

End of US combat mission in Iraq?

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US President Barack Obama made a historical statement on 2nd August. He announced that the US combat operations in Iraq would be over by August 31st that would end US's 7 years war in Iraq. His predecessor had signed an agreement with the Iraqi government that all US troops would come back by end of 2011. The incumbent President had penned an addition to that agreement that US would bring back all combat troops by 31st August of this year. Under that agreement 50,000 non-combat troops would remain in Iraq to train and assist Iraqi security forces and the rest of the 1,40,000 US troops, all involved in combat, would return home.

The subdued response in the United States to a historical decision to end combat operations and effectively US's war in Iraq is somewhat surprising. It reflects the fact that the troops are not returning home with victory won decisively. In fact, there are many who would question if a victory has been won at all. President Bush had gone to Iraq on flawed and manipulated intelligence. In the beginning, the rationale was destroying Weapons of Mass Destruction WMD in

Iraq. When that was established as a lie as Iraq did not have any WMD, getting rid of the murderous regime of Saddam Hussein or regime change became the new rationale. When that too was achieved, the US found itself mired in fighting insurgency where the major ethnic/religious groups were fighting one another and extremists and fundamentalists, fighting the US occupation force. The US named this third phase as "Operation Iraqi Freedom" as a reason to occupy Iraq.

President Bush who had declared "mission accomplished" within seven months of the war in December 2003 on board an US aircraft carrier soon regretted his mistake as Iraq went up in flames where death and destruction became a routine matter with insurgency everywhere in the country. Till the time of President Obama's announcement on withdrawal of troops, 4,400 US men and women in uniform gave their lives for achieving the changing rationales of the war. Many times more than that number, in fact running into hundreds of thousand, innocent Iraqi men, women and children have also died in what has been insensitively described in the media as "collateral damage".



REUTERS

It is just not these deaths that have made US's involvement in Iraq a questionable one; the amount of money spent in Iraq by the United States is also mind-boggling. According to a Congress Budget office report in January 2008, the Congress wrote checks worth US\$ 691 billion for wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and such related activities as Iraq reconstruction. The misfortunes of poverty, disease and denial of minimum conditions of life for billions in Africa and Asia would have become history if the US had spent even a part of that money there instead of Iraq.

It is true that Saddam Hussein has been tried and hanged; his entire gang of close associates have also been likewise

brought to face the law and many have been executed. The Baath party of Saddam Hussein has been banned. Iraq has meanwhile seen two elections where political parties and groups have fought in a democratic spirit, although such parties and alliances have been formed primarily on the basis of the country's religious and ethnic basis, thus strengthening these divides. When the first of the two elections was held in 2005, the voters came out and voted with a lot of hopes and aspirations. Nevertheless, it took three months for a government to be formed, bringing to the surface the extreme difficulties of forging alliances in a country as deeply divided as Iraq.

This time, the follow up on the elec-

tions has been more disappointing. The elections were held in March. The Iraqi National Alliance led by former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi won 91 seats; the State of Law Coalition led by incumbent Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki won 89 seats; the National Iraqi alliance 70 and the Kurdish alliance 40 seats in a parliament of 325 seats. The alliances have been negotiating for the last five months and they are nowhere near forming a Government. The US that had hoped to hand over combat operations to Iraqi security forces under a new Government must be deeply disappointed. President Obama's statement that the 50,000 troops who would remain in Iraq till the end of 2011--for what he described as training and support jobs--has now been qualified. A Pentagon spokesman Geoff Morell said in Washington after the President's announcement that the non-combat troops would be armed and ready for combat operations in case of necessity.

The time of exit nevertheless has been a favourable one for the US President. After the surge of 2007 when under President Bush, combat troops were substantially enhanced; insurgency has been to a great extent controlled. These days, insurgency being witnessed has been described as a low grade insurgency that the US feels could be controlled by the over 500,000 Iraqi security forces trained by the US forces. There is also discussion to bring combat troops from the Arab countries to fill the gap to be left by the departing US combat troops.

Some of these facts suggest that although political situation has improved considerably in Iraq under 7 years of US occupation, "something is rotten in the state of Denmark" to take a quote out of Hamlet. Iraq watchers are keeping their fingers crossed to find out whether insur-

gency would be contained after the US withdraws from combat operations. There are many who would argue that the US combat troops have been able to bring down insurgency only in specific areas of the country. They feel insurgency would flare up once the US combat troops withdraw.

Those who fear the worst in Iraq once Iraqi security forces take control argue that Iraq's deep-rooted ethnic and religious divides create the natural conditions for conflict. They feel that the US by its presence in the country for long 7 years has not been able to blunt in any way these differences. In fact, they argue that the occupation has enhanced these differences and once US withdraws, these divides would lead to dangerous and sectarian conflicts. They further argue that Iraq has never been a nation state and strong dictatorships like that of Saddam Hussein have kept it as an independent country.

The Obama administration may have sensed these problems and thought it's prudent to leave Iraq's security to Iraqis and till final withdrawal, watch how Iraqis fend for themselves without losing any more lives. This may be also a reason why he has refrained from claiming victory. Iraq may be on course to prove what some people have said earlier that Iraq's religious and ethnic divides create the conditions for a strong dictatorial government where democracy may not be the right prescription till elements of Iraqi nationalism emerge and consolidate. That is a long distance away by any count. The future of "Operation New Dawn" as the US has named the new phase is therefore, uncertain.

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Indonesia's New Foreign Policy - 'Thousand friends- zero enemy'



GREGORIOUS

IRFA PUSPITASARI

AS Indonesia celebrated its 65th independence day on August 17th, it is also trying to reorient its foreign policy goals to emerge as a responsible power in the Southeast Asian region. The two continuous terms of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono have given a new direction to Indonesia's foreign policy. Soekarno and Soeharto, the iconic leaders of Indonesia, had pursued contrasting approaches and power affiliations in every possible way. Soekarno was keen on emerging as the undisputed leader of

NAM. Soeharto formatted his foreign policy by toeing the US line to a large extent. Today, the clear trends are that Indonesia's foreign policy is a unique amalgamation of the two schools of thought and policy of adaptation to changing geopolitical and geostrategic compulsions. Indonesia being the world's largest archipelago with the biggest Muslim population is again trying to gain the leadership position in the region through constructive and cooperative gestures and balanced bargaining between major powers.

Issue brief, IDSA



Iran launches assault boats, warns 'don't play with fire'

TEHRAN: Iran began mass-producing two high-speed variants of missile-launching assault boats on Monday, warning its enemies not to "play with fire" as it boosts security along its coastline.

The inauguration of the production lines for the Seraj and Zolfaghar speedboats comes a day after President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad unveiled Iran's home-built bomber drone, which he said would deliver "death" to Iran's enemies.

The United States expressed concern about the Islamic republic's growing military capabilities.

Iran's state news agency IRNA reported that the Seraj (Lamp) and Zolfaghar (named after Shiite Imam Ali's sword) boats would be manufactured at the marine industries complex of the defence ministry. Defence Minister Ahmad Vahidi opened the assembly lines, saying the vessels would help to strengthen Iran's defences, IRNA said. "Today, the Islamic Republic of Iran is relying on a great defence industry and the powerful forces of Sepah (Revolutionary Guards) and the army, with their utmost strength, can provide security to the Persian Gulf, the Sea of Oman and Strait of Hormuz," Vahidi said. He issued a stern warning to Iran's foes. "The enemy must be careful of its adventurous behaviour and not play with fire because the Islamic Republic of Iran's response would be unpredictable," IRNA quoted him as saying.

"If enemies attack Iran, the Islamic Republic of Iran's reaction will not be restricted to one area. The truth of our defence doctrine is that we will not attack any country and that we extend our hand to all legitimate countries."

Iran's arch-foes, the United States and Israel, have not ruled out taking military action over Tehran's controversial nuclear programme. "This is... something that is of concern to us and... concern to Iran's neighbours," State Department spokesman Philip Crowley told reporters in Washington of Iran's latest military acquisitions. He said that while all nations had the right to self-defence, the United States "take into account... systems that can potentially... threaten particular countries or peace and stability in the region." Faced with "the growth Iran's capabilities over a number of years, we've stepped up our military cooperation with other countries in the region," Crowley said.

Iran has in the past threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz, choking off some 40 per cent of tanker-shipped oil worldwide, in the event of a military attack. IRNA said Zolfaghar was a new generation missile-launching vessel. "It is designed for quick assaults on ships and is equipped with two missile launchers, two machine guns and a computer system to control the missiles," the report said. Fars news agency cited Vahidi as saying that Zolfaghar was to be equipped with the Nasr 1 (Victory) marine cruise missile "which has high destructive power." Iran has previously said that the Nasr missile can destroy targets weighing up to 3,000 tonnes.

IRNA said Seraj, designed for a tropical climate, was also a swift assault vessel for use in the Caspian sea, the Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, adding that it can also fire rockets. "Seraj is a fast-moving assault rocket launcher using sophisticated and modern technology," Vahidi was cited as saying by IRNA. The launch of the production lines comes as Iran marks its annual "government week," when it traditionally showcases its latest technological achievements. The naval commander of Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards, Ali Fadavi, was quoted by IRNA as saying that the missile-launching boats are the world's fastest. "The Iranian-made missile-launching boats rank first in the world when it comes to their velocity," he said.

Ahmadinejad on Sunday unveiled a bomber drone with a range of up to 1,000 kilometres (620 miles), which he dubbed the "ambassador of death." State media said the drone, Karar (Assailant), can carry four stealth cruise missiles, two bombs of 250 pounds (115 kilos) each or a precision missile of 500 pounds (230 kilos).

Tehran on Friday test-fired a surface-to-surface missile named Qiam (Rising), and more announcements are expected over the next few days, including the test-firing of a third-generation Fateh (Conqueror) 110 missile.

Iran also recently took delivery of four domestically built Ghadir mini-submarines, stealth vessels designed to operate in shallow waters such as the Gulf.

Source: defencetalk.com

Time to Redeem SAARC

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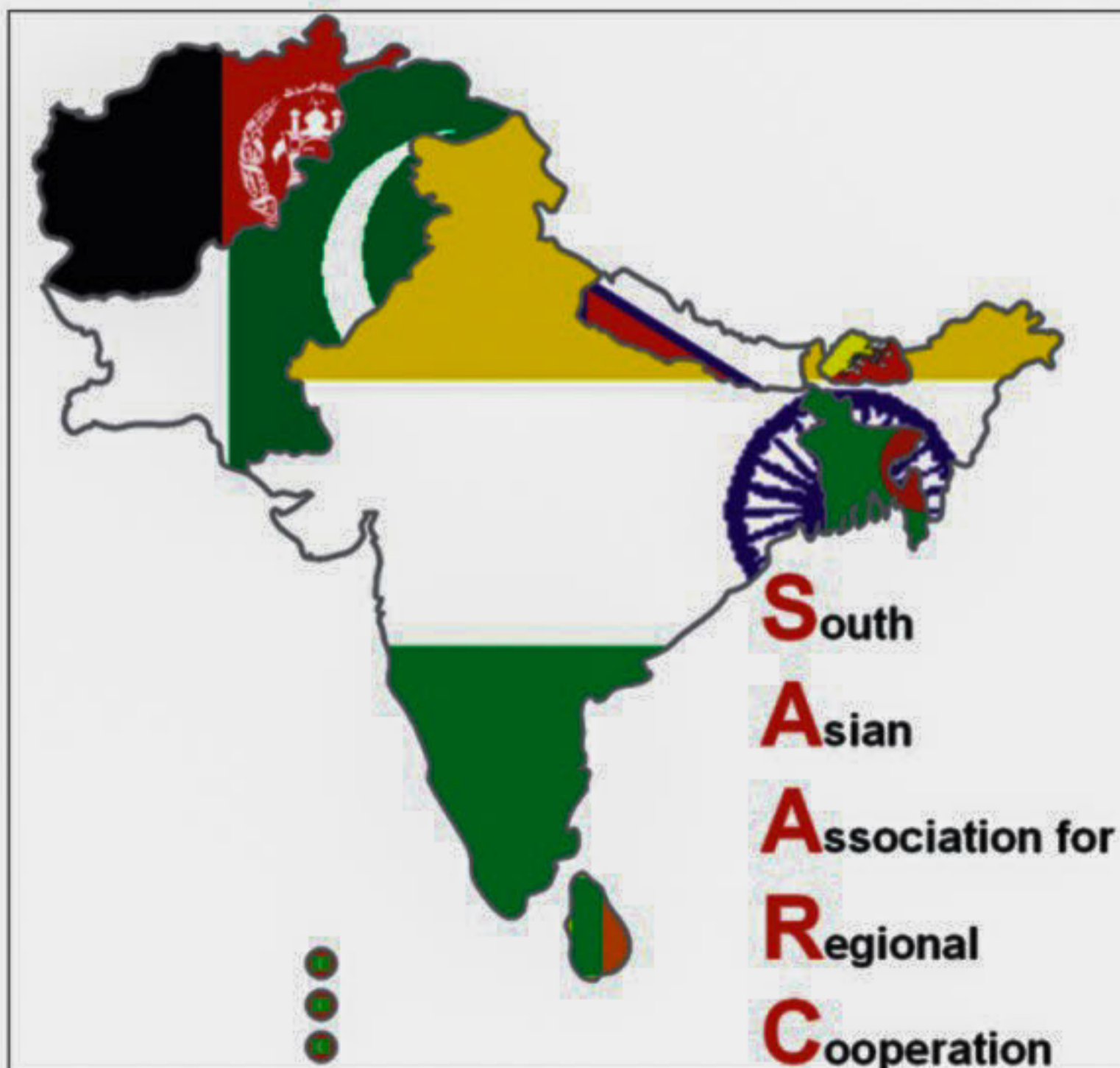
THE devastating flood that has inundated most part of the provinces of Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, Punjab and Sindh has rendered fourteen million homeless in Pakistan. The danger of water-borne disease threatens the life of many who are currently staying in temporary shelters and under open skies. The United Nations has called upon the international community to donate generously. However, as of now, it can only meet 40 per cent of the estimated budget that it requires to meet some basic needs like food, health, nutrition, shelter, water and sanitation. To assess the situation UN General Secretary Ban Ki Moon visited the flood affected areas. He said "The magnitude of the problem; the world has never seen such a disaster. It's much beyond anybody's imagination."

The international community has already committed 200 million dollars. The United States a country hated the most in Pakistan has pledged the largest aid so far amounting to US\$90 million. US marines and soldiers are involved in flood relief work apart from Western NGOs. Unfortunately, the oil rich Middle East countries have contributed very little towards flood relief in Pakistan, attracting criticism in Pakistani media. UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has already received \$182 million, which is about 40 per cent of the needs that UN has asked for; it has estimated an aid requirement of \$ 459 million. India has announced \$5 million in assistance to Pakistani flood victims, though this is yet to be accepted by Islamabad. India has promised more help depending on Pakistan's requirement. Pakistan has started importing potatoes from India, fearing that the flood would affect the kharif crop. Already 25 truck loads of potatoes have reached Lahore through the Wagah border. The World Bank has estimated that \$1 billion worth crops has been ruined by this flood. The fear that food scarcity and displacement may lead to social unrest is real.

While the world community is trying its best to provide help in spite of aid fatigue, SAARC is conspicuous by its absence. There has been no official statement by the current chair of SAARC and there is no effort to

mobilize funds for a fellow member country at a time of such a natural disaster. At the bilateral level India has offered \$5 million, Bangladesh has announced an aid of \$ 2 million, Nepal has committed \$1.3 million (10 million Nepali rupees) and Afghanistan has offered \$1 million as aid to Pakistan's flood victims. Sri Lanka has sent relief material and doctors to help flood victims. The Confederation of India's Voluntary Association a civil society initiative has decided to send 400 Indian doctors to work among the flood victims in Sindh and provide medical treat-

ment that people badly need. A question that begs an answer here is why all this aid cannot be channelled through SAARC. Bilateral aid is important but if the countries want to revitalize SAARC they should have used the organization in helping with flood relief work. At the sixteenth SAARC Summit meeting held in Thimpu, the leaders of the region emphasized the "need for more efficient, focused, time-bound and people-centric activities..." However the current inaction of SAARC reflects the fact that it has again failed to rise to the



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not rise to the occasion to provide a leadership role and organize relief during this worst human crisis in eighty years. SAARC has a Disaster Management Centre that was approved by the Heads of states in its 13th summit. One of the objectives of this Centre is to create a regional response mechanism dedicated to disaster preparedness, emergency relief and rehabilitation to ensure an immediate response. It is painful to see how this has remained yet another instance of declaratory agenda rather than any meaningful action on ground.

It goes without saying that a time has come for SAARC to have a disaster relief fund, a corpus that can be utilized to deal with such calamities.

Ironically, in almost all the summit meetings as well as the Charter, SAARC pays glorified tributes to the people of South Asia. Yet the organization has been the most insensitive in times of such national calamities. The organization has been missing both in action and words. Such a state of affairs defeats the very concept of regional cooperation and does not help in forging a regional identity which is essential for any meaningful cooperation.

If SAARC wants to make itself relevant to the people of South Asia it needs to build its connection with the people. Only when SAARC does something visible on ground can it make its existence meaningful. Otherwise, it will be derided as serving only a photo opportunity for the heads of state in beautiful locales making politically correct pledges embedded in socio-economic jargon.

What should be done? SAARC should immediately convene a meeting at an appropriate level and take stock of the humanitarian situation in Pakistan. It is important for fellow member countries to pledge relief material as well as aid based on the affordability of the individual countries. SAARC needs to send a medical team drawn from member countries as well as volunteers who must extend a helping hand in the distribution of relief as well as rescue operations. All these activities need to be carried out under the SAARC banner. It is also time to brand SAARC. All the pledges and help should be channelled through SAARC and packaged in packets that bear the logo of the regional organization. Volunteers and doctors can be made to wear SAARC badges while working among the flood affected people. This is important on three counts. First, such branding would make SAARC's contribution visible to the people of South Asia for whom apparently the organization is meant. Second, it would create a connection and bonding with the people, which, the organization has been lacking in its twenty five years of existence. Third, the SAARC forum will also take care of Pakistan's reluctance to accept Indian aid.

By arrangement with IDSA, New Delhi.