

# U.S. Drone Warfare: Reinforcing Failure

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The foreign policy debate between Governor Mitt Romney and President Barack Obama was brutally realistic and portended ominous tidings for Pakistan. The US President did not need to elaborate on his drone policy, as it was being diligently and ruthlessly manifested by the CIA in the Fata/NWA literally as he spoke. Not surprisingly, Governor Romney agreed wholeheartedly with his opponent. This clearly indicated a bipartisan support to the USA's drone policy towards the Taliban with ominous strategic connotations for Pakistan as well.

It, therefore, confirmed a continuation of US foreign policy approach towards the AfPak Region (APR) and the GWOT. The US strategic aims and objectives in the APR and the operational methodologies to attain them are unlikely to see any major changes in the near future. Thus, regardless of who wins the US presidency, innocent Pakistanis in Fata will continue to suffer death and destruction as the inevitable "collateral damage".

The US is relying very heavily on the drones. It intends to defeat its adversaries without putting too many Americans at risk. But then a constant fixation on a single technology or methodology indicates a paucity of other viable strategic or diplomatic options. The incessant employment of drones is a clear case of diminishing returns as well as colossal human sufferings.

It is endlessly repeating what is continuously failing to make any tangible impact on the Taliban or militants or bringing its strategic objectives any nearer. It has neither been able to pacify the Taliban, nor defeat them or force them to negotiate from a position of weakness. It is a classic case of adamantly and stubbornly reinforcing failure.

The US needs to change tack. And if media reports are to be believed, the US may even pre-pone its departure from the APR, then it would add to the urgency of finding an alternative methodology to deal with this situation. (Assuming that the Pakistanis will not venture into the NWA unless solely dictated by their national interests.)

The current US policy enunciates that every male of weapon carrying age in Fata/NWA could possibly be a terrorist and thus can be a legitimate target. This is an unjustifiable policy. It does not meet the strict canons of international law and justice. It needs to be re-scrutinised and reviewed. The drones are killing scores of innocent men, women and children for the reported scalp of an odd low-to-middle ranking terrorist. Do the costs (in innocent human lives) and the effects (militant scalps) achieved, genuinely balance each other out? Can they

ever? Is the cost worth the effect?

Such atrocities, in turn, traditionally motivate the relatives and friends of the innocent victims to seek revenge – and they join the militant groups in droves. So, instead of decimating the forces that oppose it, the US is, in effect, increasing their ranks and their motivation for vengeance. Can they not grasp this simple logic? Why do they not change their tunnel vision? Or do they deliberately ignore it? Or does the strong and influential military-industrial complex dictate policy and not allow them to think and act professionally and independently? Howsoever, is it not limiting the space for moderate discourse with the Taliban or militants, and foreclosing the chances of a peaceful settlement of the issue?

The current status of the Afghan campaign is symptomatic of confused US policy formulation and execution. The Obama Administration is apparently not very clear about its desired end state. It keeps changing the finishing line. It finds itself in the most unenviable and unwinnable position of trying to bring to a successful closure “someone else’s war” – a war it did not conceive, launch or conduct for the first seven to eight years! That is why there has been so much obfuscation in the strategic direction of this campaign.

Consequently, its strategic objectives have consistently been whittled down – from nation building and counter-insurgency operations to counter-terrorist operations and now it seems that they will just be too glad to egress the Afghan theatre of war post-haste. If President Obama is re-elected, then one can foresee a pre-poning of the egress of the US-Nato-Isaf combine from the APR. He may even decide not to leave any worthwhile forces or bases behind.

In other words, the US might just ditch this region, the Afghan nation, cuts its losses and head home!

The US has been encouraging India to fill in the vacuum, as it leaves the APR. The Indians, however, do not have the political, military or economic credentials or the clout to project power beyond their borders. At best, they could continue to invest in Afghanistan hoping one day that relations with Pakistan would improve and that trade corridors linking it to the CARS and beyond would become realities. If they do decide to get involved militarily in Afghanistan, then they will most certainly meet the same fate that the British, the Soviets and the Americans along with their allies will have met.

The US has dealt itself a very poor and weak hand by announcing its date of departure from the APR. The militants, thus, have no desire to negotiate with a foe, which they feel has already been defeated in mind if not in body. They can afford to wait, as patience is one of their better attributes. Militarily, the US and its allies have failed to defeat the militants decisively and the chances of success in the near future are literally non-existent. They need not reinforce failure.

The US needs to change its ways and means to achieve its, thus far, elusive strategic ends else it will continue to wallow in abject strategic vacuity. It must seek other innovative strategic or diplomatic means of tackling the Afghan problem. It should try some new initiative, perhaps, at the regional or sub-regional level, or even seek out those amongst the militant groups, which are amenable to negotiations. And then take it on from there.

But they must never lose sight of one maxim – Pakistan remains inevitable in all solutions to the Afghan imbroglio!

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