Kashmir continues to fester the peaceful resistance movement may be overtaken by events. There is a definite possibility of linkages developing with other militant groups in the region.

These unilateral and discriminatory policies of the United States against the world of Islam have led to increase in anti-Americanism that has been exploited directly or indirectly by militants to advance their agenda.

Status Quo or Change

Barack Obama's current statements notwithstanding, his main election plank has been that he stands for change. Globally, too there is yearning for new leadership and for leaders who can work together on issues of terrorism and other security and non-security threats. To what extent he will be able to depart from the present policy on the GWOT is not clear. If he were able to bring about a change in U.S. grand strategy from unilateralism to a multilateral, more global and people centric that would help in winning back the

confidence of the world community. Just as individual countries need the support of the people to win the war at the national level similarly cooperation and support is essential for fighting militancy at the global level. Multilateral approach by the next U.S president will also reduce the global surge in anti-Americanism.

Irrespective of change in grand strategy it can be safely presumed that Barack Obama will pursue a more cooperative and multilateral approach in fighting GWOT. This would be a departure from Bush's policy of forming unilateral partnerships such as the "coalition of the willing". One of the most damaging facets of Bush's highly aggressive and decisive foreign policy was that it has eroded the support and credibility of America worldwide.

Barack Obama would refurbish America's image and its relations with the Muslim world by dismantling Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib. The atrocities committed at these places has grossly undermined US soft power and discredited the war on terror. Next President has to review the adverse fall out on human rights aspects of the war on terror and bring in substantive changes. It is also possible that the entire semantics may change and the term "war on terror" may be replaced with combating militancy and terrorism. Already, Britain and many European countries have dropped this terminology since last one year.

The war on terror during President Bush took on the menacing overtones as though it was war directed by the U.S. against Islam. Never before, in recent history has there been such bitterness and anti-Americanism among the Muslims. By default this has strengthened Al-Qaeda, Taliban and other Muslim related insurgencies. In fact by giving GWOT a strong anti-Islamic coloring it has unified the Muslim world on one platform and provided a good incentive to militant outfits to recruit fresh recruits including suicide bombers. Major task of the new president would be to drastically revise this policy to win back the confidence of the Muslims and make the task of moderate Muslim governments to rally public opinion against militancy and terrorists easier.

With increasing multilateralism and less reliance on use of military force to influence events the new American leadership should drop the neo-con terminology of the “axis of evil” and abandon or at least soften the imperialistic approach that “either you are with us or against us”.

Barack Obama is better intellectually equipped to deal with the world and is likely to be more cooperative and pursue sound policies in dealing with GWOT.

Mc Cain is a seasoned politician and an experienced leader, but in respect of both Iraq and Afghanistan he had stated that he favored a double surge of troops. President Bush and Prime Minister Nouri al- Maliki have agreed to a “general time horizon” proposal whereby the reduction of forces is being linked with progress on the ability of Iraqi security forces to take control of cities and provinces. Washington and Baghdad are finalizing an arrangement to enable US troops to stay in Iraq at least up to end of 2011.

Barack Obama’s policy of pulling out troops from Iraq resonates with the leaders and people of Iraq. Moreover, the current state of US economy which is undergoing a serious financial crisis will make it problematic to sustain two reinforced military fronts. In the event that Obama’s administration pursues Bush’s policy or a more aggressive policy in Afghanistan than the only possibility of withdrawal of US and NATO forces from there would be in the event they meet a serious military and political set-back. This would provide an opportunity or an excuse to withdraw, somewhat similar to the devastating events that preceded the withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam. In an Op-ed in New York Times described the invasion as the correct strategic move. Yet since then it seems as if the United States has been trying to turn the conflict into the Vietnam War of the early 21st Century.

Notwithstanding America’s current decline there is only one nation that has the comprehensive power so if it were to have a leader who is prepared to take its allies and most of the world with than it is possible that he may be able to redirect the GWOT that brings success.

Attitude of Major Powers toward GWOT

The US quest in the post Cold War global hegemony was undermined by the skewed global aspirations of neo-cons and emergence of major regional players. These regional players that include China, India and Brazil are not prepared to accept U.S. leadership on all matters relating to GWOT.

If the Russian leadership were in a clandestine way to support Taliban for dragging the US into a quagmire as a pay back for the past deeds then United States will be in serious trouble. But that is unlikely as Russia would not like to confront Washington. Any support to radical Islamist groups is not in Russia's interest as it has a serious problem of insurgency in regions of Chechnya and Dagestan.

Since British Prime Minister Gordon Brown has assumed office there appears to be a shift toward a more cooperative approach with the allies instead of merely working closely with US. There is a likelihood of greater emphasis on dialogue and economic development by NATO countries as tools against insurgency. In a way the British leadership has somewhat distanced himself from merely towing the American line on GWOT. Gordon Brown is one leader in Europe who is more interested in longer term approaches and cooperative solutions to genesis of the conflict rather than short term expedient military solutions. Britain's young and cerebral Foreign minister Miliband has openly taken a position different to that of US, at least in terms of nuance that gave greater importance to engagement and dialogue. There are indications that he may challenge Prime Minister Gordon Brown's leadership of the Labor Party for the next elections. In the event this change occurs and the Labor Party is able to win the elections it is possible Mr. Miliband may support bolder and more innovative approaches to addressing the root causes of the spread of militancy and terrorism in Muslim countries and societies. He is also likely to take a more balanced and even handed approach toward the Israeli- Palestinian conflict. The Conservative Party victory is unlikely to bring any change.

Britain, however, can only exercise limited influence on United States policy, which remains the dominant and key country influencing the strategy on the GWOT. Ever since the tragic events of 9/11, European countries have been US partners in the war on terror and 33 countries have sent their military units as part of ISAF. Germany, France, Netherlands and few others are also providing development assistance to Afghanistan. Many countries in Europe have been targeted by terrorists --Madrid, Casabalanca and Istanbul.

German Chancellor Merk Angel has not shown any propensity toward playing a leading role on the GWOT. The position is likely to stay that way. Germany's military is therefore located in the relatively Northern province of Afghanistan in Kunduz and is providing security for development activity. She is also constrained by constitutional and legal impediments to engage German forces in combat, except in self defense. Military engagement in Afghanistan is not supported by the people and the parliamentarians either. This makes the task of expanding the mandate of their operations in Afghanistan difficult for Chancellor Merk, even if she feels otherwise. Most German parliamentarians would give higher priority to economic and social development of Afghanistan than be associated with military operations. From their perspective, increasing troops is unlikely to yield long-term stability. More effective utilization of economic assistance, development of basic facilities at the local level and elimination of warlords and drug barons should be the real priorities.⁹

Ever since Nicolas Sarkozy assumed French Presidency in 2007 he has tried to improve France's relations with the US, which went through a difficult period due to President Chirac opposing US unilateral action against Iraq. President Sarkozy has made efforts at strengthening the Atlantic Alliance and stepping up French contribution to ISAF in Afghanistan. It has agreed to increase the force levels by another 3000 personnel and willing to assign them in relatively more dangerous missions. France has also sent trainers for the Afghan Army, so that it is in a position to fight against the Taliban. President Sarkozy in his speech at Fifteenth Ambassadors Conference in August 2007 emphasized the need to strengthen the

Afghan Army, “since it is the army that must, first and foremost, wage and win the fight against the Taliban”.¹⁰ France has also committed itself to support reconstruction effort in Afghanistan. President Sarkozy has been insisting that the military and reconstruction assistance of France is closely linked to the stability of Pakistan. If the tribal belt and NWFP become a refuge of militant organizations especially of Taliban and Al-Qaeda then Pakistan would be a major casualty and all efforts of the international community will be in vain. But Sarkozy domestic problems and his loss of popularity has made his task of providing any effective or independent leadership in the fight against GWOT difficult. For all purposes Europe is going to remain engaged in Afghanistan with minimum level of military engagement and will focus more on reconstruction effort, provided security situation permits. Nonetheless, France could play a special role in view of its close association with countries of the Mediterranean. In France Islam is the second biggest religion after Catholicism. There are as many as a thousand mosques. It is also true that France has the third highest Jewish community in the world after Israel and the U.S. All these factors compel France to balance its interests with these communities. President Sarkozy realizes the dangers inherent in the war on terror being perceived as a confrontation between Islam and the West. For that purpose it would support forces of moderation and modernization. The question is whether Europe and especially France and Germany would take an equitable and just position on the Israeli- Palestinian conflict, Jammu & Kashmir, Iranian nuclear issue, Iraq and Lebanon.

No single European leader however, is either likely or in a position to adopt a very different or independent position to the US on the GWOT. European Union has emerged as a strong economic community, but is far away from becoming an autonomous military power, capable of taking a unified position on defense issues or GWOT that are fundamentally different from that of Washington. The world is likely to see much closer cooperation between US and EU on GWOT.

End Notes

- 1 Sunday Times. Interview Brigadier Mark, UK Commander in Afghanistan, Oct 5, 2008.
- 2 Zbigniew Brzezinski Second Chance, Catastrophic Leadership, P148
- 3 National Intelligence Estimate- 2007
- 4 “United States has been occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of places (Saudi Arabia), as well as devastating Iraq and supporting Israel. 1998 bin Laden fatwa. See also M.A. Muqtedar Khan, “Radical Islam, Liberal Islam”.
- 5 Newsweek, June 23, 2008, Time of the tough Guys.
6. Joseph S. Nye, Jr Patrick J. Buchanan.Syndicated Columnist. Obama’s War? “What does President Obama do then? Send in 10,000 more”? July 2008.
- 7 Presidential debate Senator Barack Obama, “If the United States has Al-Qaeda, bin Laden top lieutenants in our sights and Pakistan is unable or unwilling to act then we should take them out.
- 8 Daniel Consolatore. The Trouble with Pakistan. As reputed analyst Vali Nasr puts it Talibanization that has occurred in Pakistan’ tribal belt is the equivalent of the “Islamization of Pathan nationalism”.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Nicolas Sarkozy, President Republic of France.Speech on the Fifteenth Ambassador’s Conference, Paris 27 August 2007.

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