

NATO at the crossroads

MONAEM SARKER

RECENTLY Dhaka declaration of the Asia-Pacific Peace Conference expresses its full support and solidarity with the people of Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Jordan and Libya in their struggle for peace, democracy and progress. Believing that people's dignity includes their rights to resist oppression but also do not let other to decide their own fate, this Conference express its vehement condemnations to the imperialist military aggression against the Libyan people carried out by the USA, France, Great Britain and the entire NATO along with several willing allies from the Arab World and demands the immediate and unconditional halt of the war operations and the withdrawal of all foreign troops and navies from the area. The Conference rejects all forms of interventions which infringe the right of the peoples to determine their own fortunes and internal matters. The Conference also rejects the imperialist plan for a "Greater Middle East", which was initiated by the USA in 2003, later endorsed by the G8 and by NATO and demands the complete withdrawal of all occupation forces from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Founded in 1949, NATO was aimed to counter soviet expansion. While the threat is long gone, now the NATO is facing an identity crisis. Members of NATO grapple with just how much its long and often-unpopular mission in Iraq, Afghanistan and its new air attack in Libya size up as a

national interest -- or not when many countries' budgets are under strain.

In Brussels, US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said that US share of NATO defense spending is now more than 75 percent and just four other members-Britain, France, Greece and Albania-spend more than the agreed 2 percent of eco-

George W. Bush -- its share of NATO defense spending swelled, the strains are of Washington's own making: by devoting to much money to defense -- or roughly 45 percent of the total \$ 1.7 trillion spent worldwide each year.

Just a few months ago when NATO held its summit in Lisbon adopting its "new

of the Multinational corporations and big International capital. NATO is the "world sheriff," which is becoming a force of execution of the arbitrary decisions of the UN and the case of Libya is one more example for the manipulation of the UN and its abuse.

The imperialists of the EU and NATO are speaking about International Law and the protection of the lives of civilians. Apart from hypocritical and dubious it is also of double moral. Where is the International law in the case of the Palestinian people who are suffering from a slowly genocide and are deprived of their right for an independent State, not to mention the dozens of resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly of the UN? Why the International Law is not applied in the case of the occupation of Western Sahara or the partial occupation of Cyprus till today?

In the course of preparations for the military aggression and occupation of Iraq in 2003, the main argument was that the regime in Baghdad was in possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction. Later, when this flagrant lie was revealed nobody amongst the governments of the EU or NATO raised the question of withdrawal of the foreign troops from Iraq, the killings of civilians and destruction went on and is still going on. Meanwhile the oil of the country is flowing under the US control and a puppet regime has been installed.

In the case of Afghanistan the US and its allies called for a "war on terror", against the Taliban, which were trained, financed

and guided for decades long by the CIA. The invasion and occupation of Afghanistan resulted again in a puppet regime in Kabul and in new records of the opium production and its export for use of the International drugs trafficking.

But also in the murderous 78 days long bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999 by NATO, many lies have been revealed especially afterwards. The goal of USA, the EU and NATO to divide the former Yugoslavia in parts and create EU and NATO protectorates like the ones of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo was serving the goals of Imperialism in the broader region, their plans for the "Missile Defense Shield", their interests in Central Asia and the "New Middle East Plan". The strategy of imperialism is very clear all these years, despite the contradictions or rivalries that appear from time to time. It is at least naive and dangerous if somebody believes that the various imperialist forces are different from each other or the one better than the other.

Interestingly, Richard Clarke, a NATO watcher and Director of the Royal United Services Institute in Britain, said "the US still need NATO as political conduit to Europe-but admitted the alliance is struggling militarily. There is no doubt that militarily, NATO is approaching something of a cross-roads -- it's been approaching this cross-roads for some time."

The writer is the founder Director General of Bangladesh Foundation for Development Research.



REALCLEARWORLD

Global powers eye Africa

SIFAT UDDIN

AFRICA-when the word comes forth, some stereotyped pictures appear in our minds. We envision Africa as a continent of tribal strife, poorest nations and states with geometrically sketched boundaries. Once upon a time Oriental thinkers perceived Africa as a 'dark continent'. But now Africa is a sublime continent beyond all these imaginations. Now many global powers are extending their interest and sphere of influence towards it. Among these China and India are worthy of mention. Bangladesh, this time, is not lagging behind. It is also looking for opportunities and thus exploring potentialities to meet the growing food insecurity and export of workers to new destinations.

The recent move of the global powers toward Africa is the phenomenon of the last few years. China, here, is one of the pioneers followed by India and Bangladesh. China's 'look Africa policy' has alarmed both the US and India.

Since China's move, India consistently has been suffering from regret of 'missed opportunities'. China's move towards Africa was spontaneous; driven by its growing necessity of energy. But India's move seems, more driven by its sense of 'missed opportunities' than its actual requirements. Indian policy makers were in a hurry to conciliate the missed chances.

At this stage, a question may arise about the reasons behind these recent moves toward Africa by global powers. There may be several arguments. First of all, I think a prevailing 'power vacuum' in African continent is one of the major causes behind this development. This power vacuum has continued since the end of WWII. World powers are so much occupied with Asia and Europe that they couldn't or didn't pay any real attention towards Africa. China utilized the chance first to fill the gap up. Why China first but not the others? China is the second largest economy in this world and has the need for energy to keep up the momentum of its burgeoning economy. To meet the challenge of energy demand, China is rushing and exploring all over the world. In Africa, China is mainly investing in the energy sector. Its economy has the power to take the risk of investing in a large scale. China boasts foreign exchange reserves of more than \$3 trillion, 10 times India's \$307 billion, and has aggressively used state-owned development banks to invest heavily in oil, gas and other resources across the continent.

Beijing also leads the way in diplomatic terms, with 42 embassies across sub-Saharan Africa, double India's diplomatic presence of only 21 embassies, a report from the London-based Chatham House think-

tank said. On the other hand, New Delhi has promised billions of dollars in development support, financing for infrastructure projects and the building of educational and training institutes, as it positions itself as the alternative to Beijing.

The present rigorous and massive engagement with Africa has some qualitative differences from the previous ones. On China, many observers are speculating that it may be thinking to shift its manufacturing industries from China to Africa. This move may help to develop its green house gas effect record. We know that among many other criticisms along with human rights issue, China is surely criticized for its green house gas record. Moreover, China's investment will strengthen its relationship with African nations. India's involvement in Africa is to reduce Chinese sphere of influence among African nations. Along with India, Bangladesh is also trying to utilize the opportunities available in Africa.

Bangladesh has already started its formal procedure to lease or buy land in Uganda, Ethiopia etc.

Second prime cause concerned with the move towards Africa by global powers is more economic than political. Domestic unrest sparked by the rise of food price led many states of Africa to cultivation for increasing food production. Since 2008, when the world was hit by economic crisis, there has been a growing concern over the rise of food price. Countries like Bangladesh, South Korea and India suffered heavily during that time in coping with the rise of food price. Still the governments are in a hot water situation to hold back the domestic unrest sparked from the issue.

I shall not discuss or criticize the outcomes resulted from the move towards Africa by the global and small powers. I just want to mention some remarks made by Hillary Clinton. Ms. Clinton termed this new African era as the era of 'New colonialism'. This statement was mainly given to debilitate China's presence there. Taking notes from history She says, "We saw that during colonial times it is easy to come in, take out natural resources, pay off leaders and leave." Critics say Beijing's aid is too often tied to its investment interests and can undermine efforts to encourage fresh government in Africa because it does not demand the same kind of accountability as much Western aid. So I want to say that the African states have to be careful about their decisions taken for foreign investments. They have to know what their national interests are. Otherwise things will be worse for the already crisis prone African states.

The writer is Masters in IR, University of Dhaka and a freelance writer at fairbd.net.



AFRICABUSINESSSOURCE

Obama declares beginning of end of Afghan war

PRESIDENT Barack Obama ordered all 33,000 US surge troops home from Afghanistan by next summer and declared the beginning of the end of the war, vowing to turn to nation building at home.

In a watershed moment for American foreign policy, Obama also significantly curtailed US war aims, saying Washington would no longer try to build a "perfect" Afghanistan from a nation traumatized by its blood soaked history.

"Tonight, we take comfort in knowing that the tide of war is receding," Obama said in 13-minute primetime speech at a time of rising fatigue over costly foreign wars among Americans ground down by deep economic insecurity.

"Even as there will be dark days ahead in Afghanistan, the light of a secure peace can be seen in the distance. These long wars will come to a responsible end," Obama said. The president argued US forces had made large strides towards the objectives of the troop surge strategy he ordered in December 2009 by reversing Taliban momentum, crushing Al-Qaeda and training new Afghan forces.

But he ultimately rejected appeals from the Pentagon for a slower drawdown to safeguard gains against the Taliban and his decision will be seen as a political defeat for talismanic war General David Petraeus. The president said he would, as promised, begin the US withdrawal this July and that 10,000 of the more than 30,000 troops he committed to the escalation of the conflict would be home this year.

A further 23,000 surge troops will be withdrawn by next summer, and more yet-to-be announced drawdowns will continue, until Afghan forces assume security responsibility in 2014. "This is the beginning -- but not the end -- of our effort to wind down this war," Obama said.

However, despite Obama's stirring words, it is possible Taliban forces will be emboldened by signs of an accelerated US exit from the conflict where insurgents are notorious for waiting out their enemies.

More than 1,600 US soldiers have died in Afghanistan since the US invasion after the September 11, 2001 attacks. The US death toll already this year stands at 187.

Despite Pentagon appeals for a more modest drawdown, Defense Secretary Robert Gates quickly said he supported the plan.

"It provides our commanders with enough resources, time and, perhaps most importantly,

flexibility to bring the surge to a successful conclusion," the outgoing Pentagon chief said in a statement.

The president's speech came as domestic questions mount over the purpose of the Afghan war, following the killing of Al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden by Navy SEALS last month, and as Washington backs fragile Afghan reconciliation talks with the Taliban.

But despite the drawdowns, there will still be more than 65,000 troops in Afghanistan when Obama asks Americans to give him a second term in November 2012.

Turning to Al-Qaeda, Obama said documents seized from bin Laden's compound in Pakistan showed the organization was under "enormous strain."

"Bin Laden expressed concern that Al-Qaeda has been unable to effectively replace senior terrorists that have been killed, and that Al-Qaeda has failed in its effort to portray America as a nation at war with Islam -- thereby draining more widespread support," he said.

One official said the US operation against Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan tribal regions had "exceeded our expectations," saying 20 of the group's top 30 leaders, had been killed in the last year.

With US ties with uneasy anti-terror ally Pakistan still raw after the bin Laden raid, Obama also warned he would insist Islamabad keep its commitments to fight the "cancer" of violent extremism.

Obama's plans drew a mixed reaction across the political spectrum. Hawkish Republican Senator John McCain said Obama was taking an "unnecessary risk" and noted Petraeus and Gates had recommended a slower withdrawal. Democratic Senator Carl Levin, had led calls for a faster troop withdrawal, but said Obama's drawdown timetable represented a "positive development." Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney however suggested Obama's motivation was political.

"We all want our troops to come home as soon as possible, but we shouldn't adhere to an arbitrary timetable on the withdrawal of our troops from Afghanistan," Romney said. "This decision should not be based on politics or economics." Obama also placed the Afghan mission in the context of his wider foreign policy and war strategy, arguing he has drawn down 100,000 troops from Iraq and will oversee the full withdrawal by the end of this year.

He announced a NATO summit to review progress on Afghanistan will take place in Chicago in May 2012, alongside the G8 summit of industrialized nations.

His strategy got an early endorsement from British Prime Minister David Cameron, who said pressure could still be applied to the Taliban despite troop cutbacks.

Source: defencetalk.com

