

OBAMA'S QUICK EXIT PLAN

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THE first thing that strikes one about US President Barack Obama's Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy-unveiled on March 27-is his clear determination to wrest his country away from the bottom-less pit it has blundered into. One remembers that this is not the first time his country is betraying such a tendency.

Famously, the USA ran away from Vietnam after suffering unprecedented catastrophies and a sound thrashing at the hands of the diminutive Vietnamese communists, and left Afghanistan literally in the lurch in 1989 after ensuring that the Soviet Union quit the country. The leader of the free world wiped Afghanistan off its memory so beautifully that it took the enormity of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on its soil to look back at the country. "I know where your country is," said an American to an Afghan in the aftermath of the attacks. "Somewhere near Greece."

In the process,the Afghanistan-Pakistan region grew into a fertile land for political Islam and terrorism, financed by CIA and Saudi funds and nurtured by Pakistan's efficient Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). Between 1989 and September 1996 Afghanistan suffered internecine battles among various mujahideen armies the scars of which are still visible in Kabul and elsewhere. Pakistan's "strategic depth" strategy fructified with the Taleban taking over Afghanistan during 1996-1997.

It is necessary to note that Obama is being faithful to his predecessor's policy behind the cloak of a thorough reshaping of the Bush strategy. George W Bush's primary concern was not to wipe out terrorism from the world but to secure his homeland from terrorists. In this he has been eminently successful. Now his successor's prime concern is to disengage his country gradually from Afghanistan-Pakistan and,again,not to decisively fight and finish Islamist terrorism.

This twisted objective is best manifest in Obama's pronouncements on Pakistan. He does not buy India's argument that unless and until Pakistan successfully purges Islamist terrorism from its soil there will be no end to global terrorism and certainly not in Afghanistan and in India. However, the public acknowledgement that the ISI has continued to substantially help the Taleban in Afghanistan is a major step forward for the USA though it is easy to see that this has been prompted by the realization that American losses will continue to mount as long as this unholy alliance is in place.

But this sole positive development is of no value since the Obama administration stops short of acknowledging that the ISI must also dissociate itself from patronizing terrorist activities in India including Jammu and Kashmir. On the contrary,there is a strong possibility that in the unlikely event of the ISI-Pakistani support to the Afghan Taleban drying up,Islamist terrorism would peak in India.

Behind this disabled US approach to the very complex geopolitical situation in the Afghanistan-Pakistan belt lies Washington's refusal to take into account Islamabad's traditional strategy of strengthening itself principally by weakening and surrounding India with a string of pliable countries.

Afghanistan has always figured as a prominent client-state of Pakistan in this geopolitical game-plan.

Obama is obviously keen to maintain the security of US homeland from Islamist terrorism and disengage his country from overseas tours of self-appointed duties in order to do his principal job as the US President better, improve US economy.

India does not hope to gain substantially from the Obama strategy while Pakistan is reasonably happy with the \$1.5 billion annual bounty and should be contented with Washington's concentration on the non-Indian aspects of Islamist terrorism in South Asia.

However, it is not just India but the international community as well which is perturbed by Obama's acceptance of the identification of "good" and "bad" Taleban, which has been promoted by two governments already decisively defeated by the Taleban, the Hamid Karzai government in Afghanistan and the Zardari government in Pakistan.

When a "good" Talib is accepted as a partner in Afghanistan or Pakistan, "bad" Taleban see no reason to be unhappy for in essence it is their ideology which triumphs over "corrupt un-Islamic" ideologies. □□□