

Message of change from President Obama

M. SERAJUL ISLAM

THE US voters rose above their racial prejudice and voted to the White House as their 44th President a black man and thus made history. A country where slavery was once institutionalised and legalised, where even as late as in the 1960s blacks were still fighting for their civil and human rights, has now changed forever. Martin Luther King's dream that there will be a day when people will be judged not by the colour of their skins but by the content of their character is now a reality.

Senator Barack Obama won a landslide victory with 349 electoral votes and 52% popular votes on his promise of change. The voters of US, particularly the youth, came together to let their country breathe fresh air again. The world has also been freed of the suffocation suffered under President Bush as his neo-con advisers sought to re-write international law by inventing the concept of pre-emptive strike, which gave them the right to attack any country that they thought was a threat to the United States. They attacked Afghanistan and Iraq under that concept after the events of 9/11. Threats of attack were held out against North Korea and Iran assuming these two nations to be parts of the "axis of evil". They turned the world upside down for the worse.

There was spontaneous support internationally for President Bush's war on terror in pursuance of which the US invaded Afghanistan. The world heaved a sigh of relief when the Taliban fell. Thereafter, Bush's neo-con advisers went to Iraq on totally false premises leaving the work in Afghanistan half-done to complete the unfinished objectives of elder President Bush; that of removing Saddam, occupying Iraq and getting control over the country's oil. With the Iraq diversion and the manner of it, the US lost its image and support worldwide. It divided the US internally and the world externally following the lines drawn by President Bush himself that "you are either with us or against us". The world went against the US and her worldwide image received its worst battering ever.

Thousands of lives of US soldiers have been lost; many times more innocent

people have been killed as a result of the actions of the US. Hundreds of billions of US dollars have been pumped to Iraq and Afghanistan that pushed the US economy to its worst economic meltdown since the Great Depression, such that even a US \$700 billion dollar bailout package may not help overcome. The meltdown of the US economy has threatened to take the rest of the world down the same path. President-elect Obama thus will be inheriting an office that will challenge him like that office has not challenged anyone in history. The new President must not only lead his country; he must also set the directions for the rest of the world both politically and economically. In bringing the promised change in his country, President Obama must also think of the rest of the world for the fate of the two is inextricably linked.

President-elect Obama's package of economic reforms won the voters' approval overwhelmingly. These reforms will now no doubt develop into a movement for US' benefit under his dynamic leadership. His foreign policy priorities, however, would require re-evaluation to bring the change the rest of the world, who welcomed his victory with the same enthusiasm as people in the US, is expecting. His administration must change direction to lead the world not by bullying but by earning respect and support that most nations gave the US after 9/11 in her demand that those responsible for the acts should be punished.

President-elect Obama will thus have his hands full in dealing with foreign policy that should receive his administration's attention as much as domestic issues for the sake of the US and the world. Senator Biden no doubt will bring all his experience to assist him in the area of foreign affairs. During his campaign, Senator Obama has identified Afghanistan as the new frontier where the war on terror would be fought. On a trip to Israel, he promised the Israelis more than they have received from any US leader, giving to them the whole of Jerusalem. On South Asia, he thought the real problem is not between India and Pakistan but between Pakistan and Afghanistan. These stances indicate that Senator Obama would have to rethink his priorities if he

wants USA to become the respectable leader of a problem ridden world that his predecessors could have easily achieved but lost on a totally unrealistic view of the world; that the rest of the world had no choice but to accept the US as the leader.

The world was expected to become peaceful, where wars and conflicts were supposed to become history after the Soviet Union fell. That did not happen and trouble spots sprouted like bamboo shoots on all the continents. The one in Middle East, involving the Israelis and the Palestinians became the most dangerous. It became the root for growth of Islamic extremism by groups who used Islam to fight injustice to Palestinians who have been made refugees in their own homeland. President Bush's inadvertent slip about the crusade on TV when informed about the 9/11 incidents helped drive Islam and the western world on a dangerous clash course of civilizations where, if justice had been done in Palestine, there would not have even been cause for what eventually happened. Let it not be lost to the new President that it had taken General Colin Powell as Secretary of State eight months to make his first visit to the region under the Bush administration.

President-elect Obama thus needs to review his policy on Palestine for this is the key to bringing the Islamic and the western world into partnership. In fact, a just and successful resolution of this issue may not need the US to fight the war on terror for then this war can still be resolved without military action. He must bring the occupation of Iraq to an end early in his Presidency and open dialogue with Iran instead of taking the neo-cons and dealing with it as "an axis of evil". If a nuclear power like India is provided civil nuclear technology under an agreement with the US that Senator Obama backs, then the case of Iran for civil nuclear technology must also be dealt with diplomatically and not by threat of war.

In Afghanistan, the Bush administration has messed up everything. The Taliban is resurgent there again threatening the elected and US backed government of Hamid Karzai. Recently the British and Russian Ambassadors in Kabul and also experts on Afghanistan



have suggested that it may not be a bad policy to talk with the Taliban and insurgents for the military option there is a doomed one. President-elect Obama must review the US policy in Afghanistan and look at the diplomatic and political options as against the military. Also, his assessment during the campaign that the problem in South Asia is between Pakistan and Afghanistan and not between Pakistan and India would also need to be re-assessed for the problem between the latter two is much deeper. The signing of the civil nuclear deal between the US and India has elevated the latter to a pre-eminent position that could ruffle the delicate balance of power in the region. President-elect Obama should ensure that India uses this newfound prestige for positive ends so that the long-standing problems that the nations of South Asia have with her are resolved amicably and justly.

Bangladesh's major interest in the Obama presidency will be in trade. By tradition, Democrats are pro-labour where interests of the US workers come first. Bangladesh's RMG sector, upon which its national economy is heavily dependent, would face difficulties under the Obama presidency for two reasons. First, till the new President is able to lift the country out of her economic miseries, consumption in USA would continue to suffer and hence the need to import RMG would be significantly reduced, in turn affecting Bangladesh adversely. Second, the new administration would also put trade agreements of the past under serious scrutiny and introduce tougher standards from which Bangladesh's RMG exports could suffer adversely. During the presidential campaign and earlier, McCain's position on free trade was more favourable to a country like Bangladesh than the one taken by President-elect

Obama. One avenue for continued and increased access of Bangladesh's RMG could be made by pleading on its LDC status for which the need for effective lobbying would be of the essence.

President-elect Obama has been chosen by destiny to create the United States of Martin Luther King's dream. He has the vision, the charisma and the brilliance to do it. The world, however, has changed a great deal since the dream, and the fate of the US is now inextricably linked across national frontiers. President-elect Obama must thus not lead his country only; the world is also looking towards his leadership. Those two hundred thousand people who cheered him in Berlin as a presidential candidate represent the hope that people outside USA places on an US President. Professor Huntington's prediction of a clash of civilizations was taken up

by neo-cons to destroy Islam that in turn has brought so much conflict, death and misery. Senator Obama can change this prediction and establish a fusion of civilizations for, on the basics, Islam has no fight with Judaism and Christianity because all three are religions that have evolved from the same source.

The people of the United States deserve to be congratulated for ending their long winter of discontent suffered under a White House in the hands of the neo-cons and letting sunshine back in by their historic effort to elect Senator Barack Obama as their President. Let President-elect Obama give a part of that sunshine to the rest of the world to enjoy for US' long winter of discontent has also been theirs.

The author is a former Ambassador to Japan. His email address is serajul@cfasonline.org

Major equipment shortfall in Pakistan army

Only around USD 500 million of the funds given to Pakistan by the United States have been spent on hardware for the army, a senior Pakistani security official has claimed, even though Washington has poured up USD 10 billion in military aid into the country since 2003/04.

The official, speaking at a briefing in Islamabad on September 29, said that Pakistan's frontline field commanders deployed along the border with Afghanistan were still using Korean War-era binoculars, citing this as just one example of the poor equipment used by troops fighting the Taliban and Al-Qaeda.

Explaining details of the payments made to Pakistan, the security official, who asked not to be named, said the US had made payments of about USD 6.5 billion for Islamabad's war effort rather than the USD 10 billion figure commonly quoted.

However, this included payments for items such as building roads to Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), where the Pakistani military deployed for the first time ever in 2003.

Western defense analysts in Islamabad said the revelation, if true, raised serious questions also being asked in Washington about the ways in which US funding was being spent and whether the Pakistani military was being properly equipped to deal with the challenge that faced.

"The bottom line must be if the individual soldiers gained from the hardware they got and if the resources were of direct benefit to their operational engagements," said one Western defense official, who spoke to Janes on condition of anonymity. "It was necessary to make roads and do a whole lot of things, but if individual soldiers and individual units are still in need, then there must have been a gap in the way the US equipped the Pakistani military for the actual job."

Aso backs new Afghan mandate

Japan's Prime Minister, Taro Aso, has made the continuation of his country's naval mission in the Indian Ocean one of the top priorities of his new administration.

In his maiden policy speech to parliament as premier on 29 September, Aso said the refuelling mission in support of international forces in Afghanistan ranked second only to the revival of Japan's economy on his agenda.

Parliament voted in June to extend the mission by six months, taking it through to mid-January 2009. With that deadline now approaching, Aso told MPs that "withdrawing from these activities is not an option" if Japan wishes to be an active member of the international community.

Source: Jane's Defence Weekly

EU worries over political influence of Turkish army

Turkey's powerful military continues to wield political influence despite EU demands that control over the army be put firmly in the hands of the government, the European Commission said November 5.

"The armed forces have continued to exercise significant political influence via formal and informal mechanisms," the European Union's executive body said in an annual report on Turkey's EU-oriented reform program.

The Turkish military has long seen itself as the guarantor of secularism in the mainly Muslim country and has remained wary about the activities of the ruling Justice and Development Party, which has Islamist roots.

The commission complained that no changes had been made to laws defining the role and duties of the military, or in improving civilian control over the paramilitary police, the gendarmerie.

It said that a protocol allowing military operations to be carried out for internal security matters without a request from the civilian authorities had still not been changed.

Brussels also expressed concern that an internal military memorandum had been leaked to the press, identifying non-governmental organizations that receive financial aid from foreign bodies, including the EU.

"Overall, no progress has been made in ensuring full civilian supervisory functions over the military and parliamentary oversight of defense expenditure," the report said.

Turkey began EU membership talks in October 2005, but its quest to join Europe's rich 27-nation club has been plagued with difficulties, and Ankara is unlikely to sign up for at least a decade.

NATO welcomes Obama win

The NATO military alliance welcomed Barack Obama's US election victory November 5 underlining that tighter transatlantic cooperation was essential to combat the world's security problems.

"The transatlantic link, based upon the shared values on which our alliance was founded almost 60 years ago, remains essential," NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer said in a statement.

"Today's security challenges require an ever stronger cooperation and solidarity between allies, and I look forward to the role the United States will continue to play in this regard under president-elect Obama's leadership."

The United States is the most powerful and influential member of the world's biggest military alliance, and has been pushing its European partners to commit more troops to the fight against Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan.

Source: www.defensenews.com

Expansion of NATO in the terrorist era

Historic mistake or sustainability?

SHAMIMA NASREEN

THE North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) missions have expanded dramatically since the end of the Cold War, and most of the United States' closest allies are members of the alliance. NATO has added new members six times since first forming in 1949 and now NATO comprises twenty-six members. The United States is taking another step today toward getting Albania and Croatia folded into the NATO alliance. Both countries had been isolated behind the Iron Curtain during the Cold War. NATO leaders agreed at a summit earlier this year in Romania to invite Albania and Croatia into the alliance. However, the alliance rebuffed US attempts to begin the process of inviting Ukraine and Georgia. Germany, France and some other alliance members opposed that move, fearing it would provoke Russia, which is unhappy with possible NATO enlargement on its doorstep. Nevertheless, NATO plays, at best, a supportive role in US efforts to combat terrorism. The alliance contributes to preventive and defensive missions to address the threat of terrorism, and its consequence management plans aim to respond to terrorist attacks and to mitigate their effects.

NATO after the September 11 attacks

The expansion of the activities and geographical reach of NATO grew even further as an outcome of the September 11 attacks. These caused as a response the provisional invocation (on September 12) of the collective security of NATO's charter - Article 5, which states that any attack on a member state will be considered an attack against the entire group of members. The invocation was confirmed on 4 October 2001 when NATO determined that the attacks were indeed eligible under the terms of the North Atlantic Treaty. The eight official actions taken by NATO in response to the attacks included the first two examples of military action taken in response to an invocation of Article 5: Operation Eagle Assist and Operation Active Endeavour.

Initiatives to defend terrorism

At the Summits of Allied leaders held in Prague from November 21-22, 2002 and in Istanbul from June 28-29, 2004 NATO launched new initiatives to enhance national capabilities in defense against terrorism, increase interoperability, and develop rapid deployment and sustainability of combat forces. The NATO Response Force (NRF), launched in Prague, laid the ground for the expeditionary capabilities for the Alliance. These capabilities are increasingly necessary to handle the full range of missions, from traditional full-scale warfare for Article 5 collective defense to humanitarian support operations in remote areas. NATO also launched a Declaration (#20) on terrorism in Riga Summit, November 28 - November 29, 2006.

Military involvement in Afghanistan

NATO's role is a key part of the Afghanistan Compact, a five-year plan between the government of Afghanistan and the international community, which sets goals relating to the security, governance and economic development of the country. Violence in Afghanistan is at its highest level since US-led forces toppled hard-line Taliban Islamist rulers after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States for harbouring al Qaeda leaders, including Osama bin Laden. The United States has about 32,000 troops in Afghanistan. Approximately 13,000 of them are in the NATO-led force of more than 50,000 troops. Kurt Volker, the US NATO ambassador, told reporters he believed other members of the Western security alliance would contribute more to the NATO effort if reassured on the US strategy and commitment.

On the issue of Afghanistan on the other hand, the alliance showed greater unity: On 16 April 2003 NATO agreed to take command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. The decision came at the request of Germany and the Netherlands, the two nations leading ISAF at the time of the agreement, and all 19 NATO ambassadors approved it unanimously. The handing over of control to NATO took place on 11 August, and marked the first time in NATO's history that it took charge of a mission outside the north Atlantic area. Canada had originally been slated to take over ISAF by itself on that date.

In January 2004, NATO appointed Minister Hikmet Cetin, of Turkey, as the Senior Civilian Representative (SCR) in Afghanistan. Minister Cetin is primarily responsible for advancing the political-military aspects of the Alliance in Afghanistan. Defense Against Terrorism (DAT) programme, launched in 2004, has already borne fruit. Recently, its initial eight initiatives were expanded to ten. Each addresses an important area of the Alliance's fight against terrorism, brought forward by a member nation in the lead, and supported by others. This approach leverages the capabilities of national governments, industry, science and research for an accelerated countermeasure development. We have achieved considerable success in the development of prototypes, systems evaluation, force training and doctrine, as well as in tactics, techniques and procedures. For instance, great strides are being made in the development of advanced technologies to counter improvised explosive devices, as well as precision airdrop technology for special operations forces. These are two capabilities our troops are in dire need of in Afghanistan today. Yet a dedicated commitment and adequate resourcing are necessary to move forward with the programme at high speed.

On 31 July 2006, a NATO-led force, made up mostly of troops from Canada, Great Britain, Turkey and the Netherlands, took over military operations in the south of Afghanistan from a US-led anti-terrorism coalition. NATO is

contributing to the fight against terrorism through military operations in Afghanistan, the Balkans and the Mediterranean and by taking steps to protect its populations and territory against terrorist attacks. The Alliance is also engaged in a far-reaching transformation of its forces and capabilities to better deter and defend against terrorism, and is working closely with partner countries and organizations to ensure broad cooperation in the fight against terrorism.

Controversy regarding Cooperation

The fight against terrorism has become a key focus of NATO's cooperation with Partners in the framework of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council as well as the NATO-Russia Council. But the controversy regarding cooperation is, on 9 October 2008 Moscow accused NATO and the United Nations of secretly forging an agreement that tightens their cooperation without informing Russia. UN Security Council member whose relations with NATO are badly strained. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Russia was aware an agreement was in the works and assumed it would be shown to member states for review. "This did not happen, and the agreement between the secretaries was signed in a secretive way," Lavrov said.

Concerned about US power, Russia often stresses the UN's role as the linchpin of international relations. Its leaders cast NATO as an aggressive and outdated alliance, and are calling for a new security system spanning Europe and other areas. Russia became increasingly assertive on the world stage during Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's eight years as president, demanding a voice in discussions of

global security.

Tensions between Russia and NATO have increased in recent years over the alliance's eastward expansion and were further strained by Russia's war against Georgia. NATO has suspended operations of its chief vehicle for cooperation with Russia in response to the war.

NATO and its future regarding terrorism

The future of NATO has become inextricably linked to the future of Afghanistan. NATO is actively engaged in assisting Afghanistan's young democratic government against the resurgent Taliban. This is not only NATO's first mission outside of Europe, but also its largest operational deployment. Afghanistan has now become a test of NATO's ability to transform itself and adapt to the post-9/11 threat environment. (NATO in Afghanistan: A Test Case for Future Missions, Helle C. Dale, December 6, 2006)

The problem is many of the essential activities of the fight against terrorism occur outside NATO, through bilateral cooperation or loose coalitions of the willing. Three factors help to explain NATO's minor role in combating terrorism:

Shifts in alignments and threat perceptions caused by systemic changes.

The alliance's limited military capabilities, and

The nature of the fight against terror itself. Over time the consequences of NATO's limited role could be severe.

If NATO's strongest members do not seek to address their core security threats within the alliance, NATO may have difficulty sustaining its military value. Moreover, the further expansion of NATO

will create more tension between Russia and the alliance.

What can be done?

NATO must develop its capacity to deal with terrorism despite resistance from European allies who worry about giving the alliance too great a "global" or "political" role. The part NATO can and should play in this area is strictly limited - issues of law enforcement, immigration, financial control, and domestic intelligence are all well beyond NATO's areas of competence and should be handled between the United States and the European Union. Still, NATO allies can and should share information about nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons and ballistic missile programmes; develop civil defense and consequence-management planning; develop theater missile defenses; and better coordinate various member-state Special Forces, whose role in the antiterrorism campaign will be critical. The alliance should even consider a new Force Projection Command that would be responsible for planning out-of-area operations. (NATO and the War on Terrorism: A Changing Alliance, by Philip H. Gordon, Summer 2002 Vol 20 No 3, pp. 36-38). During the Cold War, few could have imagined the need for American and European Special Forces to travel halfway around the world and execute coordinated attacks, but today that need is very real. Although NATO was not used for the military response to the September attack on the United States, it is not hard to imagine a catastrophic terrorist attack on a European city for which a NATO response would be appropriate.

The author is an analyst on International Relations.

