

## Foreword

Assessments lie at the core of success or failure in any major conflict, and, as Clausewitz has noted in his classic, *On War*, “the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive” confronting the statesman and the commander is “the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature.”<sup>1</sup>

And yet, recent experience is overwhelming testimony to the myopia of leaders and, indeed, of the tremendous void that has come into existence, globally, in military doctrine and strategic thinking. Worse, the political discourse – crucial, in democratic nations, to the strategic impulse – remains mired in obfuscation, in ideology-led dogma, in denial, and in the sheer and deliberate opportunism of short-term partisan political postures.

The most glaring of recent examples in this context is, of course, the sheer perversion of intelligence and falsification of reality that preceded – and conjured the case for – the Iraq invasion. The disastrous consequences of this misadventure are everywhere in evidence and America has already paid an unimaginable price for this folly, not only in money and lives, but in the loss of international prestige and irreversible damage to its status as the world’s ‘sole superpower’.

Astonishingly, there is little evidence of learning within at least some sections of the Bush administration, and there are many and strident voices calling for US armed intervention in

---

<sup>1</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976, p. 88.

Iran, once again, on intelligence and assessments that are, at best, dodgy.

In Afghanistan and Pakistan, crucial, though not as immediately disastrous in potential, miscalculations remain in evidence. Despite repeated failures of experiments to include a mythical 'moderate Taliban' in the establishment at Kabul, and various 'peace deals' with elements of the Taliban and various warlords on both sides of the Pak-Afghan border, each of which has only brought about a further consolidation of power and operational capacities of the Islamist radicals, efforts for such *rapprochement* persist, and have intensified with the formation of a new, democratic Government in Pakistan. Indeed, the great faith invested in the 'fundamental transformations' that are to be wrought by the 'new order' in Pakistan, themselves, constitute a failure of intelligence, and a grave error of judgment.

Elections and the installation of 'democratic' regimes in regions of instability invariably give rise to euphoric sentiments and assessments. Regrettably, in all but the rarest of cases, the electoral exercise does little to alter the existing equations of power within the system, and the consequent institutional perversities that continues to operate, despite the apparent 'shift' engineered by 'democracy'. The situation in Pakistan is not among the 'rare exceptions' in this regard. The powers of the 'democratic forces' remain hostage to the country's overwhelming military establishment, though the latter has found it expedient to execute a tactical retreat from overt control after the humiliation and discredit accumulated over eight years of sustained catastrophe under President Pervez Musharraf. To the extent that Pakistan's principal challenge remains the struggle with deep-rooted Islamist extremism, both within the establishment and in elements now arrayed against it, as well as against the associated and rising Islamist terrorism within and sourced from the country, the role of the Army will remain pivotal. The inherent contradictions of this role – which seeks, at once, to confront and neutralize the increasing menace of some aspects of Islamist radicalism, but simultaneously to retain control of the instrumentalities of Islamist terror within the state's strategic and tactical arsenal – have in no measure diminished with the advent of 'democracy'. Worse, while the 'democratic

forces' are currently being lionized, the reality of their past cannot be ignored for long. These are, in the main, deeply discredited and compromised parties and leaders, and most of these have had deep and enduring linkages with the Islamist extremists and with Pakistan's project of international radicalization and terrorism, during past tenures in power. Crucially, moreover, notwithstanding the 'marginalization' of the Islamist formations in the elections, the disruptive capacities of the Islamist extremists have in no measure been diluted, nor has their intent been altered, by the electoral process or the installation of a 'new regime'. The reality of power in Pakistan remains an irreducible conflict between a pre-eminent, but declining, military power, and a rising, albeit still far inferior, *jihadi* force. 'Democratic' players remain, at best, minor and probably transitional actors in this theatre.

The 'democracy delusion' is conspicuously manifest in Nepal as well. A party committed to a totalitarian ideology of violent transformation has now nearly secured the seizure of state power through a tactical subordination of the democratic process – at the end of a ten-year campaign of its explicitly violent 'people's war'. Apologists for the new *fait accompli* are, of course, vigorously celebrating the 'victory of democracy'. But the seizure of power, though still in its execution, is no less a reality merely because it was not effectively resisted by democratic forces or the existing state apparatus; nor, indeed, is the Maoist ideology any less totalitarian because power is secured through a manipulation of democratic processes and institutions; moreover, the state may not have manifestly been captured through the 'barrel of the gun', but it has certainly been secured under the shadow of the gun, in a situation of widespread intimidation and the denial of democratic space to political rivals by the Maoists. This outcome has, moreover, been achieved through a long succession of political and strategic blunders on the part of each of the powers involved – both domestic and international – which have aided, inadvertently but invariably, in the consolidation of the Maoist stranglehold over Nepal.

Infirmities of perception are also endemic in India's multiple internal conflicts – including the persistent proxy war that Pakistan continues to wage, through Islamist extremist

instrumentalities, in Jammu & Kashmir and in progressively wider areas across the country. Such errors are, however, most dramatically exemplified in the irreconcilable conflict of views that has persisted, for nearly four years now, between Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his Minister of Home Affairs, Shivraj Patil, on the threat of Left Wing Extremism or Maoism/Naxalism in India. The Prime Minister has, variously and repeatedly, articulated the view that “Left Wing Extremism is probably the single biggest security challenge to the Indian state”,<sup>2</sup> and has advocated the strongest measures for the suppression of this threat, noting, “We need to cripple the hold of Naxalite forces with all the means at our command... we also need to choke their support infrastructure.”<sup>3</sup> His Home Minister has, however, explicitly rejected this assessment,<sup>4</sup> has repeatedly sought to minimize the Maoist threat in India through statement and statistical manipulation, and has insisted that, in dealing with “our children”<sup>5</sup> and with “our brothers and sisters”,<sup>6</sup> “the Government is not interested in using weapons.”<sup>7</sup> The impact, down the chain of command and operation, of such ambivalence – indeed, contradiction – at the highest levels of Government, can only be imagined.

It is significant, however, that wherever a sufficient measure of clarity has been secured in counter-terrorism perspectives and doctrine in India – as was the case in Punjab and, more recently, in Andhra Pradesh and Tripura – the results have been the most astonishing and swift reverses inflicted on anti-state forces.

---

<sup>2</sup> Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, “Speech at the Chief Ministers’ Conference on Internal Security,” New Delhi, December 20, 2007, <http://pmindia.nic.in/speeches.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> “Naxal threat has not become worse: Patil,” *CNN-IBN*, February 16, 2008, <http://www.ibnlive.com/news/naxal-threat-has-not-become-worse-patil/59198-3.html>

<sup>5</sup> Home Minister’s statement on September 17, 2004. See also, Ajai Sahni, “Bad Medicine for a Red Epidemic,” *South Asia Intelligence Review*, Vol. 3, No. 12, October 4, 2004, South Asia Terrorism Portal, [http://www.satp.org/satporgetp/sair/Archives/3\\_12.htm#ASSESSMENT2](http://www.satp.org/satporgetp/sair/Archives/3_12.htm#ASSESSMENT2)

<sup>6</sup> Union Minister’s statement at a meeting with representatives of political parties and voluntary organisations in Bangalore, *The Telegraph*, April 25, 2005,

[http://www.telegraphindia.com/1050425/asp/nation/story\\_4658169.asp](http://www.telegraphindia.com/1050425/asp/nation/story_4658169.asp)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

As with all wars or major conflicts, strategies of response to insurgency and terrorism relate essentially to the acquisition and disposition of force and resources. The degree to which this task is effectively and imaginatively addressed – in conformity, not with some particular rigidity of theory, ideology or vested interest, but with an objective and accurate assessment of the challenges at hand – defines the measure of success that is attainable. The critical imperative is to define clear objectives and ends for our strategies, and to assess these strategies in terms of the quantifiable advances they secure towards these specific goals and objectives.

It is only a continuous study of the specific details and dynamics of the forces and conditions operating on the ground that can yield a sufficient understanding of, and framework of response to, the rising terrorism and sub-conventional wars of our age. It is to such study that *Faultlines* is dedicated.

Ajai Sahni

New Delhi, April 25, 2008