

## CONFERENCE ON AFGHANISTAN

## Karzai promises to take charge by 2014

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AFGHANISTAN, the frontier of President Bush's "war on terror" that his successor President Obama has embraced fully, continues to remain insecure and victory in the war is still as elusive as it was when it started 9 years ago. The main objective of that war was to destroy the Taliban that held power and had given sanctuary to Al Qaeda for its operations against US and western interests and capture Osama Ben Laden for allegedly masterminding the 9/11 attacks. Although the Taliban have been driven out of power, they have found new and impregnable sanctuary in the no man's land between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Osama Ben Laden is still free and the Taliban are on a resurgent mode in Afghanistan.

The protagonists of the war, the US and its allies, met in a one-day International Conference on Afghanistan on July 20th in Kabul that was co-chaired by the Afghan President and the UN Secretary General to support a plan by President Karzai for development, governance and stability. The conference brought 60 countries and international agencies together. Nato Secretary General Fogh Rasmussen wrote an optimistic piece in an IHT column to create an optimistic aura for the conference. He commended USA for sending 40,000 additional troops who played a major role in undermining Taliban in its stronghold in Kandahar and Helmand provinces. He acknowledged Taliban resurgence and supported a recent plan of Karzai for integration of moderate Taliban. He was upbeat about Afghanistan's future.

Rasmussen's optimism, however, is in contrast to a number of facts that surfaced in the days and weeks before the conference in Afghanistan. In June, President Obama ran into a problem with

the General that he had backed so fully. In an interview he gave for the magazine the Rolling Stones, General McChrystal showed no respect at all for the remarks and his team. Derogatory remarks aplenty have been expressed not just about the President but also the Vice President. Marine General James Jones, the National Security Adviser, has been referred to as "the clown" and only Hillary Clinton has escaped grilling. The President regained control by sacking General McChrystal and replacing him with General David Petraeus who had a successful stint in Iraq as a commander. The sacking nevertheless left a poor impression about conduct of the war, as it is most unusual to sack a commander in the midst of a war. The drama surrounding the sacking of General McChrystal brought to surface the deep divisions between the military fighting in Afghanistan and the strategists in Washington. It was also revealed that even within the President's team in Washington, there are sharp differences. In Afghanistan, the news of resurgence of the Taliban has been accompanied by deep corruption in the Karzai administration.

The conference was thus held in the backdrop of uncertainties about the future of Afghanistan. The US and the allies focused on how quickly they could handover the security to Afghans and come out of it with the US committed to start withdrawal of troops by end of 2011. With mounting casualties among US and allied troops, domestic pressures in those countries are now strong about continuing with a war where victory is not so clear a prospect. There have been 1,966 coalition military deaths in Afghanistan so far of which 1,206 are US soldiers and 436 from UK. At the Kabul Conference, President Hamid Karzai demanded of the allies and the donor countries and agen-

cies to handover 80% of development and governance assistance over the next two years to the Afghan government. He was critical of the US \$29 billion that has been spent in Afghanistan since the war started and mentioned that 77% of it went to projects to suit the donors' needs and priorities and was not sustainable for development of Afghanistan. He assured the allies that they could leave Afghanistan by end of 2014 when 300,000 trained Afghans would be ready to take over the security of the country.

President Karzai's optimism notwithstanding, there are many twists in the Afghan tale. President Obama's vision of securing Afghanistan by a substantial increase of troops has not fully worked. The Obama administration has been forced to back the move of Karzai government to open dialogue with the moderate Taliban to isolate them from the extremists which in itself is an acknowledgement of victory of sorts for the Taliban because their name was a pariah to the US and its allies when the war on terror started. The news that has been headlined all over the world in recent times about Afghanistan's fabulous mineral resources worth US\$ 1 trillion that has the potential of lifting the country from abject poverty to great prosperity is too alluring for the powers now present there to leave Afghanistan without some assurance of benefitting from marketing those resources. That could bring to play new dimensions in an extremely fragile security situation in the country. In a country as fragmented as Afghanistan, where the ethnic groups have a history of fighting, the mineral resources could divide these groups further by introducing new and serious issues to fight.

Finally, Pakistan and India's involvement in the conflict has brought new dimension that could prolong the conflict instead of resolving it. The press is already



calling the Afghan conflict a proxy war between Pakistan and India. In a recent edition of the Guardian, William Dalrymple has written that internally, the Afghan war is a Pashtun rebellion against Tajik, Hazara and Uzbek dominated regime with Karzai "only a fig leaf of Pashtun window dressing". Externally, it is a regional proxy war between India and Pakistan. In recent times, India has opened 4 regional consulates and provided the Afghans US\$ 662 million in aid; all terrifying news for Pakistan as it would be left squeezed on the west and east by

India. Dalrymple has thrown in an interesting probability: eventually India would withdraw from Afghanistan accepting it as Pakistan's sphere of influence for Pakistan's guarantee to stop encouraging the Kashmir jihad accepting that to be the Indian sphere of influence!

The Kabul Conference has not raised optimism about the future of Afghanistan although President Karzai appeared upbeat. Indian Foreign Minister Krishnan who attended the Conference said that foreign troops should remain in Afghanistan much longer in response to a

question on US decision to start withdrawal by end of 2011. He also said that India would consider sending troops to Afghanistan if asked, a loaded response in terms of the emerging situation and also the India-Pakistan proxy war, the latter in turn with the potentials to derail all strategic calculations of the allies. Is history again shaping to repeat itself; that the foreigners can only meet their Waterloo in Afghanistan?

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## Pakistan army chief gets extension



BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

ON 22 July, the Government of Pakistan announced that it has decided to extend the term of the army chief General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani (58) by three years. General Kayani was originally due to retire on November 28, but will now remain in office until 2013.

Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani described the general as essential to the nation's fight against militancy. General Kayani has led the Pakistani army since November 2007 when General Pervez Musharraf stepped aside.

Gilani said that the government was not under any kind of pressure prior to its decision to extend the Army Chief's tenure.

The extension is only the second such incident in Pakistan's history when a civilian regime has increased the services of the Chief of the Army Staff (COAS).

The first such extension was given by former President Iskandar Mirza to General Ayub Khan. The three army chiefs - Field Marshal Ayub Khan, General Zia-ul-Haq and General Pervez Musharraf had extended their own terms while holding their office as the President.

Some analysts say there seems to be three basic reasons for the extension: the perceived successes in the war

against the Taliban in the tribal areas; his rapport with American military officers; and, his keeping the military out of politics.

The US pays the Pakistani military an estimated \$1 billion a year to fight the militants. They heavily depended on General Kayani's permission for the CIA drones striking at Qaeda and Taliban operatives in the tribal areas and appreciative of his efforts to ensure transit on the supply route to US and Nato troops in Afghanistan that runs through Pakistan.

The US has praised General Kayani for his army's campaign against the Taliban but behind the scenes the Americans have reportedly been disappointed with his failure to disown the Afghan Taliban who benefit from sanctuaries in Pakistan's tribal areas.

Kayani has been the focal point for the Obama administration. The US Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen paid regular visits to General Kayani to encourage him to stop the Pakistan-based Taliban from crossing into Afghanistan and fighting the US.

General Kayani is regarded as the nation's most powerful person who is not corrupt and as the army chief he is the de facto guardian of the nuclear arsenal. The US is comfortable with the current position of the military overseeing all elements of the nuclear programme in Pakistan.

Although the top civil officers dominate the National Command Authority which controls the nuclear arms, many of the day-to-day operations including security of nuclear weapons are reportedly made by the Special Plans Division, located near the Islamabad airport. It is run by General Khalid Kidwai under overall command of General Kayani.

General Kidwai was appointed by former President General Musharraf. General Kidwai remains in place after the Zardari Government came into power. Pakistan possesses 75 to 100 nuclear weapons. The deepest concern for the US and allies is these weapons falling under in the hands and control of Islamic extremists.

At the moment, Pakistan's nuclear weapons are judged to be safe. The nuclear warheads are separated from the weapons systems. The Americans have helped install a special system of locking and unlocking that would be extremely difficult for an outsider to operate.

Although Pakistan has recently introduced parliamentary form of government in which the chief executive is the Prime Minister, it is widely believed that General Kayani has a strong say and is the key person who makes all the vital strategic decisions.

Kayani is widely regarded as a quiet, professional soldier, who has helped transform the army in his tenure from

a largely conventional force to one that is effectively fighting an irregular war inside its own borders. He was the former head of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), a position that provided him intimate knowledge of activities of Pakistan's various intelligence agencies. He maintains a low public profile and is seen as a thinking General.

From the very beginning he stated a policy of keeping the army out of politics, a policy that he tried reportedly to maintain even while selectively intervening in political squabbles as a referee.

The news that General Kayani would serve another three years has been received with mixed feelings. Political analysts in Pakistan have warned that the three-year extension of General Kayani's tenure will undermine the authority of the country's parliament.

Rasul Baksh Raaes, a political analyst at the Lahore University of Management Sciences, said that the extension "reinforces that the civilian leaders have failed to establish their constitutional supremacy over the military and the military remains a very powerful institution."

Human rights activist and renowned lawyer, Asma Jahangir, has also expressed concern over the extension. She termed the decision a disappointing measure, and claimed that the country's democratic process is weak. "Our 63 years of history is evident that every general damaged the democratic process whenever he was given a promotion or extension in his job," Asma said.

Cyril Almeida, the assistant editor of the Dawn, the country's most prestigious newspaper, said: "Kayani is supposed to preside over the finest institution in the country and if he regards himself as indispensable, it cannot be read in a positive way."

By giving an extension to General Kayani, there is a view among many Pakistanis that the Pakistan army does not have a General that can lead it. They believe an institution should not be dependent on individuals. The next in line should be capable enough to perform the duties of the current Chief.

Politically, the country will of necessity see another election during Kayani's extended term, unless things deteriorate so dramatically internally that the army, under public pressure, mounts another coup.

The author is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

## Pakistan denounces US intel leaks as 'Skewed'

PAKISTAN on July 26 denounced leaked US intelligence reports accusing its premier spy agency of supporting Taliban insurgents as "skewed" and inconsistent with realities on the ground.

Tens of thousands of documents dating from 2004 to 2009 were released by whistleblowers' website WikiLeaks to the New York Times, Britain's Guardian newspaper and Germany's Der Spiegel weekly.

They carry allegations that Iran is providing money and arms to Taliban and detail how widespread corruption is hampering a war now in its ninth year.

"These are far-fetched and skewed reports, evidently inconsistent with ground realities," Pakistan's foreign ministry spokesman Abdul Basit said.

The leaks reportedly link the ISI, Pakistan's secret service, to an assassination plot on Afghan President Hamid Karzai - which never got off the ground - attacks on Nato warplanes, a plot to poison the beer supply of Western troops and the 2008 Indian embassy bombing.

Pakistan last year launched major operations against Taliban threatening its own people, although US officials have long called for direct action on the Haqqanis and Afghan Taliban.

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## In test, Indian Air Defence System is on target

INDIA'S Prithvi Air Defence (PAD) system, which failed a test earlier this year, was more successful July 26: A PAD interceptor missile struck an incoming target missile at an altitude of 15 kilometres, according to a scientist from the government's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), which is developing the missile defence program.

Fired from Wheeler Island off the Orissa coast near Dhamra, the interceptor "destroyed an incoming ballistic missile - a variant of the Prithvi II that lifted off from Launch Complex-III of the Integrated Test Range at Chandipur-on-Sea," about 70 kilometres away across the sea, the scientist said.

In March, the PAD had failed a similar endo-atmospheric test when the target missile, a short-range Prithvi ballistic missile fired from a mobile launcher, deviated from its trajectory after travelling about 11 kilometres and fell into the sea, the DRDO scientist said.

The hypersonic interceptor missile did not receive the required command for takeoff from Wheeler Island during the March test, Defence Ministry sources said. But the DRDO scientist claimed the March test was not a failure as the interceptor missile's capabilities were not to blame.

The PAD system has undergone exo-atmospheric and endo-atmospheric tests. Its original Israeli-built Green Pine radar has been replaced with an indigenous system.

PAD Phase-I, which can kill an incoming ballistic missile at a height of 80 kilometres, is expected to be inducted into service in 15 months.

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## Israel and US to develop Arrow 3 anti-missile defence system

ISRAEL'S Ministry of Defence and the United States Department of Defence signed a deal on Sunday evening (July 25) to develop the Arrow 3 anti-missile system, integrating Israel's anti-missile systems. The Arrow 3 will make it possible for Israel to intercept long-range ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction from outside the atmosphere.

The agreement was signed by Brig. Gen. Ofir Shoham, head of the Ministry of Defence Administration for the Development of Weapons and Technological Infrastructure (MAFAT), and by Lt. Gen. Patrick O'Reilly, head of the US Missile Defence Agency.

The new interceptor will complete Israel's anti-missile multilayered capacity, which includes the Iron Dome, the David's Sling, and the Arrow. The Iron Dome is a defence system against short-range missiles and rockets which will be operational by November after it recently successfully passed final tests. The David's Sling system is intended to intercept mid-range missiles. Finally, the Arrow system is a defence system against long-range ballistic missiles and missiles carrying atomic warheads.

The Israeli Ministry of Defence reported that the deal continues a long and successful history of cooperation between Israel and the US in the field of anti-missile technology.



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