

Indian boots in Afghanistan?

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-[T]he NATO and ISAF command, which sees Pakistan as an “enemy” because of Pakistan’s security doctrine of “strategic depth” and the analogy of “good Taliban and bad Taliban”, also wants Indian boots in Afghanistan since 2006 and would still welcome them.

US President Barack Obama has already begun his 10-day trip to Asia where he would be visiting Japan, South Korea, Indonesia and India. Obama’s trip to Japan, South Korea and Indonesia is seen as a “continuing policy” to further strategic cooperation between the US against growing Chinese influence and North Korea. However, it is his trip to India, which is being seen as “agenda-driven” and somewhat a strategic shift by the US.

Obama’s trip to India, which the Indian media is playing up as an “extra-ordinary trip”, is being seen with very high hopes domestically where various agreements and issues such as civil nuclear cooperation, economics, counter-terrorism, Pakistan and China will be discussed in great detail. The real agenda of Obama’s trip to India is “Afghanistan” where there’s “an absolute breakdown of relations”. While both the US and India wish to avoid re-emergence of terrorism sanctuaries capable of carrying out international terrorism, it is the “US giving all cards to the Pakistanis in Afghanistan, which is a real problem. We have investments, assets and recent history which prove that Afghanistan is abused and used against carrying out attacks inside India”, confirmed Zahid Hussain, an Indian defence analyst.

“Afghanistan has become a major source of tension between the US and India for the primary reason that India does not believe that we will stay until the job is done,” McCain said in a speech before leaving for a trip to Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq. While President Obama will be in India signing deals and will give a strong statement supporting India, McCain will be on a “Mission Pakistan” to make sure “no egos are hurt” in Islamabad.

While Obama will be singing praises for New Delhi, Daily Times had been told by many American analysts close to the US Defence Department that finally, the US has made up it’s mind up to formally ask India to send troops to Afghanistan due to shortage of manpower in Afghanistan, to satisfy non-Pakhtuns, and to satisfy the concerns of India and other regional powers, including Russia regarding a possible Taliban take-over. It should be noted that

Pakistan's all-powerful army chief General Ashfaq Kayani, in Washington DC, publically called for "minimising Indian role" in Afghanistan for an exchange of stability in Afghanistan.

The US, according to Harvey Carroll, a US defence analyst, "is thinking broadly and keeping all its options open and while there had been talks with the Taliban, the US also wants to keep the Northern Alliance and "non-Pakhtuns" happy or give some sense of security for the long term. Pakistan needs to get out of its India-centric attitude and stop the blackmail".

"The almost 9,000 Indian troops deployed on UN peacekeeping missions could easily be re-deployed in Afghanistan," confirmed Bharat Singh, an Indian defence analyst. While it should be noted that India has other interests in Afghanistan too, it primarily wants to end Pakistan's monopoly as a gateway to Afghanistan and had even financed an alternate corridor of strategic importance that connects Afghanistan with the Iranian port of Chahbahar. The 280km road from Delaram on the Kandahar-Herat highway to Zaranj is India's own 'Silk Road', which it wants to protect at any cost with the Iranians, who play along.

India, which traditionally has been supporting the Northern Alliance against the Taliban, has many defence officials and even a serving brigadier inside Afghanistan to look after Indian interests. Daily Times has been told that Lt Gen RK Loomba, the Indian Army's Military Intelligence DG, was also in Afghanistan to assess Afghan military's capabilities, and India is keen on taking the new role in Afghanistan.

It should be remembered that the Afghan Defence Ministry, which is mostly headed by old leftists, denied Pakistan's offer to train the Afghan army, while General Caldwell, the head of NATO training mission, during an interview previously published in Daily Times, also denied Pakistan's role in training the Afghan army. Meanwhile, the NATO and ISAF command, which sees Pakistan as an "enemy" because of Pakistan's security doctrine of "strategic depth" and the analogy of "good Taliban and bad Taliban", also wants Indian boots in Afghanistan since 2006 and would still welcome them.

In a conference call with reporters this week, Robert D Blackwill, who served as an ambassador to India during the George W Bush administration, said India is extremely anxious that the US would forge a deal with the Taliban in Afghanistan. McCain described the emergence of a strategic partnership with India as "one of the most consequential, bipartisan successes of recent US foreign policy". While it should be remembered that India has taken Russia, France, the UK and now even the Americans on board for their permanent membership in the UN Security Council.

On the Pakistani side, the country has taken a central role in Afghanistan policy by assuring the Americans earlier this year that "we will help you stabilise Afghanistan only when you reduce Indian influence in Afghanistan". The offer to India from the US to actually bring in uniformed Indian soldiers to Afghanistan would be seen as a serious security threat and an anti-thesis to Pakistani security doctrine of strategic depth.

Could this be all bluff? The US actually pressurising Pakistan? "Maybe, but it would certainly take skeletons out of the Pakistanis, plus the possibility is real. We can't get blackmailed anymore," Daily Times was told

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