

“Obama Wars”: Woodward’s Ominous Narrative on the Af-Pak War

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Bob Woodward’s book “Obama Wars” in general offers an account of President Barack Obama’s national security team’s flawed decision-making practices, yet there is malicious intent behind raising the points of Quetta Shura, Haqqani network in North Waziristan, and ISI’s support to the Taliban. Even if one presumes that there is some truth in these allegations, it is not understandable as to why hundreds of CIA agents and Blackwater mercenaries who are running around in FATA and Balochistan have not been able to either arrest or kill the top Taliban and Al Qaeda leaders despite the fact they are equipped with sophisticated equipment and gadgetry. Osama bin Laden may be dead or may have been killed a long time ago, but the US wants to keep him ‘alive’ so that it can use it as justification for its presence in the region and advancing its global interests. In Bob Woodward’s book ‘The Obama Wars’, the author wrote: “Once Zalmay Khalilzad brushed off Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari’s claim that the US was arranging the (suicide) attacks by Pakistani Taliban inside his country, as madness, and was of the view that both Zardari and Afghan President Hamid Karzai, who believed in this US conspiracy theory, were dysfunctional leaders”.

He also quoted President Zardari having said that this was a plot to destabilize Pakistan so that the US could invade and seize its nuclear weapons. But it is not President Zardari or Karzai’s perception, as there have been statements from the US think tanks, analysts and members of Obama administration about Pakistan’s ‘double game’ and they suggesting attack on Haqqani network in North Waziristan. Before the drone attack in South Waziristan on Baitullah Mehsud, Pakistan had many a time provided information to the US about TTP leaders holed in South Waziristan. It was in this backdrop that President Zardari had said: “We give you targets of Taliban leaders you don’t go after. You go after other areas”. Khalilzad is reported to have responded that the drones were primarily meant to hunt down members of al Qaeda and Afghan insurgents, not the Pakistan Taliban. This showed the liaison between the CIA and Baitullah Mehsud, as ‘Frankenstein monster’ was killed in a drone attack along with other militants in March 2009. It has to be mentioned that Baitullah Mehsud had arsenal and night-vision equipment which Pakistan army did not have at that time.

The book also revealed that CIA chief Leon Panetta and National Security Adviser Jim Jones were sent by Obama to Pakistan to talk to President Asif Ali Zardari and COAS Ashfaq Pervez Kayani after the failed Faisal Shahzad bombing at Times Square in New York. Woodward wrote that CIA chief Leon Panetta told President Zardari: “If, God forbid, Shahzad’s SUV had blown up in Times Square, we wouldn’t be having this conversation. The president would be forced to do things that Pakistan would not like. The president wants everyone in Pakistan to

understand if such an attack connected to a Pakistani group is successful there are some things even he would not be able to stop. Just as there are political realities in Pakistan, there are political realities in the US. No one will be able to stop the response and consequences. This is not a threat, just a statement of political fact.”

American leadership does not realize that Pakistan is not a banana republic but a nuclear state with the delivery system. Though Pakistan’s political leadership dithers while taking decisions, and does not have guts to give adequate response, military leadership has the spine to respond adequately. Anyhow, when Jim Jones and Leon Panetta met General Kayani privately, Jones reportedly told the army chief that the clock was starting now on all four of the requests. Obama wanted a progress report in 30 days.

“But Kayani would not budge very much. He had other concerns. I’ll be the first to admit, I’m India-centric,” Woodward quoted him as saying. After the London Conference on Afghanistan last year, there was positive change in America’s attitude, and it tried to address Pakistan’s concerns vis-à-vis Indian influence in Afghanistan. But India has been successful in reversing the situation, and American political leaders and especially military leaders who had pro-Pakistan stance, and now they have suspicious about Pakistan’s intelligence agencies supporting the Taliban.

A few months ago, through WikiLeaks an effort was to put Pakistan on the defensive, though out of more than 92000 reports only 180 related to Pakistan. Though it was admitted in the report that there was “low-level assessments about Pakistan’s ISI secretly supporting Taliban insurgents, which was based on Afghan intelligence”, yet they insisted that the evidence was credible. Americans doublespeak was obvious from the fact that whatever was mentioned in the reports regarding Pakistan they said the evidence was conclusive, whereas about American and NATO forces’ brutalities and war crimes they said that evidence was not conclusive. Anyhow, major focus of reports was on brutal military actions involving the United States and the NATO forces, intelligence information, reports of meetings with political figures. It was also admitted that the report regarding Pakistan was mainly based on the information of Afghanistan’s National Directorate of Security, which was under Tajik Amarullah Saleh – a pro-Indian, a CIA asset and diehard anti-Pakistan.

Indian media as usual availed this opportunity as well to malign Pakistan and the ISI. Whereas documents related to Pakistan were insignificant in volume and substance, yet they were blown out of proportion by anti-Pakistan lobbies. Some even described the ISI of directing attacks against US forces in Afghanistan. And America’s pro-India legislators tried to get the financial assistance to Pakistan suspended or stopped. India has been constantly trying to convince the US that Pakistan should not have any role either in brokering peace or availing opportunities in reconstruction process in Afghanistan. However, the Guardian had called the material “one of the biggest leaks in US military history – devastating portrait of failing war in Afghanistan; revealing how coalition forces killed hundreds of civilians in unreported incidents; Taliban attacks have soared and NATO commanders fear neighbouring Pakistan and Iran are fuelling the insurgency”.

All this disinformation was being spread to put pressure on Pakistan into launching military operation in North Waziristan, where they say Haqqani group’s is holed in. But it is a flawed perception that the Haqqani group is based in Pakistan, because American and NATO forces know full well that the Haqqani network is in Afghanistan and is giving them a very tough time.

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