

# Fighting the 'new enemy'

By Talat Masood

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Down  
9.5.04

FOR decades the American armed forces remained poised against those of the Soviet Union. The US military strategy, tactics and training devolved round countering any Soviet threat. They made a great success of it by ensuring a strategic balance through deterrence, pursuing the doctrine of mutually assured destruction (MAD) or flexible response at different stages of the cold war confrontation.

They also maintained, in conjunction with Nato forces, an effective conventional capability in Europe, to hold back any possible Soviet attack — nuclear or conventional. Both the Soviet Union and America knew the dangers of escalation, and an uneasy peace was maintained until the former collapsed on account of the heavy military burden and the internal contradictions of the Soviet system.

Americans, however, have little experience of the new enemy that they are now facing in Iraq and Afghanistan where they seem to be getting caught in a quagmire. Here the enemy is elusive and borderless and this asymmetric combat in an urban or rural guerilla war is placing limits on America's military prowess.

Interestingly, there are some similarities to what our army had to face recently in the tribal belt. Pakistan too has been militarily focused on India for over five decades. All its strategy, tactics and many

remarks on May 16, 2003, when he declared victory aboard a US carrier and that the war was over. Wars are not won when a country is militarily defeated and the victor is euphoric about it, but only when the will of the vanquished is defeated and he accepts defeat. If military offensive fails to produce peace and generates greater hostility towards the perceived aggressor, then it becomes counter-productive and is worse than protracted confrontations.

High technology and massive military superiority seems to be turning the US into a global isolationist power. Instead, it should use its technological and military superiority to transform the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East and Central Asia by peaceful means — through cooperation and consensus-building. The neo-conservatives strategy is not working and they have to realize that obsession with the

fight the Taliban and the Pashtuns. From a purely military perspective, it may be expedient, but it creates problems of conflict and disharmony in a country where two successive generations saw nothing but war, devastation and endless civil strife.

Similarly, the US looks at Iraq through the prism of the Kurds, Shias and the Sunnis. Not that these ethnic and sectarian differences did not exist prior to the US invasion of Iraq, but accentuating ethnic and sectarian rivalries to facilitate military victory has turned out to be a nightmarish experience as recent events have shown.

Even after the military occupation of Iraq, the US continues to rely on playing on these differences, thereby losing a valuable opportunity to unite the nation. Whatever goodwill for the US that existed among the Shias for delivering them from Saddam's tyranny has since been squandered. Prudence demands that they stop their assault on Najaf. That would be their Achilles heel, as the US desperately needs the goodwill of the Shias. Sadr may have a small following compared to the more elderly and sober Sistani, but his followers are young and armed and ready to die. By defying America, Sadr also strikes a chord that resonates far beyond his group.

As the situation stands it is hard to visualize that sovereignty will revert to the Iraqis on July 1. The likely scenario is that an unrepresentative civilian administration will be thrust on Iraq and made to coexist with the US occupation force of nearly 150,000 strong over which it has no control. All this

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of its policies have been oriented to face this challenge — defending its borders against an Indian assault, practising offensive defence, all in the context of India.

Now the Pakistan military has to confront an internal threat, fighting a mini-battle in South Waziristan against its own people, who are fiercely independent and opposed to any intrusion into their cherished autonomy, however misplaced the concept may appear in the context of the present-day world. The Pakistan army and the Frontier Corps soon realized the limitations of their military power when they were forced to retreat after suffering heavy casualties and had to opt for peace and compromise with those very militant leaders they were so determined to eliminate.

Ironically, the Pakistan army could transform this major tactical setback in the tribal belt into a strategic gain provided it continues to pursue the path of achieving its objectives by well-conceived and sustained political and military means. It should increase its military presence to open up the area and for facilitating development work there. Furthermore, by its increased physical presence it can improve intelligence surveillance which will put the militants — whether they be remnants of Al Qaeda or of the Taliban — on the defensive and use military force only as an instrument of last resort.

The Americans are likely to be upset with the current outcome in Wana and may keep pushing Pakistan into launching another offensive to flush out the militants. But there are many lessons that the Americans and the Coalition partners could learn from Pakistan's recent military experience in the tribal belt and from their own military engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Military success does not necessarily result in a political victory. As military thinkers have repeatedly emphasized winning battles does not necessarily mean that the war has been won. America having overrun Iraq and also Afghanistan by its overwhelming military superiority in a short span of time has not won the war, notwithstanding President Bush's famous

use of military power to shape the world is doing enormous damage to world stability and, in the final analysis, to America's own interests.

Regrettably, the US, which has some of the best minds working in its prestigious think-tanks and government, has failed to fully grasp what is motivating the irate people, be it in Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan, to fight back, and what is needed to win them over. Unless, along with the military instrument, they address the political, religious and psychological factors that motivate the insurgents, it is highly unlikely that they will prevail. Excessive reliance on military power, without the promise of a just and equitable political solution of the problems in Palestine and Iraq, will further intensify anti-American sentiment the world over and lay the ground for a new breed of warlords, transnational terrorists and ethnic and religious zealots.

The development efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan have to be seen by the people of these countries and the world not as an effort to favour neo con contractors but to reconstruct and rehabilitate these countries.

Excessive reliance on military power has falsified many of the great values and principles of American life that many once admired and respected. "Shock and awe" has to be a small part of the overall military strategy and not the central one if the US is to counter violence. A strong military impulse in the aftermath of 9/11 is understandable, but now political considerations have to guide American thinking and approach so that the US retracts from its course of a dangerous imperial overstretch.

Brutal military action against people who have already suffered at the hands of dictators and the oppressive regimes of Saddam and the Taliban is unjustified. Securing the support of the local people and countries of the region is the best way of combating terrorism.

Often the US military objectives and professed political goals are at variance. For achieving quick military victory, they pitched one group against the other. The Northern Alliance in Afghanistan was beefed up to

will lead to greater alienation among the people and bring about a rapid erosion of the US-backed Iraqi regime. The best course for the Americans would be to withdraw from the cities and hand over the reins of administration to the Iraqis, similar to what they have done in Fallujah, and then finally to transfer the role of peace-keeping to the UN — not cosmetically but substantially.

The great danger is that the situation in Iraq, if not handled wisely, will spill over into the whole of the Middle East, signs of which are already showing. Similarly, the instability in Afghanistan may engulf Pakistan and the Central Asian states. For this reason, apart from that of the US, the role of the governments and civil societies of the Muslim countries of the region becomes critical in countering this growing threat.

The question arises how can unrepresentative, corrupt and autocratic regimes fight violence and terror when they are as much a cause of it. Their ineffectual governments, feudal and tribal societies that are unable or unwilling to confront the demands of 21st century are a primary source of violence.

How can the Islamic world lay claim to modernity, moderation and justice when the armed forces along with a network of intelligence services hold the state together. Instead of drawing strength from the people most Muslim rulers rely on coercion and, in some cases, also support from the US to stay in power and therefore remain vulnerable to Washington's dictates. Religious demagogues exploit the frustrations of the Muslim masses against their inefficient and oppressive governments and whip up anti-US sentiment in response to Washington's heavy tilt towards Israel and its occupation of Iraq.

These two factors are giving rise to a growing number of militants or "warriors" in many Muslim countries and communities. Unless the individual countries and the US are willing to address these issues seriously, the spectre of chaos and conflict will remain to haunt the region.

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