

Iran or Israel: Who bites hard?

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THE debate around Iran's nuclear program has kept western leaders thinking deeply. While negotiation is still in place the fear of a full-scale war seems plausible. The question of war obviously takes the analysts to look at the potential strength the countries have upon each other. Israel enjoys a strategic advantage over Iran having scores of nuclear weapons with long-range delivery means. Iran contrarily makes attempts to strike a balance with undeniable conventional military edge over Israel despite decades-long arms embargo. Is it the hard weapons that only matter in war? Then what about the non-state protégés of Iran? These questions only further complicate the calculation of hawkish Generals in both the United States and Israel.

The war may be undesired to idealists but the reality persists. It may be an argument that the likelihood of Israeli attack on Iranian nuclear sites and counter attack by Iran is over-stated. Global media giants, sympathetic to Israel, might find crucial interests in invoking such war fever. But it is also true that, Israel would prefer war adventure a lot more than the US if no change is visible in Iranian attitude. It profoundly maintains its trust in Darwinian Theory of survival of the fittest. The United States has clarified its position and stated that it won't tolerate nuclear weapons in the hands of revolutionary regime in Iran. Israel's posture better depicts the context of what US hopes to do regarding the issue. Iran is unchanged in its position: nuclear program is peaceful and it is uncompromising in exercising its rights of peaceful use of nuclear technology endorsed by Nuclear

Non-proliferation Treaty.

Then what does come next? The US is stiff, Israel is stubborn and Iran is unbendable. When public statements failed to convey the message it was meant for, negotiation still serves as important tool to prevent the conflict to further escalate. Israel told that that it disbelieves in time-consuming negotiation. Benjamin Netanyahu declared military preparedness to attack on Iran. Later, however restrain came not from Israel, but from the United States. Any war with Israel means potential US involvement. In Iran-Israel war, Americans practically see no chance to sell arms to any party; it has to rather supply arms to Israel as aid.

If the ongoing-negotiation fails for any reason, is there any possibility of potential Israeli attack on Iran? If so, can Iran defend itself? Making quick and absolute assumptions will be a mistaken venture. Victory does not depend on military power alone; other factors come across the spectrum. Israel-Hezbollah war in 2006 is an instance. However, despite all factors, it is the military power which plays the crucial role in any kind of war. Iran and Israel both have significant military muscles; but Iran remains far away from Israel in certain strategic areas.

While Iran leads in quantity, Israel outweighs in quality. Iran has a ten times larger population than Israel to draw its armed forces. Report says that it has more than 523,000 personnel on active services including 350,000 in the army, 18,000 in the navy,

and 30,000 in the air force along with 12,000 in air defense. On the other hand, in Israel 176,500 personnel are in active duty which makes up of 133,000 in the army, 9,500 in the navy, and 34,000 personnel serving in the air force. But Iran runs backward having only 1, 613 backdated tanks in comparison to Israel's 3000 modern possession. Likewise, sheer number of 3 German-made Dolphin tactical submarines brings Israel superiority in water as they are suspected to be nuclear

combat-capable aircraft, with 168 fighters which also include 27 Boeing F15A Eagle, seven F-15B and 90 F16A Fighting Falcons made Israeli air force invincible in the air. Iran's air force is also not weak in strength. It has 336 combat-capable aircraft, including 189 fighter aircraft like 20-US-made F5B jets, 60 F5E Tiger IIs and Russian-made 35 Mig-29A jets. The primary difference between them lies in attack with precision by Israel. The unmanned drones in possession of

Israel will give a clear advantage over Iran.

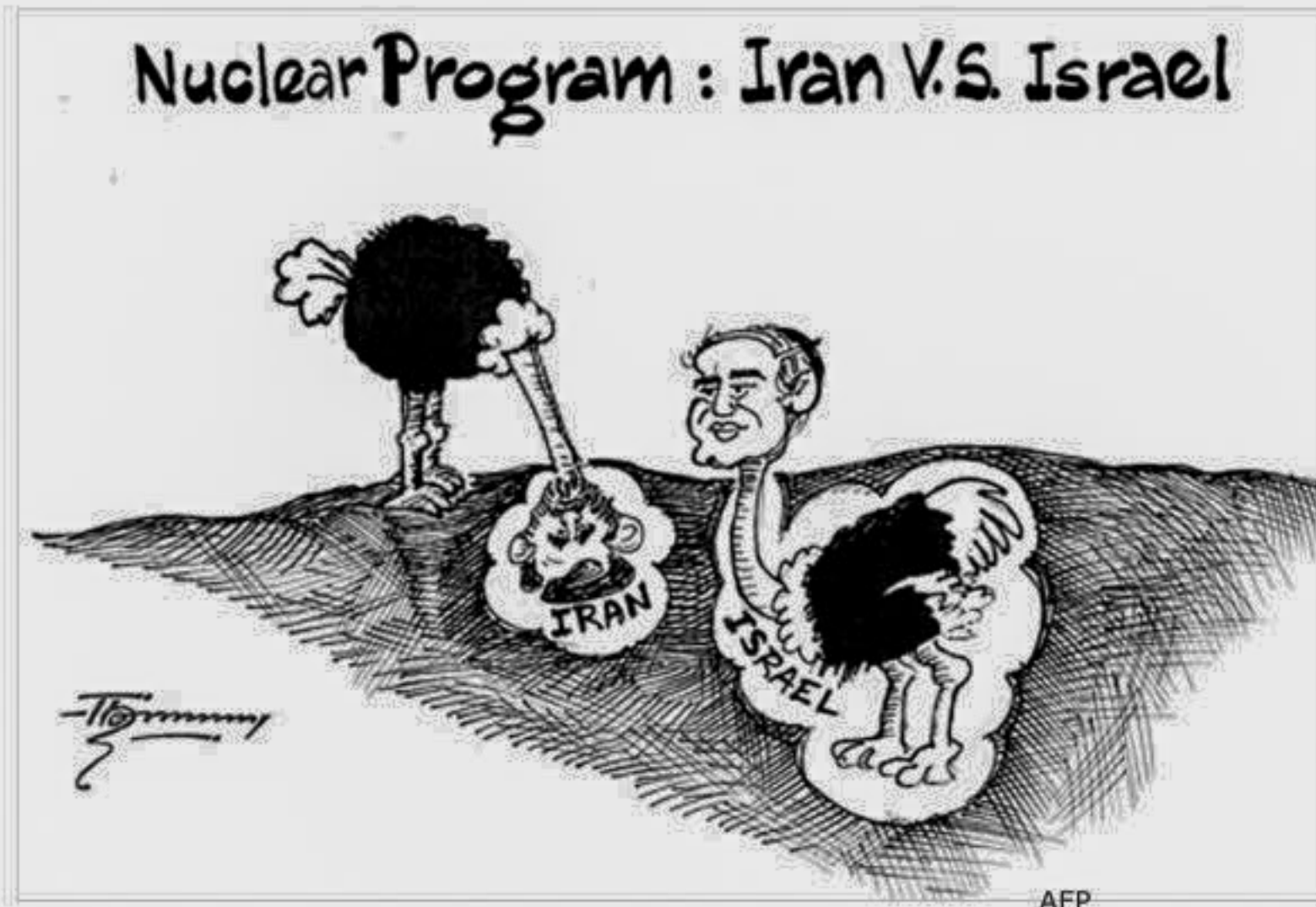
Iran possesses missiles capability of all three kinds. It currently possesses ballistic missiles and long range artillery rockets which are largest in Middle East. Reportedly it has 1000 strategic missiles, capable of striking throughout the Gulf and beyond. In February 2012, Israeli officials claimed that Iran is developing missiles with range about 6000 miles, able to reach the United States, and is getting ready to produce missiles of 10,000 miles range. But United States denied this claim saying that it is badly exaggerated. America

is not ready to recognize that Iran could reach its mainland, because it would add psychological strength to Iranians and its allies. United States say that Iran is working on missiles with medium range of 2,000 miles. If Israel's claim is true, then with a range of 10,000 km, missiles can be fired from Iran to fly halfway around the world to reach the United States, which is for present day Iran a nightmare. On the other hand, by virtue of strategic missile

cooperation with United States, the missile capability of Israel is unquestioned. Its ballistic missiles are primarily used as nuclear-weapon delivery system unlike Iran which uses missiles as delivery for conventional warheads. Israel though maintains 'nuclear ambiguity' it is open secret that it already possesses the nuclear weapons. Reportedly it has more than 200 nuclear warheads, the tools that carry nuclear weapon at the tip of missiles. Iran has not only denied having any nuclear weapons produced, but also outright negates the possibility that such program is in the process.

It is clear that while Iran somewhat exercises a conventional edge, Israel's advantage is somewhere else: huge possession of nuclear weapons. But whatever, the superiority of Israel, using nuclear weapon is never a first choice. For Iran's strategic depth, it can absorb more attacks than Israel. The greatest disadvantage of Israel and United States is the lack of accurate information about military might of Iran. However if the Israelis attack Iran, it is true that it won't be able to incur damages as much as it wants. Iran won't remain sitting idle. Israelis will also need to pay much for that. In retaliation, Iran would launch hundreds of missiles at Israel. Would Iran's protégés in Middle East remain apart? Israel has to endure the bites from them too. Iran has more reason to fear the United States than Israel as US presence continues to form strategic envelope encircling Iran. But the greater fear inhabits in the notion that, Iran after absorbing attacks from Israel would finally get a public reason to produce nuclear weapons.

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armed giving it offshore second-strike capability. It means that if attacked on land, it can take counter-attack from the sea denying the enemy the chance to destroy by first strike or go immune. Conversely, Iranian possession of 19 submarines remains inferior to that of Israel in the absence of nuclear weapons and therefore stays far from having second-strike opportunity.

The Israeli air force is called the best air force in the world. It proved its success in 1967 Arab-Israeli war. The possession of 460

He marched forward to rescue the besieged

LT. COL. (RETD.) QUAZI SAJJAD ALI ZAHIR, BIR PROTIK

MAHTAB Beg was the Chairman of No.2 Satnola Union, adjacent to Ranir Bander and Champakoli areas near Syedpur town. He was a popular and benevolent leader. During 1965 India-Pakistan War he was a Company Commander of the Rangpur Ansar Battalion. During the war he performed his duties devotedly and so the local Army Commander had presented him a revolver.

On March 23, 1971, the Bengalis in Syedpur town raised the flag of Bangladesh in their own houses like in other places of the country to demonstrate solidarity with the ongoing democratic movement. Simultaneously, the non-Bengali population of Syedpur raised the Pakistani flag on that day.

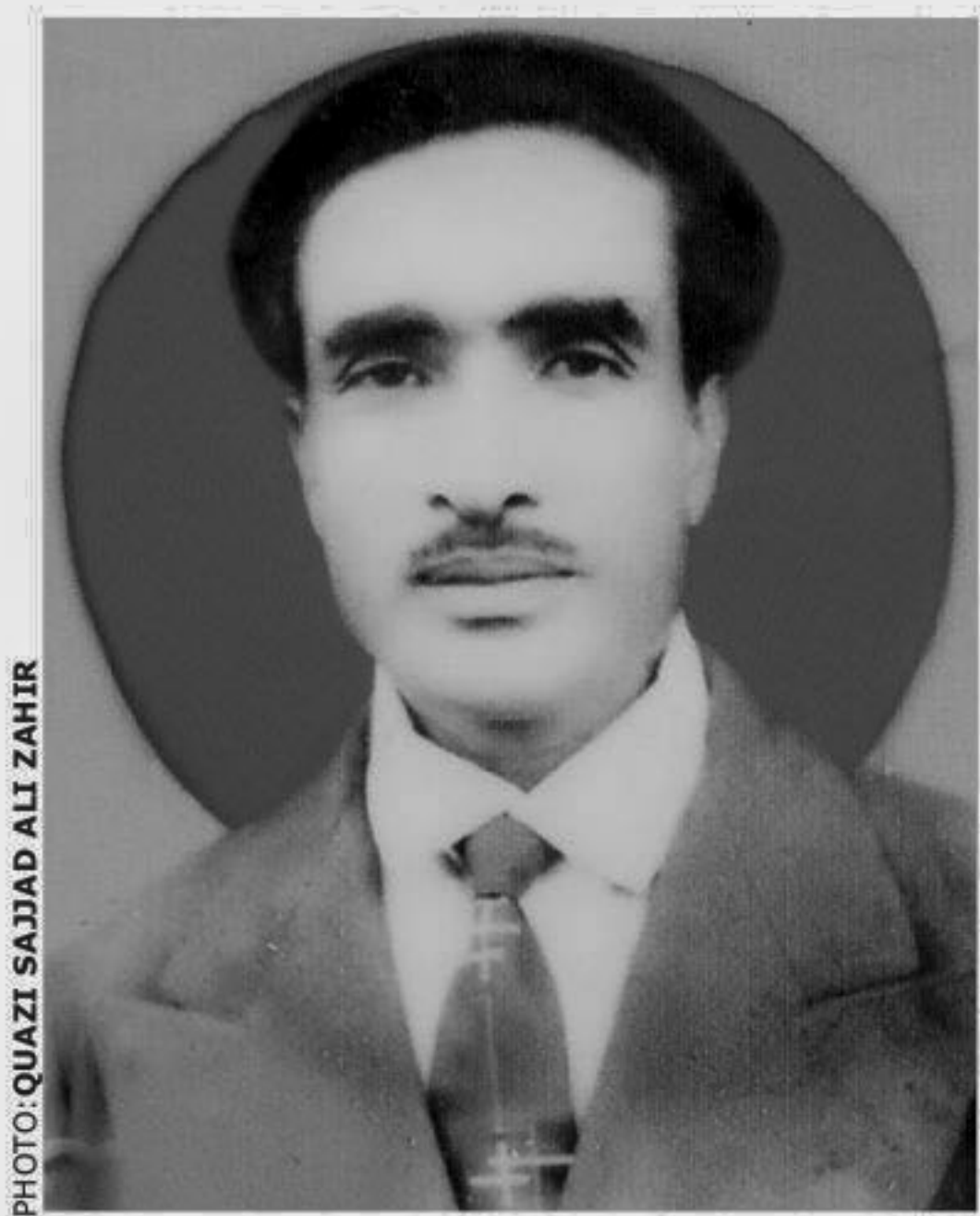
The majority population of Syedpur was non-Bengalis who were collaborating with Pakistan army stationed in Syedpur Cantonment. For raising Bangladeshi flag in Syedpur, the army and non-Bengali population became very hostile on the Bengali population of the town. They interned the Bengalis within the town area and established check post and refused to allow the Bengalis to leave the town. From March 23, the roads were being patrolled by the Pakistan army accompanied by non-Bengalis armed with fire arms. It was very clear that the Pakistan army from Syedpur Cantonment were providing fire arms to the non-Bengalis to conduct oppression on the Bengalis. Bengalis in the town were feeling insecure and were apprehending attack on them any time. They could not dare to come out of their houses.

This information of the precarious situation spread like wild fire to the nearby villages. From the loudspeakers of the mosques announcements were made to help the Bengalis of Syedpur and the danger they were in. Having heard about the prevailing situation, on 23 March evening, the villagers from the villages around Syedpur gathered in the house of Mahtab Beg and discussed with him a plan as to how to save the Bengalis of Syedpur. They were all rallying around Mahtab Beg who was a trusted and brave leader, capable of giving them guidance and leadership at the time of crisis.

In the same evening Mahtab Beg sent a number of young villagers to go near Syedpur town and find out the actual situation of the town and the condition of the Bengalis interned there. The young men conducted their reconnaissance and returned to Mahtab Beg. They reported that the Bengalis in Syedpur were in a desperate situation and if they were not immediately rescued, they would be

massacred.

Mahtab Beg spent the whole night thinking on a course of action to be taken to save the suffering people. He made up his mind. In the early morning of 24 March, there was a bigger crowd near the house of Mahtab Beg. Mahtab Beg told the crowd that they could not allow the Bengalis in Syedpur to be butchered. The time had come to take a decision and if time is lost, the Bengalis in Syedpur would be killed in mass. He told the villagers to collect whatever they could lay their hands on and march to Syedpur town along with him to rescue the Bengalis. He reminded the cheering crowd on the March 7 directives of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman that they must be prepared to face the enemy with what ever they had.



Mahtab Beg

Around 10:00 in the morning, Mahtab Beg led about ten thousand villagers to Syedpur town. He had with him the revolver which was gifted to him by the Pakistan army earlier. Beside him was his 28-year old son, Rashed Beg with a .22 rifle and another son Salahuddin Beg. In total the Bengalis could manage only 35 fire arms and rest of the people had sticks, bows and arrows, spears, etc. Around 11:00 a.m. the crowd reached near the bridge on Khargaria River adjacent to the western side of Syedpur town. Near the bridge Mahtab Beg found that Pakistan army and their non-Bengali collaborators had taken up position on the road leading to Syedpur. The crowd saw that the non-Bengalis had mobilized in thousands near the Sher-e-Bangla School with fire arms and they were blasting explosives to create panic among the villagers. Being unnerved, Mahtab Beg advanced with his followers. Immediately the non-Bengalis opened fire. Mahtab

Beg with his advance party took position in the abandoned brick field nearby and tried to resist the enemy with the small number of weapons available with them. At one stage, a burst of rounds hit Mahtab Beg in his stomach. It could be understood that the enemy were using automatic weapons and Mahtab Beg was targeted by them. Salahuddin Beg tried to reach his father and bring him to safety but a group of twenty non-Bengalis were firing and advancing towards Mahtab Beg. Salahuddin Beg was severely wounded by enemy bullets hitting his thigh and chest. Due to intense fire, none could reach Mahtab Beg. By this time Mahtab Beg was martyred. The non-Bengalis carried the dead body of Mahtab Beg to the town. The villagers retreated having lost their leader.

What the non-Bengalis did after carrying the dead body of Mahtab Beg is beyond human comprehension. First, they severed his head from the body and started dancing and celebrating like animals. Then they paraded the streets of Syedpur with his head tied to a long stick and announcing through loudspeaker drawing attention of the Bengalis that if anyone disobeyed Pakistan army and non-Bengalis, they would face the similar consequences. These animals in human form did not have the slightest respect for a dead human body.

Mahtab Beg had taken a bold and decisive step to save suffering people. In the process he sacrificed his life. He understood that if the interned people of Syedpur were not rescued, they would be massacred. His fear came true as after 25 March the massacre on the total Bengali population started. Such massacre has few parallel in history. Bengalis were killed in the Railway Workshop area, Railway Colony, Golahat area, Syedpur Airport area, Tatia Jute Press area and all over the town. There is no exact account on how many Bengalis were killed in Syedpur but it is said that thousands of Bengalis were killed in Syedpur town.

Mahtab Beg, a rural Bangladeshi, is a fine example of a brave political leader who stood beside his people in the time of need. He set a high standard of leadership quality and patriotism. He fell but did not yield. His name is etched in the memory of the local people but is not recorded in the pages of history. It is a story of a fine leader and a hero who did not abandon his people to their fate but moved to rescue them.

Time is now; time is always to honor such heroes.

The writer is a Freedom Fighter.

Why should the US withdraw?

MUHAMMAD RUHUL AMIN and MD. AZHARUL ISLAM

ON May 1, the US President Barack Obama made a sudden fly to Afghan palace and signed a long-term strategic treaty. This mid-night visit made a clear date for withdrawing the US troops from Afghanistan. However, this is not the only declaration of withdrawal program. Previously a number of speeches and declaration were made with a view to ending the Afghan war. The purpose of this write up is to raise the justifications why the US should withdraw from Afghanistan in order to comply with its incessant declarations in this regard. Prior to analyzing the necessity of the US withdrawal, it is very important to have a short idea about the background of US intervention in Afghanistan.

The United States of America, the lonely superpower of today's world, commenced its intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 just after the 9/11 terrorist attack. Under Bush administration the USA declared her National Security Strategy 2002 and 2006 which proclaimed that weak states like Afghanistan can be used as incubators of terrorism and transnational organized crime. Against this backdrop, Washington intervened in Afghanistan with two specific purposes: first, exiling the Taliban from power and second, obliterating the terrorist networks led by Al Qaeda.

Before the 2008 presidential election of the USA, current US President Barack Obama promised to withdraw US soldiers from Afghanistan. After being elected, in December, 2009, Obama asserted that the last American troops would depart from Afghanistan by the end of 2014. This proclamation is followed by Obama's sudden visit to Afghanistan on the first day of May. This gave birth to a prominent debate whether the US would withdraw its troops from Afghanistan. For rational justifications, the US should withdraw from Afghanistan.

Firstly, the US commenced its intervention in Afghanistan with a view to ousting the Taliban regime and demolishing the networks of al-Qaeda. The US have swiftly fulfilled both objectives, inspired the USA for endeavor the nation-building process in Afghanistan. Critics argue that the western style of nation-building process might not work in a country like Afghanistan. The Afghans have their own tradition, custom, values. Their rich culture has built well renowned civilization, giving their own ways of life. Arguably, the US should accelerate its withdrawal and leave the nation-building process of Afghanistan to the hand of Afghans. However, the US can oversee the Afghanistan's nation-building process without being physically present in that country.

Secondly, the famous Chinese military general Sun Tzu said in his 'Art of War' that no country can be benefited from a prolonged warfare. The US has been fighting the war in Afghanistan for more than a decade which made it the second longest in American history behind Vietnam. The financial and strategic costs of such a war are usually very high. A

conservative estimate shows that withdrawing all US troops from Iraq within this year and from Afghanistan by the end of 2014 would save \$200 billion federal budget from 2012-2021. As the US has succumbed to failure in the Vietnam War due to the prolonged nature of war, it should learn many lessons from previous while operating the present Afghan war.

Thirdly, the US has been losing her support, at home and abroad, in favour of long-lasting war in Afghanistan. People want an end to the Afghan war. A latest CBS poll indicates that nearly two-thirds of Americans support ending the war in Afghanistan within the next two years. Moreover, following the massacre of sixteen Afghan villagers in Kandahar by a US soldier and the Quran-burning incident, America is grandly losing its credibility among the Afghan people, as well as the Karzai administration, let alone the Taliban.

Fourthly, the United States claims that its troops are supporting Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) by providing training to make them able to take over the responsibility



AFP

of their own security. In recent days, Washington currently has deployed almost 90,000 troops in Afghanistan. It is assumed that such a huge number of troops are redundant to train-up ANSF. At the same time, the US is supporting intra-Afghan negotiations with diverse stakeholders, including but not limited to President Hamid Karzai and Afghan insurgents. Thus USA has been assisting the Afghans to prepare for next presidential election to be held in 2014. Such activities require a synchronization of political and diplomatic endeavor rather than overt military presence.

The US should realize that the current American interest in Afghanistan can be afforded best through incredibly limited presence or no presence of the US military troops. Undoubtedly, an indirect presence through an effective role in nation-building process of Afghanistan should be the better policy option for the US. It is time for the US to recognise the reality and depart from Afghanistan. President Obama should not use the withdrawal announcements as the strategy for winning in the next US Presidential election. The US withdrawal is a must for bringing back normalcy in the domestic politics of Afghanistan and restoring the global security. The US withdrawal is also necessary for both regional and international security.

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