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## US: TIME FOR A NEW STRATEGY ON PAKISTAN

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The indicators from reliable sources in Pakistan are that the just-concluded visit ( October 21,2011) of Mrs.Hillary Clinton, the US Secretary of State, to Pakistan at the head of a high-power delegation including the new incumbents to the important posts of Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey and Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA),David Petraeus, failed to have the necessary impact on the military as well as civilian leadership.

**2.** What she was expecting was a clear commitment from the Pakistani leadership with a time-bound plan of operation to neutralise the sanctuaries of Al Qaeda and the Haqqani network, an arm of the Afghan Taliban, in the Pashtun belt in the Federally-Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)---particularly in North Waziristan.

**3.** The Pakistani civilian and military leaders were as evasive as ever and the Army headed by Gen.Ashfaq Pervez Kayani, the Chief of the Army Staff (COAS), avoided making any commitment on this issue despite cautions emanating from identified and unidentified sources in Washington regarding the likely punitive consequences of continued Pakistani inaction against the terrorist sanctuaries in Pakistani territory from which, according to the US, attacks are launched against NATO and Afghan targets in Afghan territory.

**4.** As the US moves towards the Presidential elections next year, the counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations of the US-led NATO forces in Afghanistan have been stalling on the ground. Spectacular decapitation strikes against high-value targets through pilotless Drone aircraft and commando actions such as the one that killed Osama bin Laden on May 2 last have not produced any major qualitative

change in the ground situation.

**5.** Successful decapitation strikes need time to produce results on the ground situation. The Obama Administration wants quick results that would enable it to start thinning out the US troop presence in Afghanistan well before next-year's elections when Mr.Obama will be seeking re-election.

**6.** Such quick results in counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations come only from successful strikes against terrorist sanctuaries and other infrastructure on the ground through a mix of air and ground actions. Such a mix facilitated the elimination of OBL in Abbottabad, but it is difficult to repeat it against widely-scattered terrorist infrastructure.

**7.** The US faces a dilemma because it does not have the stomach for sustained ground operations by its forces in Pakistani territory. Any ground operation by the US forces that is confined to North Waziristan alone would not produce enduring results because the entire Pakistan---its tribal belt as well as the non-tribal hinterland--- provides a strategic depth to the Afghan Taliban, including its Haqqani network.

**8.** The cruel reality is that without the co-operation of the Pakistan Army, the US is not in a position to mount a successful counter-sanctuary operation in Pakistani territory. The Pakistan Army has a clear understanding of the limitations to the ground action capabilities of the US in Pakistani territory. Such limitations do not arise from Pakistan's nuclear arsenal as it is generally presumed. They arise from the nature of the tribal belt and the vast non-tribal hinterland.

**9.** There are no quick answers to the operational dilemma faced by the US in Pakistan. The US has to realise that Pakistan as constituted presently will continue to keep coming in the way of the over-all strategic objectives of the US in the Af-Pak region. Unless the Pakistani capabilities are weakened, there is going to be no enduring solution to the US dilemma in Pakistan. Economic and military sanctions alone will not weaken Pakistan's capabilities in view of the assistance that would be forthcoming to Pakistan from China and Saudi Arabia.

**10.** The only enduring way of weakening the capability of Pakistan is to work strategically for changing the very nature of Pakistan as it is constituted presently by identifying friendly elements in Pakistan such as the Balochs, the Mohajirs and the Shias and helping them in achieving their objective of freeing themselves from the control of the Pakistani Army.

**11.** These three elements have been struggling on their own, but they have not made much headway due to lack of external support and absence of strategic unity amongst them. If they can be persuaded to come together in a Southern Alliance and struggle jointly and if their political objectives are supported by the outside world---the US particularly---one may see the beginning of the process of weakening the capability of the Pakistani Army to stand in the way of peace and stability in the region.

**12.** The time has come for a clear realisation that Pakistan as constituted presently is the problem in the region and that unless the non-

radical sections of the Pakistani society are helped to assert themselves, no enduring solution would be possible.

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