AMERICAN GLOBAL CHALLENGES
Previous publications

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American Global Challenges
The Obama Era

Brigadier Mohammed M. Zaki
Dedicated To

The Hope of a Safe, Secure, and Terror-free World
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The war on terror has been going on ever since the United States was attacked on September 11, 2001. It has become the longest war in American history, and there appears to be no end in sight, and the likely result also cannot be predicted with certainty. The main goal of waging this war was to eliminate terrorism and make the world a safe place for all humankind. Has this aim been achieved? Will the world become a safer place after the complete withdrawal from Iraq and after the war in Afghanistan is over, with the defeat of hard-core Taliban and their guests, Al Qaeda and its affiliates? Was the war strategy that followed the 9/11 attacks the proper way to tackle the global menace or was it done on impulse without giving detailed thought to the aftermath or the aftershocks of a long-drawn-out campaign? Was there a better way in which this objective could have been achieved with much less bloodshed and the animosity that has followed? What should be done to repair the damage that has resulted?

The author has served in the Indian army for over 37 years. During that time he was intimately involved in counterinsurgency operational planning and execution at various levels of command. He served at army headquarters where he was in charge of the conceptualization of the national response; later he commanded an infantry brigade in counterinsurgency operations where he implemented plans on the ground. He has also held instructional appointments at the Army Commando School and at the Army War College where he taught the conduct of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations. He did his doctorate in counterterrorism and was also a professor and the Director of the Centre of Strategic Studies, a research center for policy issues, at the Aligarh Muslim University. He was a visiting professor at San Francisco State University, where he taught a course entitled “War Crimes, Human Rights, International Humanitarian Law and the Application of Moral Standards to International Politics.” The course addressed issues such as the “just war” and the larger problem of the individual’s responsibility over foreign policy.
Given this background, the author has been following the U.S. global war on terror closely and has authored a previous book entitled *Global War on Terror: Shadow of Fear or Ray of Hope*. The book was released by the vice president of India, Hamid Ansari, in June 2008. This present book discusses in detail the challenges that are confronting the United States and, in fact, the whole world because of the lack of a coherent policy by the United States to tackle the problem of terrorism, resulting in its greater geographical spread. He has put forward a number of policy suggestions on countering terrorism, as well as on improving relations with the Muslim world. East-West relations have a very major bearing on global security, more so because there is a great and increasing chasm between the perceptions of the Western and Muslim worlds, which must be bridged for peace to prevail.

It is an achievable goal and there is an urgent necessity for all countries to work toward its achievement. What is required is the will and political sagacity of all nations. President Obama has the necessary vision and will to bring about the much-needed changes and give a new direction to the global dispensation of interstate relationships.
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my children—Khalid, Javeed, and Shahid—for their encouragement and advice in writing this book. Khalid and Javeed went through the manuscript and offered valuable suggestions. Javeed also assisted me in the preparation and finalization of the book, in spite of his other commitments; I particularly appreciate his patience and assistance.
The election of Barack Obama as the forty-fourth President of the United States of America was a historic event. The epochal rise to power by an African American was truly a momentous occurrence. It was a shining example of the equality of all human beings, a significant marker in the present age, when the American people rose above and beyond their prejudices to vote for him. This also truly reflected the “Spirit of America” and epitomized its democratic values. It was a beacon for the beginning of a new world, a hope of change from the past, when racial superiority and other forms of biases divided the human race. America being the crucible and melting pot of different races, cultures, and even civilizations could once again show a new path to the rest of humanity. Obama is more than the personification of African American achievement, he is a bridge between races as well as a bridge to the new millennium’s dream of equality; a living symbol of tolerance in an age when sectarian and racial divides seem deeply rooted and intractable. His election heralds a positive change for the rest of the world, asking it to cast aside the relics of racial and other prejudices relating to the categorization of the human race. This sentiment is reflected in Alfred Tennyson’s poem, “The Idylls of the King,” which tells the classic story of King Arthur’s struggle to maintain order despite the monumental upheaval facing his kingdom,

The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom corrupt the world.

... And the new sun rose bringing the new year.\(^1\)

The world today is standing at the crossroads; side by side with unprecedented material progress, mankind’s greed has eroded human values and depleted natural resources putting future generations in peril. The United States, which still is the preeminent power of our time, can chart a new course and light the torch of hope and radiance.
Barack Obama has been placed at the center stage of world affairs, and much is expected from him. Unlike in the past, the November 4, 2008 elections in the United States were watched by the whole world with great hope and enthusiasm; all nations, including even those hostile to the United States, congratulated Obama on his stellar win. It was as if he were placed at this momentous juncture in history, when the world is facing myriad challenges, to bring about the change and sanity which has been missing for some time. If he is not to belie the hopes placed in him, and if he is not to fail these great expectations, he will require not only the goodwill but also the cooperation and participation of other nations, both friends and foes. He must formulate a new direction, departing from past policies, and he must not be a prisoner of his advisers and various lobbies, and pressure and interest groups, even though they are important in their own right; he must chart his own course anew.

This is easier said than done, but nevertheless essential if he means business and wants to make a difference in the contemporary world. He must not squander away the goodwill and the warmth toward him of all the people around the world. While he steers his own course, it is also essential for the rest of the world to help him in this direction to make the world a safer place. Such moments in history are rare and fleeting and must be seized at the right time to make a difference; they will be lost if not acted upon with urgency and dispatch.

The challenges facing the United States and the world are extraordinary and interconnected. During its eight years, the past U.S. administration made the world highly unsafe and vulnerable to the new security threats that have become more unpredictable and complex in nature. The past administration’s policy of unilateralism and preemptive war, and the resulting disregard for the sovereignty of other nations, gave rise to anti-Americanism in many parts of the world. It also brought untold misery, death, and destruction in its wake. Reflection on past mistakes is essential, since they provide an opportunity to correct the wrongs, and to forge ahead for a better and brighter future. The going will be tough and there will be many roadblocks and obstacles en route. However, no man alone, however strong and willing, or, for that matter, no nation by itself can go it alone and change conditions, even if it is the sole superpower. In Thomas Friedman’s words, the world has become flat and actions in one part adversely affect other, even distant, parts. Multilateralism and cooperation of all the nations is a prerequisite for tackling the many varied problems facing the world.
President Obama inherited economic challenges of monumental proportions from the previous administration. The interdependence and globalization of the world has been clearly illustrated by the economic crisis facing all nations. The consequences of the financial meltdown in the United States toward the end of 2008 had a devastating effect on the economic landscape of almost all other countries. Earlier, too, natural calamities like the tsunami of 2004 in the Indian Ocean region of Southeast and South Asia, affected millions of people, necessitating the mobilization of global resources to provide much needed relief and succor. The latest pandemic of H1N1 virus, or “swine flu,” also illustrates that many problems facing the world respect no man-made boundaries. In this interdependent world the good that is done in one part in the interest of humanity will likewise have its positive effect all over, and that is what is expected from President Obama. It is appropriate to mention the couplet of Sheikh Saadi, the eleventh-century philosopher and poet whose verse adorns the entrance to the Hall of Nations in the UN building in New York:

Human beings are members of a whole,
In creation of one essence and soul.
If one member is afflicted with pain,
Other members uneasy will remain.
If you have no sympathy for human pain,
The name of human you cannot retain.3

Transnational threats and globalization have linked national security with international security and made them mutually dependent. America thus needs to act more consensually on the world stage along with other nations to come together in an effective manner to address all the issues on the basis of shared commitment to collective security to achieve the goals of peace, progress, and prosperity for humanity.

The United States under its young and dynamic leader can provide the much-needed leadership to overcome the myriad problems being faced. In history, it has always been the young who have been the torchbearers of change, for they are not encumbered with the prejudices and mindsets of older generations. President Obama with his pragmatic approach to the resolution of problems is well placed for bringing about the much needed change—a change that hopefully will cause all the misgivings and prejudices to be blown away and fall like ninepins by the force of unpolluted youth. George Bernard Shaw rightly said, “Progress is impossible without change and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.”
America must recast itself and be seen once again as a champion of human rights, international law, and as a nation that truly cares for the betterment of humanity. Obama must distance himself from the policies of the past eight years and also must guard against the so-called “imperial hubris” and corruption and arrogance that power brings. The greatest challenge confronting Obama is to navigate through these trouble-filled and violent times without compromising the values that he so ardently cherishes and so assiduously safeguards and promotes. He must at the same time respect the values, traditions, ethos, and cultural underpinnings of others. He should get the other nations of the world on board through cooperation, diplomacy, and dexterity. He will also have to keep in mind domestic needs and steer the nation toward the achievement of his goal of a peaceful world. There is a great necessity today for international collaboration to overcome the numerous global crises. The overall atmospherics and tone have to change and a spirit of cooperation and not confrontation must become the hallmark of his administration, and must prevail in all his dealings and statecraft. The United States must show that it is a nation that listens to and respects others’ views and is not just the nation that dictates, as has been the case during the recent past. President Obama would do well to remember Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s famous words:

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time;

... Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o’er life’s solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.  

This book carries out a detailed appraisal of the challenges that are being faced in the world and the manner in which these need to be tackled so that all human beings can live in peace and harmony.
The world is in the throes of myriad problems of unprecedented magnitude. The United States in particular is confronted with critical problems, many of which are the legacy of the Bush administration and require immediate remedy. While each problem needs to be analyzed in detail and its remedial measures found, it may be appropriate to list some of them here. The number one problem is the economic meltdown set in motion by the U.S. subprime crisis. While this is of immediate domestic concern, affecting millions of Americans who have been laid off from their jobs and therefore lost their earnings, savings and their homes, it also has had devastating consequences across the entire world, some calling it an economic tsunami. In the immediate aftermath of the meltdown, leaders of the G20 met in Washington on November 15, 2008 to find a way out of the crisis. They agreed upon instituting measures to strengthen and reform the world financial system. Some even called it “Bretton Woods 2,” after the original Bretton Woods system for international monetary management, to ensure compatibility with the modern and increasingly globalized system.¹

The then U.S. administration of President Bush went into top gear to bail out some of the adversely affected institutions, such as banks and the stock market. The U.S. automobile industry was in dire straits as well and also clamored for an economic bailout. President Obama, on assuming office on January 20, 2009, immediately instituted tough economic measures, indicating his resolve to confront the crisis in a bold and pragmatic manner. His first address after becoming president, to the joint session of both houses in Washington on February 24, 2009, very eloquently and forcefully outlined his vision for America of the “present” and of the “future.” In keeping with this vision, his policy formulations reflected the necessity to attend urgently to domestic concerns for the well-being of the American people and the progress of the country. While his prime concern was to alleviate the
problems being faced by millions of his countrymen, at the same time
he endeavored to promote freedom both at home and abroad.

The economic crisis was of immediate domestic concern, needing
very urgent measures to be implemented. However, the other impor-
tant problems could hardly wait; any delay in confronting them would
only aggravate them and make them more complex. It was fortunate
that the transition period, from the time of election to becoming
president, provided Obama some time to ponder all the ills facing
the United States as well as the world. It gave him an opportunity to
seriously consider past mistakes and to reflect upon the course on
which he wished to steer the United States in partnership with other
nations to bring about peace and stability, both important ingredi-
ents for progress and for the well-being of the human race. He was
thus able to inject his personality into the situation immediately upon
assuming office, by putting into effect remedial measures to resolve
various problems with dispatch.

His first 100 days in office reflected his seriousness in tackling
the various problems he had inherited, and he was able to institute a
number of measures both domestically and internationally to over-
come them. His first year in office also illustrated the same zeal and
earnestness; he was able to to a large extent to measure up to the expec-
tations placed in him. The various steps he took during this first year
indicated that he was very much concerned about the gravity of the
economic situation at home and the deteriorating security situation
worldwide. The measures he adopted mitigated some of these prob-
lems; in particular, he was able to prevent the economic conditions
from further worsening into something that might resemble the
Great Depression of the 1930s.

President Obama appointed a very able and experienced team
to deal with the economic crisis. With their expert handling and
through massive financial stimulus packages and regulatory mea-
sures, the economic situation started to show signs of recovery as
early as one year later, although it would take some time to recover
completely. Simultaneously he addressed other problems of interna-
tional magnitude, with foresight and equanimity, so that the United
States regained the moral high ground, which it had lost substantially
because of its ill-conceived and imperiously executed policies in the
past. President Obama needed to reinvent America as a nation that
listened, had patience and respect for others’ views, and, above all,
valued human dignity.

The enormity of the financial crisis spawned other major inter-
connected problems. The economic meltdown in the United States
quickly infected other countries and almost every home around the world was affected by it. Millions lost their jobs due to the closing of manufacturing units in their respective homelands. The most serious and adverse fallout from the economic crisis, particularly in the developing world, could manifest itself in the form of political unrest leading to instability if governments were unable to provide the necessary relief or meet humanitarian obligations to their people due to the drying up of resources, as was being witnessed in many countries. They were also unable to meet their own defense needs which impacted seriously on the geopolitical security situation. According to the assessment of the director of U.S. National Intelligence, a prolonged crisis could cause some nations’ governments to collapse, thereby resulting in great damage to the strategic interests of the United States.

Niall Ferguson, writing in *Foreign Policy* magazine, was of the opinion that the fallout from the economic crisis could give birth to what he called the “Axis of Upheaval.” He said, “Forget Iran, Iraq, and North Korea—Bush’s ‘Axis of Evil’; today’s most dangerous countries are the places where economic calamity meets political and social turmoil and the world’s worst problems may come from countries like Somalia, Russia, and Mexico. And they’re just the beginning. This axis has at least nine members, and quite possibly more. What unites them is not so much their wicked intentions as their instability, which the global financial crisis only makes worse every day. Unfortunately, that same crisis is making it far from easy for the United States to respond to this new ‘grave and growing danger.’”

The other important issues that needed equal dispatch were the wars on terror both in Iraq and Afghanistan, and dealing with the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan, and in the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) and the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan. During his campaign President Obama had promised to scale down troop deployment in Iraq and redeploy additional troops in Afghanistan. He lived up to his promises and also carried out a realistic and pragmatic appraisal of the situation in both these war zones and formulated policies for conflict resolution.

The U.S. missile attacks in the area of Waziristan and in the FATA tribal region of Pakistan by drones—Unarmed Aerial Vehicles (UAV)—caused much consternation among the local population and also put the Pakistan government in a dilemma and at loggerheads with the local population and their leaders (village elders). Pakistan’s effort to win the hearts and minds of the people of these areas was thus jeopardized, and it risked alienating the very people
whose support was crucial to ultimately defeat terrorism. It remains an ongoing problem, and requires a review and the crafting of a new approach. The Taliban clearly could not be given a free run and were required to be dealt with firmly; at the same time the population could not be made to suffer because of them, but rather must be won over. This dilemma requires all the ingenuity, statesmanship, and judicious application of soft power or all that the latest buzzword, “smart power,” connotes.

The stability in Iraq is also of great concern, particularly since the withdrawal of the bulk of U.S. troops. According to the Status of Force Agreement (SOFA) that was reached between the Iraqi and U.S. governments, a timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. forces was agreed upon, and was put into effect on August 31, 2010, ending “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” seven years and five months after it was launched in March 2003. All combat troops have been withdrawn from Iraq, leaving behind approximately fifty thousand troops for training purposes and in an advisory role. The remaining “advise and assist” brigades are to concentrate on supporting and training Iraqi security forces, protecting American personnel and facilities, and mounting counterterrorism operations. These troops are also to be withdrawn by the end of 2011. Will they be able to do so in the time frame agreed upon or will they have to stay on longer if the situation deteriorates? Will Iraq be able to look after its own security as pronounced by President Obama in his televised address to the American people on August 31, 2010 on the occasion of the conclusion of “Operation Iraqi Freedom”? Because of the political impasse Iraq was not been able to form a permanent government until December 2010, despite elections which were held in March 2010. Proper governance is a prerequisite for security and law and order to be enforced. The demographic structure of Iraq has a great bearing on its stability, and a solution needs to be found for the reconciliation of the three communities—Shia, Sunni, and Kurds.

The most important problem which did not receive enough attention during the Bush administration’s watch was the Israeli-Palestinian dispute in the Middle East, the foremost cause of Muslim alienation around the world. For some inexplicable reason the United States, which wields tremendous power over not only the Israeli government but also over the Palestinians and other Arab and Muslim states, has done precious little to resolve this thorny issue, despite the fact that it is an extremely sensitive question for the entire Muslim world, fueling passions and being a major cause for the spread of terrorism. The problem was further aggravated by the Israeli invasion of Gaza during
the last weeks of December 2008. It lasted for 22 days, causing a tremendous amount of death and destruction of civilian life and property. It is a political minefield inherited by Obama, which he must not only negotiate pragmatically but also clear out the entire minefield itself through diplomacy and use of pressure, the smart power, where necessary. Unless this issue is resolved to the satisfaction of both the Israelis and the Palestinians, the fundamentalists on both sides of the divide will always find ready recruits for their ill-conceived and even misguided causes.

The question of Iran and its nuclear pursuit is a very serious matter, since it concerns the future of nuclear proliferation around the world and in particular in the Middle East. There is great distrust between the United States and Iran, and again the previous U.S. administration did not resolve this issue despite the good offices of the European Union. This will need the attention of President Obama, who has indicated his willingness for negotiations without any preconditions. Iran, too, must reciprocate in equal measure to defuse the volatile situation. The whole question of nuclear proliferation by other states in the Middle East such as Israel, and also by North Korea, must be addressed in its entirety since this proliferation has a bearing on Iran’s nuclear quest. The political turmoil created by allegations of electoral malpractice and fraud in the June 2009 presidential elections has created conditions of political unrest in Iran, which will impact Iranian relations with the United States and may imperil the negotiations process.

Yemen is fast emerging as the new haven for Al Qaeda for a number of reasons. There is political turmoil in the country and the government is weak and corrupt. The law-and-order situation has deteriorated and the government’s authority does not exist in tribal areas, which are controlled by tribal chiefs. Adding to the woes of the government, relations between the north and the south of Yemen are not good because of economic disparities between the two regions, which merged into one state only in 1990. Tensions have grown over the years and the government is confronted with rebellion from the northwestern region by the Zaidi sect, a branch of Shia Islam, and at the same time there is a secessionist movement from the south. The Yemeni government accuses Iran of helping the Shia rebels, whereas the rebels accuse Saudi Arabia of supporting the Yemeni government in crushing them.

After the crackdown on Al Qaeda operatives in Saudi Arabia, it shifted its base to Yemen where the conditions were conducive for it to operate and train extremists as they did in the case of Umar Farouq
Abdul Mutallab, the Nigerian youth who failed in his Christmas day bombing attempt on December 25, 2009 of Northwest Airlines Flight 253 from Amsterdam to Detroit, while it was approaching Detroit Metro Airport. Yemen is the poorest country in the Middle East, with a rank of 153 among the 177 countries in the UN’s development index. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has established its roots in Yemen, as the terrain and tribal nature of its population suit the propagation of radicalism among the poor and illiterate people. The United States will have to be careful in dealing with this emerging threat. While the United States has provided assistance to the Yemeni government by way of drone attacks on Al Qaeda leaders, the same problem confronts it in Yemen as in Afghanistan and Pakistan. That is, a large number of civilians have been killed in addition to Al Qaeda leaders, which has resulted in a growing anti-Americanism among the population, giving advantage to the radicals in spreading their distorted ideology.

Despite the abortive Christmas day outrage in the United States and other indications of Al Qaeda activities in Yemen, President Obama very rightly decided not to send troops into Yemen. This was a very sensible step because rather than solving the problem it would have further aggravated the situation, since the local population is very resentful of American presence. Moreover, the American military has its hands full fighting the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Its forces are stretched to their limit and the American public is tired of the “War on Terror,” which has been going on for over nine years and is likely to continue into the future indefinitely. Another military invasion would not find any support, nor is it required, since this problem can be tackled in a different manner.

Furthermore, according to Hamoud al-Hitar, who is the minister for religious endowment of the Government of Yemen, “Military action by the United States would make the people unite against the Americans, ending their internal disputes to stand together against direct military intervention.” What the United States needs to do is to provide assistance to the Yemeni government by way of training their security forces to enable them to combat Al Qaeda, and at the same time to give financial support for development of the country. Mr. al-Hitar also stated that most of the extremists who were operating in Yemen had received their education outside the country and that his government had adopted the strategy of countering terrorism by basing it on ‘intellectual dialogue’ and spreading moderate ideas in the school curriculum, thus it was “the war of ideas against Al Qaeda” ideology which would ultimately win. Fortunately this
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view is also held by the elderly people of Yemen as was demonstrated to Thomas L. Friedman, who visited Sana, the capital of Yemen, in February 2010. He saw four elderly bearded men discussing a poster pasted on the wall asking “fathers and mothers” to send their girls to school. When asked about this the oldest among them said he was ‘ready to give up a part of his meal each day so that my girls can learn to read.’ The desire for education among the population, and particularly for educating girls, is indeed a very welcome sign and must be promoted with vigor.

Relations with the Muslim world are also very important for the successful conclusion of the war against terror. Unfortunately 9/11 became the watershed between the West and the Muslim world. Even though the Bush administration stated that the war on terror was not a war against Islam, due to many of its ill-conceived policies and actions, Muslims came to perceive it as such. At the same time in the Western mind Islam wrongly became associated with violence, and ordinary Muslims were incorrectly seen as suspect terrorists. This resulted in creating a chasm between the West, in particular the United States, and the Muslim world.

A new course needs to be charted to assuage this feeling. President Obama is well placed, and has the necessary credentials, to right this perceived wrong. He spent his early childhood in Indonesia and understands other people and their aspirations well and is much liked in the Muslim world. In fact, in Indonesia, which happens to be the most populous of the Muslim countries in the world, the population considers him “one of them.” Therefore what he says registers well in the Muslim world and he is in a position to devise ingenious ways to remove the misperceptions. The Muslim world must also put forward imaginative solutions so that a healthy relationship can develop between the West and the East. It is necessary for Muslim leaders to realize that their progress and development has been hampered due to this confrontation, and that the way forward requires the shedding of old prejudices so that a new beginning can be made which would be in their interest. The leaders of the Muslim world, including the clergy, need to reflect on this and devise ways best suited to their talents for the sake of the future of their children, and the peace and prosperity of their people.

Ever since the end of the cold war, Russia has been on the receiving end, both from the United States as well as the European Union, neither of whom regard it as an equal partner. President Bill Clinton expanded NATO and took it to the doorstep of Russia with the aim of its containment. Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, all
former Warsaw Pact members, became NATO members in March 1999. Even though NATO expansion was in the national interest of the United States, however, many of its critics, including George F. Kennan, the father of the cold war policy of “containment,” felt it would inflame the nationalistic, anti-Western and militaristic tendencies in Russia. President Bush went even further by promoting NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine. He also planned to deploy a “Missile Shield” in Poland and the Czech Republic, ostensibly to protect Europe against missile attacks from Iran. However the Russians did not see it in that light and viewed this move as a threat to them and a way to weaken their offensive nuclear capability. This move heightened tensions a great deal and was felt by Russia as crossing the “red line,” as it were.

Russia is no longer the underdog it was 20 years ago. Because of the firm political leadership provided by former President Putin during his eight-year presidency, and due to the profits accruing from its abundant energy resources, Russia, like the phoenix, has once again risen from the ashes, and is now spreading its wings and flexing its muscles. While declining oil prices have created conditions of economic uncertainty, the adverse effect on Russia has yet to become clear. As the world recovers from this crisis, Russia too will recover in due course and once this happens it will wish to become an important player in international affairs.

In the meantime the power of the United States has been considerably weakened during the past eight years, and, taking advantage of the situation, Russia reacted provocatively to U.S. plans for deployment of the missile shield in Poland by threatening to deploy its own missiles in Kaliningrad, next to Poland, just after Obama’s election victory was announced. However, Russian President Dmitri Medvedev showed the olive branch during the G20 Summit in Washington on November 15, 2008 where these leaders had gathered to discuss the economic crisis facing the world. He said at that time that he hoped U.S. President-elect Barack Obama would restore mutual trust between the two nations, which had soured over missile defense and the war in Georgia. In a goodwill gesture President Medvedev also announced that Russia was ready to compromise over plans of deployment of elements of a U.S. missile shield in Eastern Europe and promised to hold off on a possible military response to the project.

President Obama understands the importance of Russia in resolving the many problems facing the world. Russia has the potential leverage on issues relating to Iran’s nuclear ambitions, Afghanistan,
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Middle East and security in Eastern Europe. In order to “reset” their relations and also to set the stage for President Obama’s meeting with Russian President Medvedev, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met her Russian counterpart, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, in Geneva on March 6, 2009. President Obama has had a number of meetings with the Russian president, starting with a one-on-one meeting with him on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in London on April 2, 2009, where he discussed various issues, particularly focusing on arms control, the beginning of negotiations on reduction of long-range nuclear weapons, and the strengthening of nonproliferation treaties. Subsequently President Obama visited Moscow in July 2009 where concrete steps to limit the number of nuclear warheads was discussed. The American relationship with Russia has important bearing on the Obama presidency because it lies at the heart of how Washington wants to resolve the numerous world crises in cooperation with Russia, and how it conceives its own role in the twenty-first century. A new cold war must be avoided at all costs and Russia must be co-opted to resolve various problems, particularly where the Russians exercise considerable influence, such as with Iran.

Global warming is a grim warning to all nations that the unlimited and wasteful degradation of finite resources and the emission of greenhouse gases will ultimately affect the existence of humanity on planet Earth. A bitter taste of this was witnessed in December 2004 when the region of Southeast and South Asia was devastated by the tsunami. Various calamities such as forest fires, tornadoes, cyclones, and the melting of glaciers are all attributed to global warming by various studies and researchers. Urgent steps need to be taken in this regard. The advanced nations, as well as China and India, need to have self-regulatory mechanisms and must utilize energy-efficient technologies to cut down on carbon emissions. Unfortunately some of the nations have not signed the Kyoto Protocol; the United States, for instance, did not ratify the treaty. In fact the Kyoto Protocol is due to expire in 2012, and therefore a new treaty with greater safeguards needs to be framed and adopted to set the pace for reforms and set standards to arrest this self-inflicted catastrophe in the making.

Leaders of 193 countries met in Copenhagen at the UN Climate Change Summit in December 2009 to resolve the very important and pressing global warming issues confronting the entire world. Much was expected from the summit and it was hoped that stricter and more expansive environmental safeguards would be agreed upon. However, the results were not commensurate with the expectations and there were reports of sharp differences between the developed
and developing world; the poor countries especially felt that the developed world was not doing enough toward curtailing carbon emissions. After two weeks of deliberations and prolonged negotiations, it was due to the last minute efforts of President Obama that the summit was saved from being a failure.21 UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon welcomed the U.S.-backed Copenhagen deal as an “essential beginning.” However, he said, it must be made a legally binding agreement by the end of 2010.22

These are some of the urgent and critical issues that require immediate remedial measures by President Obama. It would be appropriate to quote the somber message of President Franklin D. Roosevelt to the nation on New Year’s Day in 1941, when a crisis was looming large and much of the world was at war, even though the United States had not joined the war at that time. “The presidency,” President Roosevelt said, was “pre-eminently a place of moral leadership and hence such leadership is to be exercised by deeds.”23

President Obama too has been elected to fulfill the moral, ethical, and other obligations of the high office he holds, and the promise he has made to the people to bring in the much-needed change. The world has changed dramatically over the eight years of the Bush presidency and America must change with the world to provide the necessary leadership, keeping national interests as well as international interests at the core of Obama’s presidency.

President Obama must live up to his mantra “we are ready to lead,” which he stated in his inauguration speech on January 20, 2009. There is nothing that is impossible and cannot be achieved. It requires careful thought, patience, cooperation, and, above all, sincerity of effort and “Audacity of Hope”24 in Obama’s own words. It is also very heartening to hear an upbeat and confident President when he says, “I think that we are at an extraordinary moment that is full of peril but full of possibility and I think that’s the time you want to be president….I think that there’s—there’s something about this country where hard times, big challenges bring out the best in us….So I am…I am invigorated by the challenges.”25
Lost Opportunities: The War on Terror

The terror attacks of September 11, 2001 were a turning point in contemporary history which have changed the complexion of the global security landscape. The terrorists, with their mistaken and distorted beliefs and ideology, have sown the seeds of suspicion and hate among different peoples of the world. This state of affairs was compounded by the ill-planned response of the West, which has created conditions of instability and strife all over the world.

The riposte to these attacks by the Bush administration was done in great haste without giving it detailed thought and consideration. No long-term strategy was evolved and there was no clear-cut and coherent aim as to how to deal with the menace. It appears that the American leadership was in a hurry for an immediate response to assuage the feelings of the public—to shore up their confidence and perhaps even to bolster the confidence of the administration itself, which was badly shaken because “Fortress America,” the mainland, considered to be impregnable, had been penetrated and attacked, causing a great psychological shock to the American people. The need to punish the culprits became the rallying point and battle cry for action, and rightly so; however, this battle could have been waged in many different ways on many different fronts and planes, instead of focusing on the military dimension alone. Perhaps that would have paid much better dividends and would not have caused so much of death, destruction and instability around the world.

Consequently the “War on Terror” was waged without proper planning, and the long-term goals and ramifications were not thoroughly analyzed. War is a very serious business and is not waged on impulse. Frederick the Great laid down certain classic maxims of war, which are studied and applied by all great war leaders to formulate their strategy for the conduct of war. These are very much applicable
in the case of war on terror as well, and are as relevant today as they were more than a century and a half ago. He said, “War is not an affair of chance, a great deal of knowledge, study, and meditation is necessary to conduct it well.” Unfortunately, not enough thought was given to the bigger picture and various dimensions of the war and the consequences that were likely to manifest not only in Afghanistan and Iraq but also in the larger Islamic world. Sheikh Saadi described such impulsive actions by individuals or nations very eloquently when he said, “Whatever is produced in haste goes easily to waste.”

In addition, the war was waged on wrong premises, fabricating the extent of the threat and distorting the truth (case in point—the invasion of Iraq) to win back the public trust. It has been very aptly said that “the greatest gap in the world exists between the cause of justice and the motive of the people pushing for it.” As often happens, truth was sacrificed at the altar of ideology and self-promotion of the few in the Bush administration who misled the American people. If the diagnosis of the problem is wrong, the treatment too will be incorrect, and consequently the disease will be aggravated and spread further. In this case, too, there was no strategic aim; moreover, the goals kept changing as the situation worsened. Instead of defeating the terrorists, the war on terror has in fact given the terrorists a greater lease of life and greater geographical spread. The security situation all around the world has deteriorated considerably and the world has therefore become more unsafe today than it was before the 9/11 attacks. It has also contributed to the economic crisis because the conduct of war entails colossal and unforeseen expenditure.

A war on terror is unlike other wars. In conventional war the enemy is identifiable and his defeat is tangible. Ulysses S. Grant, the American Civil War general, said, “The art of war is simple enough. Find out where your enemy is. Get at him as soon as you can. Strike him as hard as you can, and keep him moving.” However, warfare has totally changed in the twenty-first century. Now the world is in the midst of “Fourth Generation Warfare,” where the conventional threat has receded considerably and threats from nonstate actors, subnational groups, and terrorist and extremist elements have increased. These are shadowy elements that require a different strategy to combat them.

The Mumbai attacks on November 26, 2008, which the Indians have called India’s 9/11, have revealed that the terrorists have not only grown in numbers and spread across the world, but that they also have become highly “technology savvy.” The heavily armed terrorists came to Mumbai by sea using a Global Positioning System
for navigation. They carried Blackberry devices, CDs holding high-resolution satellite images of their targets like those used by Google Earth, multiple cell phones with switchable SIM cards that would be hard to track, and they spoke by satellite phones. The sophistication of their planning, training and use of technology as a tactical tool enabled just ten well-trained and heavily armed terrorists to hold the complete city of over 16 million people hostage for 60 hours, causing untold death and destruction, a sure indication that terrorism had entered the “digital age.”

It is alleged that detailed and meticulous planning and scouting of potential targets was carried out by two individuals, David Coleman Headley, an American citizen, and his friend, Tahawwur Hussain Rana, a Canadian citizen, both of whom were of Pakistani origin. They were, it is alleged, involved with the Lashker-e-Taiba. They carried out reconnaissance of the targets, including the Taj Mahal and Oberoi hotels, the Leopold Cafe, Nariman House, and Mumbai’s main railroad station, all of which were later attacked by the ten Lashker terrorists.6

This small team of terrorists carried out a tactical operation, but its impact has had great strategic significance—it brought two nuclear nations almost to the brink of war, which had reverberations around the world. This aspect needs to be given urgent cognizance in planning the response in order to prevent terrorist acts from becoming the cause for bigger conflagrations and a pretext for nations to go to war. The Israeli invasion of Lebanon and Gaza in 2006 was also ignited due to a small incident—the abduction of Israeli soldiers, which led to greater death and destruction on both sides.7

Even though there is total asymmetry between the terrorists and government forces, which are overwhelmingly superior and are always more powerful than the terrorists, due to changed conditions of combat, the complete weight and might and firepower of government security forces cannot be brought to bear. They have to fight with restraint—“with one hand tied behind their back.” This is because the terrorist is seldom visible and operates in very small groups and often singly. Such individuals operating alone are also called “lone wolf militants.” The threat posed by them is quite different and presents unique challenges to security forces because it is very difficult to find out their intentions before they commit a terrorist act.8 Intelligence about them is also very scant. The case of the “Christmas day bomber,” Abdul Mutallab Umar Farooq, the Nigerian youth who tried and failed to bomb Northwest Airlines Flight 253, is ostensibly a case of a lone wolf militant.
The terrorist organizations are highly complex and their structure is kept deliberately amorphous. Often they are not centrally controlled and ad hoc teams are created with links to one or more groups only for carrying out a particular operation. Most of the time the terrorists hide their identity in the crowd, or operate in inaccessible areas, so as to make their identification and apprehension very difficult. Hence intelligence about them is often weak. If the government forces used their entire might they would cause horrendous destruction to the life and property of the civil population, which is not acceptable. Furthermore, such raw power might become the main cause for alienation of the public and the rallying point for extremists to show the government forces in a bad light. The security forces must therefore strictly adhere to the laws of war and rules of engagement. Consequently, the elimination or defeat of the terrorists is not as tangible and not as spectacular, both in terms of the actual reality of numbers and a photo opportunity for the media, as is usual in the case of defeat of conventional forces.

The terrorists indoctrinate and play on the mind of the public through perceived wrong which has been done to them. It is an ideological war and the winner is the one who gets the maximum people on his side. While the terrorists try to win their support through coercion, threat or by distortion and exaggeration of the perceived wrong done to the people, the government forces must tread carefully and win the hearts and minds of the public so that they do not fall prey to the terrorist ideology, but rather are won over to the government’s cause. The brutality and savagery of extremists cannot justify the abdication of human rights principles and laws of war or the adoption of means such as those of the extremists by the government security agencies.

Any excesses by government forces, resulting in “collateral damage” done to civilians in the form of death of innocent bystanders, may satisfy the commanders and their leaders or the world press, but it will end up creating more recruits for the terrorist cause, as has been happening both in Afghanistan and Iraq, and now in Pakistan. Thus it is a “catch-22” situation. However, there are answers to this dilemma and it is not as if the war is unwinnable. What is required is detailed thought in planning and meticulous adherence to the laws of war and rules of engagement in its execution. A thorough understanding of the mind of the population, the human terrain as it is now being called, is essential so that strategies can be devised to win their support. Thus the war has to be fought differently and on various planes simultaneously.
Terrorism does not develop in a vacuum. There has to be a cause, perceived or genuine. This could be in the form of government neglect in development of the region, discriminatory laws against a particular group or race, repression of any sort or some trumped-up grievance which is played up by interested groups to further their own agenda and to advance their ulterior and sinister motives. Talking about specifics, it would be pertinent to analyze the 9/11 terror attacks. The 9/11 Commission was set up by the United States to investigate these attacks in their totality. The terms of reference were also clear. The Commission’s mandate was to investigate “facts and circumstances relating to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, including those relating to the intelligence agencies, law enforcement agencies, diplomacy, immigration issues and border control, the flow of assets to terrorist organizations, commercial aviation, role of congressional oversight and resource allocation, and other areas determined relevant by the Commission.”

Even though the Commission carried out an exhaustive investigation, its main concern and thrust of investigation, it appears, was concentrated toward examining intelligence failures and strengthening and revamping the intelligence apparatus of the government so that such attacks do not occur in the future. While the Commission succeeded tremendously in this important task and mainland America has become very secure and no terror attacks have occurred since (barring two aborted cases, the attempted bombing of Northwest Airlines Flight 253 on December 25, 2009, and the failed car-bombing at Times Square in New York on May 1, 2010), the Commission did not fulfill its mandate in full. It did not investigate the major causes of the attacks in detail and touched only on the ideology of Al Qaeda and the radical teachings of some Arab scholars, who preached radicalism and extremism.

The composition of the Commission itself was flawed and handicapped right from the outset, since it did not have any member who was fully conversant with the teachings, beliefs and practices of Islam. Because of this lacuna, the Commission viewed everything from Western eyes and Western perceptions about Islam, which were divorced from the realities on the ground. Since the members did not have adequate knowledge about Islam, they relied on their own perceptions, understanding, and judgment, and, as often happens, it displayed complete ignorance of the tenets and practices of Islam and the cultural differences that exist between different people and different regions, particularly between the ideals and viewpoints of the West and the East.
This was a serious drawback and led to very grave repercussions in the conduct of the war on terror. It is pertinent and essential to study the history of the people concerned to appreciate how to deal with them. Sun Tzu said, “If you know your enemy and know yourself you will win a hundred battles”, this cardinal principle in the conduct of war, to know your opponent, was never factored into the investigations or the subsequent response.

The findings of the Commission highlighted at great length the philosophy and ideology of radical Arab scholars, but not the perceptions and practices of ordinary Muslims. In Islam there is no concept of priesthood. Moreover, in almost all cases, the ideology of the radical clerics and ideologues is in contravention of the actual teachings of the Quran or the Sunnah (Practices of Prophet Mohammed). The radical philosophy of these scholars has no locus standi and does not influence the thinking of the majority of ordinary Muslims. The Commission portrayed Al Qaeda in a larger-than-life image, even though it did not have a large following and prominence. In fact, Al Qaeda owes its prominence to the American media, notwithstanding the fact that they were involved in the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Before launching the attack in Afghanistan attempts were not made to wean away the Taliban from Al Qaeda despite the fact that the intelligence reports indicated that the relationship between these two extended only to the Taliban providing protection to Al Qaeda, who were their guests, and, as such, according to Afghan tribal customs, they were honor-bound not to hand them over to the United States. It is reported that the Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, was amenable to handing over Osama Bin Laden to a (Muslim) third country where he could have been tried for his crimes as per their law. However, this avenue was not pursued. The invasion of Iraq was also launched on the false premise that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction (WMD) that were in a “ready to use” state, thereby posing an immediate danger to world peace and security.

The most important thing that was not analyzed and investigated thoroughly by the Commission was the reason and cause of Muslim disenchantment with the policies of the West, and in particular the United States. Unfortunately, the Commission portrayed the teachings of the radical Muslim scholars alone as the cause of the 9/11 attacks, which was not correct. The root cause lay elsewhere and was not analyzed by the Commission, as will be discussed later.

This distorted portrayal of Islam as propagated by radical clerics resulted in creating a wrong impression in the West and in many other countries of the world about the Muslim community as a whole.
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and about Islamic teachings. Islam has been painted as an intolerant religion, and, consequently, both Islam and Muslims have become synonymous with terrorist activities in the Western perception, compounding matters. Any terrorist attack anywhere is attributed to “Islamic terrorism,” whereby, unwittingly, Islam is depicted as the religion that advocates and sanctions senseless violence. Until this perception is corrected the “War on Terror” will not be successfully concluded.

The terrorists who profess to be acting in the name of religion, and who indulge in wanton killing are actually acting against the religious tenets of that religion, for no religion sanctions the killing of human beings. In fact, all religions teach their followers to live in peace and harmony with people of other faiths. Extremism is not confined to the misguided people of any one religion; throughout history fundamentalists belonging to different faiths have indulged in extremism and terrorism at different times and at different places. Certain Muslims, too, who are not following the teachings of Islam, have, by their acts of terrorism and other kinds of atrocities and savagery, brought a bad name to the majority of Muslims, who are now suffering the consequences of the misdeeds of such individuals and groups.

The Quran repeatedly emphasizes human rights, justice for all and condemns in very strong terms all forms of injustice, aggression and oppression. It safeguards the rights of all human beings, irrespective of their beliefs, and stresses the freedom to practice one’s faith by all individuals. The Quran says, “Let there be no coercion in matters of faith” (Quran 2:256). It says that the essentiality of building relations with others is based on kindness, while the minimum obligations to be observed are justice and fair dealing, as per the verse, “God forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for (your) Faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for God loves those who are just” (Quran 60:8). This was illustrated by the Holy Prophet in his personal conduct with those who had even tried to kill him, when he forgave all the residents of Mecca after the city’s surrender. Whatever conflict may occur with other groups, Muslims are required not to yield to blinding passion and hatred, but rather to adhere to the principle of respect and justice. The Quran states, “O you who believe! Stand out firmly for God, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others make you depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety: and fear God (be intimately conscious of God). For God is well acquainted with all that you do” (Quran 5:8). There is another verse in this regard which
says, “Invite (all) to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in the best manners that are most gracious” (Quran 16:125). It is therefore ironic that the so-called votaries of Islam are the ones who are breaking its basic tenets.

There is a dire necessity today for creating better understanding between people of different faiths and making them aware of the tenets and teachings of each other’s religions and the many commonalities that exist. The goal of all religions is the same; only the methodology or path of achieving these goals is different. All the people of the world have the same aspirations and problems, and eke out their livelihood under similar conditions and circumstances. They want to lead a peaceful life so that their children can have a safe and better world to live in tomorrow, and to lead a life of prosperity and happiness. This aspect needs to be given greater emphasis while formulating the strategy to create a better environment.

It may also be pertinent to mention here the fable which all of us have heard or read in our childhood and which is very relevant to the situation today. One of Aesop’s fables tells us about the competition between the North Wind and the Sun to test who was stronger of the two. Both applied their force on a man who happened to be walking on the road, on a wintry morning, to make him take off his coat. The North Wind was the first to experiment and blew very fiercely, which made the traveler cling more tightly to his coat. The Sun had its chance next and showed its brightness; the traveler was overcome with warmth and had to take off his coat. When the Wind asked how the Sun did it, the Sun said, “I lit the day and through gentleness got my way.”

Human nature and real life situations are not as simplistic as the fable because of the complexities of human nature; however, there are some lessons which can be applied in winning the hearts and minds of the population in counterinsurgency and counterterrorist operations. For normal human beings, persuasion, kindness, gentleness, patience and perseverance work better than force; harsh methods only make them more rigid and make them cling to old ideas. Nevertheless, many a time harsh methods have to be used to discipline incorrigible elements such as extremists and terrorists who are bent upon creating mayhem in a society. Therefore, where force has to be used, it must be applied, as in the case of hard-core terrorists who must be eliminated at all costs, after they are given due warning. At the same time, it is important also to try to win them over by persuasion, to make them see reason, and to illustrate to them that their actions and their perceptions are misplaced and are the cause of more harm to fellow human beings and to their coreligionists.
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All nations around the world, irrespective of their differing political ideologies, had for once shed their differences and were united after the 9/11 attacks to combat the scourge of terrorism, and the United States had been given carte blanche, so to speak, to eliminate this menace. The United States had the sympathy, solidarity, support and pledge of all nations to fight terrorism. Moreover, almost all the nations of the world were themselves victims of the curse of terrorism in one form or another, in varying degrees, and its eradication was in their interest too. The United States should have utilized this international capital of goodwill by taking all nations on board, and it should have been a collective effort, utilizing their entire resources.

A holistic view should have been taken of the complete gamut of terrorism, and the methodology to combat it should have included not only the military but also other instruments at the disposal of a state, such as scholars, academics, intelligentsia, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the common man, to eliminate this menace at its roots. By proper planning and joint effort a coherent strategy should have been evolved, utilizing the combined resources of all nations to combat terrorism in all its dimensions and efforts should have been directed to first educate the public and then to isolate, ostracize, marginalize and eliminate the terrorists and their ideology. Unfortunately, the United States, along with the Coalition of the Willing, chose to combat terrorism utilizing its military power, and the results are there for everyone to see; it squandered away the tremendous fund of goodwill to no avail.

The Bush presidency of eight years tells a different story of misplaced and misjudged employment of immense force—military power. In the initial phase of the “War on Terror,” massive force was used to “shock and awe” not only the enemy but also to display the “might and reach” of America to the rest of the world. This made for a very impressive display on the TV screen but did not achieve its aim of obliterating the enemy. Al Qaeda and the Taliban were no match for the American forces. However, as stated earlier, the irregular forces or insurgents have no logistics tail, and operate in very small groups. They had further advantage in the case of Afghanistan because of the topography of the land (very rugged terrain), which lends itself to guerrilla operations and provides tremendous protection not only from aerial assault but also from attacks of ground troops. An added advantage was the availability of the tribal support of Pashtun to the Taliban on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistan border.

The Taliban and Al Qaeda operated from extremely inhospitable terrain, from caves and badlands of unimaginable desolateness.
Moreover, the coalition forces did not have sufficient troops on the ground to pursue the enemy and take full advantage of the initial shock and destruction of Taliban and Al Qaeda leadership, which had been put in total disarray and psychological dislocation. Thus their main leaders, Mullah Omar, the Taliban commander, and Osama Bin Laden and his deputy, Ayman Al Zawahiri, managed to escape. It is reported that they had been driven to a corner in the Tora Bora mountain range and a determined push at that juncture would have enabled the coalition forces to capture them. This great opportunity was lost and they escaped the dragnet and are still at large, directing terrorist activities from their unknown hideouts even after eight years since the fall of the Taliban.

Sound military strategy stipulates war on one front at a time. This cardinal principle was given short shrift by the U.S. civilian leadership and the military was forced to launch the invasion of Iraq despite the professional advice of the military leadership to the contrary, and their sound recommendation to finish off the job at hand in Afghanistan before embarking on another mission was disregarded and preemptively dismissed. Thus the troops, intelligence elements and other resources had to be thinned out from Afghanistan to be redeployed in Iraq thereby diluting the effort on both fronts. The resultant effect has been that no victory has been possible either in Afghanistan or in Iraq. History is replete with examples where many a mighty empire in the past has come to grief because of such strategic overreach.

These eight years have been a tale of lost opportunities, and, in fact, have been “the wasted years” in terms of time, money, resources and, more importantly, in the unnecessary lives that have been lost including American, coalition and Iraqi servicemen, and civilians both in Afghanistan and in Iraq, with no apparent tangible gain. It has also fostered a host of other problems. It has revealed that no nation however strong, both militarily and economically, can go it alone in reshaping the world or disciplining a “rogue” state. It must take other nations of the world with it through a UN mandate. Another adverse fallout of these wars has been the sharp decline of American prestige, which could have been avoided had other means been applied to rid the world of the scourge of the terrorists.

Notwithstanding the mistakes that have been committed over the last eight years, it is not a time for recrimination, but a time to forge ahead with hope, resolve and fortitude. With the new president who has been heralded by all the nations as the harbinger of “Change and New Hope” and who has the political capital of goodwill of all the people around the world at the helm of affairs in the United States,
it is time to think of fresh solutions to the problems confronting the world.

The United States is very lucky; it is being provided a second opportunity with nations around the world on its side because of their goodwill for, and expectations of, President Obama. It should not lose this second golden chance, as it did with the squandering of goodwill and sympathy in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Some very bold course corrections and new policies have to be adopted to clean up the mess. Unilateralism and the strategy of preemptiveness will have to give way to multilateralism and consensus of all nations to deal with the numerous problems that exist. This is quite achievable in the changed environment of “hope” that prevails presently, and this fleeting window of opportunity must be capitalized on in full measure. The methodology of change in Afghanistan and Iraq should be the first to be put into effect, and side by side, the Middle East peace process must be renewed with vigor—old thinking must give place to a new approach. A few suggestions in this regard for the new president are discussed in subsequent chapters.
Relations with the Muslim World

“There are only two forces in the World: the Sword and the Mind. The mind shall always defeat the sword”

—Napoleon Bonaparte

The relations that the United States has with the Muslim world have a very important bearing on peace and stability in the world. Unfortunately, ever since the September 11, 2001 attacks, the policies that have been followed by the United States have somehow made Muslims all around the world feel that the United States is against them and is out to destroy Islam, thus making matters worse. In their view U.S. domestic and foreign policy has vilified Muslims and their religion, with every person who bears a Muslim name or wears Muslim garb being seen as a terror suspect. The war on terror and, particularly, the invasion of Iraq further exacerbated the problem. The ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the one-sided support of Israel by the United States, particularly during the 22-day invasion of Gaza by Israel in December 2008, toward the end of the Bush administration, has compounded the situation.

The global perception of President Bush was that he was unwilling to listen to, engage with, or change his policies, which resulted in increasing suspicion of the United States and its motives. Many acts of omission and commission were committed in the name of the war on terror, which have led to this sad state. Starting with homeland security, which was a very legitimate requirement for the safety and security of the American homeland and its people, it is now clear that its enforcement was done in an arbitrary manner on insufficient intelligence, resulting in many innocents being rounded up and incarcerated without trial or recourse to judicial appeal. Other actions include the infamous abuse and torture of prisoners of war at the U.S. prison
in Guantanamo Bay (Cuba), Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and Bagram prison in Afghanistan, and extraordinary rendition by the CIA of suspects, that is, their secret imprisonment and torture in third countries. Hundreds of thousands have been killed or made homeless because of the war, and all these acts have done great damage to U.S. prestige and to its standing as a nation which prides itself as the upholder of justice, human rights, fair play, and the rule of law.

It is not necessary to go into the various acts of wilful disregard of human rights and departure from the path of justice, as they are well known and well documented. What is of importance, however, is to find ways to repair the damage and bring about reconciliation and a meeting of hearts and minds to make the world a safer place. The new way forward for both the Muslim world and the United States should be based on “mutual interest and mutual respect,” the famous words spoken by President Obama during his inaugural address on January 20, 2009.

President Obama has lived up to his campaign promises, and, despite his hands being full with the domestic financial crisis, his first act on the very first day of assuming office as president was to issue three executive presidential orders which indicated his serious intent to return America to the “moral high ground” in the war on terror. The war itself is now being termed Overseas Contingency Operations, perhaps because the International Commission of Jurists advised President Obama to change it, since they felt it had given the Bush administration “spurious justification to a range of human rights and humanitarian law violations,” including detention practices and interrogation methods that the International Committee of the Red Cross has described as torture.1

The first presidential order was on the closure of Guantanamo Bay prison within one year. Issuing the order President Obama said, “The United States does not have to continue with the false choice between our safety and our ideals, and will restore the standards of due process and the core constitutional values that have made this country great even in the midst of war, even in dealing with terrorism.” He also said, “The United States does not torture.” The second order involved banning torture and restoring adherence to the army field manual as a guide for terrorism interrogation. The third order concerned the establishment of an interagency task force for systematic review of detention policies and procedures to deal with the disposal of detainees at Guantanamo Bay. He also said that in the fight against terrorism the United States would be unyielding and at the same time wanted to send a signal that the actions in defense of liberty would be as just as the cause.2
President Obama needs to concentrate on resolving the contentious issues (the Arab-Israeli conflict, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Iran), which bedevil the relations with the Muslim world. While he has already appointed special envoys, these contentious problems will take some time to resolve. In the meantime it would be prudent to attend to other areas in which there is commonality of interest and convergence of views, and which would benefit the Muslim world and consequently promote peace in the region.

First and foremost is, of course, the fight against extremism. The microscopic hard-core militant elements and terrorists among the Muslims have caused more damage than any other outside agency to the Muslims and to Islam, which ironically they profess to safeguard. They, by their inhuman and brutal acts, which are totally against the Quranic teachings, have projected a very wrong and distorted image of the great and peaceful religion of Islam. The extremists have misrepresented the teachings of Islam and have hijacked its fair name to promote their narrow ends. The Muslims themselves must fight this menace, for they are required to stop violence and mayhem from being created in society, as per the Quranic injunction which states, “Let there arise from amongst you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong; they are the ones to attain felicity (attainment of happiness and success in this world and the next)” (Quran 3:104). In view of this commandment, all Muslims are duty-bound to fight extremism and to bring those who resort to violence and extremism back to the correct path. All Muslims must offer help to the government in tracking down extremists and militants since it is an essential teaching of Islam to admonish those who resort to wrongdoing. In addition, it would be advisable to explore the areas where there can be greater cooperation between the United States and Muslim countries, in order to marginalize the radical elements, and to work toward socioeconomic development of Muslim countries which would benefit the common man.

At the start, the main obstacle to coming to a common ground is the fact that the West and Muslim world hold many prejudices and distorted views about each other, which have been brought about by baggage of the past and have been further aggravated by the crosscurrents of conflicting contemporary events and ideas. These prejudices and stereotypes need to be removed in an intelligent and reasoned manner so that they can begin to understand each other and appreciate their different cultural underpinnings, and at the same time realize that there are many things which the vast multitude of races, faiths, and nations have in common. The destiny of man demands a
peaceful and rational approach to resolving the complex issues confronting humanity.

It is paradoxical that the Muslim world has a love-and-hate relationship with the United States. The common man in the streets of Muslim countries likes everything American: the American people, the political freedom they enjoy, their technological and economic progress, and does not hate American values, as was stated by President Bush after 9/11. On the other hand, they are very disturbed, anguished, and angry with the policies of the American government and the West, which have caused great harm to Muslims, particularly by the actions and events of the last eight years, after the 9/11 attacks.

There is no gainsaying that the public has suffered a great deal because of the war on terror. Nevertheless, the United States is not against Islam or Muslims, even though the gross mishandling of the war on terror has made it appear so by default. President Obama’s sincere overtures and extension of the hand of friendship toward the Muslim world should allay these fears to some extent, and there is a need for the Muslim world to reciprocate in equal measure. His interview with Al Arabiya television on January 27, 2009, which was given just one week after he took office, illustrates his earnestness to improve these strained relations. In the interview he said to the Muslims, “Americans are not your enemy.” Further he added, “We are ready to initiate a new partnership based on mutual respect and mutual interests. My job is to communicate the fact that the United States has a stake in the well-being of the Muslim world, that the language we use has to be a language of respect. The language we use matters,” he continued. “We cannot paint with a broad brush a faith as a consequence of the violence that is done in that faith’s name.” Even though President Bush had also said repeatedly that the fight was against the terrorists and not against Islam, many of the actions of his administration resulted in giving a different impression otherwise.

Again during his visit to Turkey on April 6, 2009, addressing the Turkish parliament President Obama emphatically said, “The United States is not and will never be at war with Islam.” He further went on to say, “The friendship with the Muslim world was critical in rolling back a fringe ideology that people of all faiths reject.” In the series of conciliatory and positive steps taken to better the relations with the Muslim world were his visits to Saudi Arabia and Egypt in the first week of June 2009, and in particular his Cairo speech, in which he made very skillful use of public diplomacy and won a standing ovation not only in Cairo University but also among Muslims all around the
world. He rightly expressed the hope of a “new beginning” between the United States and the Muslim world.5

President Obama has a tremendous capital of goodwill in the Muslim world which he must utilize deftly for the common good. While he used some strong words and expressed strong sentiments in his Cairo speech, which warmed the hearts of the Muslim world, what is now required is to translate them into action so that the necessary impact is felt at ground level. His other actions, such as orders for the closure of Guantanamo Bay prison, withdrawal of troops from Iraq, and his overtures to Iran as well as other conciliatory gestures, indicate the thrust of his administration toward correcting the mistakes of the past; all these actions should be the harbinger of a more peaceful world. There are a number of areas in which the Muslims and the United States have shared values, perceptions, and interests, which should act as the stepping-stones for policy formulations for the common good.

There are, however, areas in which there is misinformation and misunderstanding between the Muslims and the United States, and the manner in which to dispel these fears and apprehensions will be discussed in detail later. Writing in the Washington Post,6 Jon Cohen and Jennifer Agiesta note that a poll of one thousand adult Americans, conducted by Post-ABC from March 26 to 29, 2009, indicated that the policy of President Obama of outreach to the Muslim world received a positive rating as those polled felt that it is an important goal to seek a “new way forward.” However, more than half of those polled had a negative view of Islam and Muslims, and a sizable number said that even mainstream Muslims encourage violence against non-Muslims. The polls suggest that there is broad lack of understanding and awareness of Islam—hence these perceptions.

Likewise, another poll was conducted by a different organization, WorldPublicOpinion.org, in 21 Muslim countries around the world at the end of December 2008; the majority of those polled (21,750 people) felt that the United States is disrespectful to Islam and is out to humiliate Muslims.7 They also felt that the U.S. support for democracy in the Muslim world is limited (conditional) to cases where the government is cooperative with the United States.

From the above two polls it is quite apparent that the adherents of the two largest religions in the world have very little knowledge about each other and have been conditioned to form wrong opinions, which have been the cause of so much animosity in the past. Such negative stereotypes persist today and have even gained renewed impetus. Therefore, the time has come to shed the misgivings and
animosities and forge a relationship that promotes friendship between the two sides for a better tomorrow. To achieve this aim it is essential to bridge the perception gap between the West and the Muslim world. In this context urgent measures need to be taken to carry out a detailed and comprehensive study to understand the misconceptions that exist between the United States and the Muslim world about each other and the reasons for them. Effective measures to correct these misconceptions and misapprehensions can only be taken if we understand the problem.

There is a belief in the West that Islam sanctions violence, since some Muslims have taken recourse to bloodshed to gain their objectives. However, these actions have nothing to do with religion or the majority view, and are either politically motivated or to promote self-interests of a handful of individuals or groups. There is no place in Islam for violence; as per the teaching of the Prophet, even animals are not to be ill-treated nor nature destroyed, since all life is sacred and we must respect it. It is categorically stated in the Quran that anyone who kills even one innocent human being, it is as if he has killed the whole of humanity (Quran 5:32). Islam is a religion of peace and the word Islam itself means “submission to the will of God” and is derived from the root word, *Salam*, meaning peace.

There is also an erroneous belief that Muslim women are not granted the equal status and equal rights of men. This too is incorrect, since in Islam no single human being is inferior or superior to another, and the best and closest to God are the righteous among both men and women. In the Quran it is stated, “Whosoever works righteousness, Man or Woman, and has faith, verily to him will We give a life that is good and pure, and We will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their actions” (Quran 16:97). There are many safeguards for women in Islam; to mention only a few, the right of inheritance, the right of divorce and the right to choose the man a woman wants to marry. Until her consent is given she cannot be married. Forcing a girl to marry against her choice is forbidden in Islam, and her consent is a prerequisite and has to be recorded in the marriage contract that she signs. A woman can pursue her own business and spend the money without the permission of her husband or father. She may keep her maiden name after her marriage. There are many injunctions in the Quran about proper treatment of women.

Prophet Mohammed too emphasized strict compliance to the proper treatment of women, including giving proper education to them. A girl has to be treated exactly in the same manner and in all respects as a male child. The Prophet said that a girl child is God’s
blessing to the household. The Quran also says that, “For Muslim men and women... who are believing... devout... true... patient and constant... humble... charitable... who fast (and deny themselves)... who guard their chastity... and for men and women who engage much in God’s praise, for them has God prepared forgiveness and great reward” (Quran 33:35). In other words, the Quran emphasizes that both men and women are on an equal footing, and of the same nature. Thus they have the same moral, human, and religious rights and duties.

In fact, during the lifetime of Prophet Mohammed, women even took part in battles as nurses, and in an exceptional case two women participated in actual fighting in the battle of Uhud near the city of Medina in Saudi Arabia, in the second battle thrust on the Muslims, even though they had initially come to carry water and attend to the wounded. In his last farewell sermon to the Muslims at Mount of Mercy on the outskirts of Mecca, besides conveying and confirming the instructions of God revealed to him, the Prophet was very emphatic about proper treatment of women.

What is true, however, is the fact that, in many Muslim countries, women are not treated in the manner prescribed in the Quran and the Sunnah (practices of the Prophet), a malaise which defies logic because these Muslims profess to be strict in observance of other tenets of the religion, but ignore or violate this very important injunction, which is at the core of human society, with family as the basic and most important unit on which a society’s edifice is built. Therefore, the Muslims or Muslim societies that do not follow the injunctions of the Quran and Sunnah need to be condemned and also need to be educated about the correct teachings of Islam.

The important position women occupy can be judged from an incident in which the Prophet was asked by one of his companions what good deeds he must perform to achieve salvation; the Prophet replied “serve and look after your mother.” The questioner asked him who should be the next in order, and the Prophet said “your mother.” The questioner repeated this question three times and got the same answer—“your mother.” When the same question was asked for the fourth time the Prophet said “father,” thereby indicating that the importance of the mother was three times more than that of the father. He also said that paradise lay under the feet of the mother.

It is also a fact that in Muslim homes women exercise considerable influence and power. They control many aspects of the household such as household expenditures, raising and educating the children, and arranging their marriages. No individual can go on jihad (war of
self-defense) without getting the permission of the mother; however, this vital injunction is violated with impunity by the extremists when they force and abduct young children of impressionable age, indoctrinate them, and compel them to commit acts of terror.

Even though in Muslim society women are often not given their due as required by the Quranic injunctions, it is quite revealing that they control a substantial amount of finance and real estate in some countries and that their education is on the rise. According to John L. Esposito, “Saudi women own 70 percent of the savings of Saudi banks and own 61 percent of private firms in the Kingdom; they own much of the real estate in Riyadh and Jeddah. . . . In Morocco more than 20 percent of judges are women . . . women’s literacy rates in Iran and Saudi Arabia are 70 percent and as high as 85 percent in Jordan and Malaysia. . . . In the UAE and Iran, the majority of university students are women.” Thus because of the changed conditions of education, literacy, and economic progress, more and more women have started to exercise their rights which have been granted to them by Islam. This is a very positive development and in the long run will not only better women’s status but also ensure better education for their children, which will consequently lead to the overall development of the Muslim world.

Some say Islam is not amenable to democracy and modernity, an assumption that is not tenable. Islam is not the religion of a few or a particular set of people or restricted to a particular period in time. It is an egalitarian religion that is for all human beings and is applicable for all times. Its applicability is till the end of history, as it were, and its teachings conform to the latest ideas of humankind through all ages—past, present, and future. All Quranic tenets are in consonance with modernity. Some Muslim rulers, to perpetuate their rule, have deliberately spread the wrong belief that Islam is not amenable to democracy, which is unfounded.

As regards the concept of jihad, there is a misunderstanding that it is incumbent on all Muslims to wage a religious war to convert all non-Muslims to Islam. This is one of the gravest misinterpretations, since there is no such thing as a “religious” or “holy” war in Islam. The meaning of jihad is to struggle or strive tirelessly, and the Prophet said that the greatest form of jihad is to struggle within oneself (to cleanse oneself) to become a better human being by resisting the temptations of power and lust. As far as war or fighting is concerned, the Quran gives permission to Muslims to resort to war only in self-defense—to defend the religion and Muslims. As is clear this permission is conditional; the main reason for having recourse
to arms is “in self-defense.” It is also enjoined on Muslims to regard going to war as a last resort, after all attempts have been exhausted to solve the problem through negotiations. The Quran states, “fight in the way of Allah (God) against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Indeed Allah (God) does not love transgressors” (Quran 2: 190). Also it states, if the people you are fighting ask for peace, Muslims have an obligation to accept peace and fight no more: “so if they hold aloof from you and wage not war against you and offer you peace, Allah (God) allows no way against them” (Quran 4:90).

The mutual misunderstandings can only be removed when we become aware of the teachings of other faiths, the commonalities as well as the cultural differences that exist, and the spirit of human brotherhood that needs to be fostered among all humanity. The misgivings must be removed through exchange of ideas, interfaith dialogue, seminars, and various other forms of cultural and educational exchanges. All religions teach the same fundamental thing, that is, to live in peace and harmony with each other, irrespective of the obvious differences in religious and cultural beliefs. With this as the starting point there are many areas of cooperation that must be explored and exploited with vigor.

There are myriad problems facing the Muslim world. These include poverty, illiteracy, lack of jobs and employment opportunities due to lack of economic development, lack of proper governance, rampant corruption and many other forms of injustice. The first and foremost, and, in fact, the most important area in which there is a great deficiency in the Muslim world, is in the field of education. Due to the lack of direction by the rulers and elders, and due to insufficiency of educational institutions at the primary and secondary levels, which is true of higher education as well, all Muslim youth are not afforded the opportunity to acquire education, and that is one of the reasons for the illiteracy rate being the highest in Muslim countries. Proper education is the only way, the key to eradicating backwardness and ensuring progress and empowerment of the people.

How can the United States assist the Muslim world in this important area? What is required is to have greater cooperation in the educational field, which is the single most important area where there is great deficiency in the Muslim world. The United States can be an important partner to fund basic education in Muslim countries, which must include in its curriculum learning about other cultures and a balanced portrayal of historical, social, cultural, and political issues. There is a need to promote student exchange programs to
foster greater understanding between different people and cultures, and a larger number of students from these countries could come to the United States for higher education. Likewise students from the United States and from other Western countries should study in Muslim countries so as to enrich each other’s culture and understanding. Also there needs to be greater exchanges in the fields of arts and social sciences so that a better bond can be established as people-to-people contact increases, which will lead to cross-fertilization of ideas and better foster understanding and awareness among different people.

Another important area of exchange is in the field of sports. A lesson in this regard can be learned from the “ping-pong diplomacy” followed by China during the 1970s to break the ice and initiate better relations with the United States. The American table tennis team, which was participating in the thirty-first World Table Tennis Championship in Japan in April 1971, received a surprise invitation from the Chinese delegation for an all-expense-paid visit to the People’s Republic of China. The visit took place from April 11 to 17, 1971. The team was the first group of Americans allowed into China since the Communist takeover in 1949. While they played exhibition matches and were feted and entertained, and met and interacted with the people of China, Prime Minister Chou En Lai utilized the opportunity to invite the team to a banquet in the Great Hall of the People on April 14, 1971, during which he said, “You have opened a new chapter in the relations of the American and Chinese people and I am confident that this beginning again of our friendship will certainly meet with majority support of our two peoples.” That same day the United States announced plans to remove a 20-year embargo on trade with China. The results of this friendship are for everyone to see—today, China is the largest trading partner of the United States.

Another such example is the utilization of cricket diplomacy between India and Pakistan to promote better relations between the two. The people of these two cricket-crazy neighbors love each other’s cricketers and they are looked upon as good ambassadors for peace. At the height of tensions between India and Pakistan in 1987, when the armies of these two nations were facing each other in an eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation, President Zia ul Haq of Pakistan utilized cricket diplomacy to defuse the situation and went to India on an unofficial visit to witness a cricket match which was being played between the two countries in Jaipur. This resulted in an easing of tensions.
Despite the standoff between India and Pakistan due to the 11/26 Mumbai attacks by Pakistani nationals, the T20 Cricket World Cup tournament finals played at Lord’s Cricket Ground in England, between the teams of Pakistan and Sri Lanka, in June 2009, is again an example, in the language of sports, that demonstrates its power in contemporary societies. The *Times of India* reported that there was peaceful and harmonious relations between the Indian and Pakistani supporters, and soon after the match, which was won by Pakistan, was over, it was encouraging to see the Pakistani men and women asking the Indian journalists to join them in their revelry, again indicating that people-to-people contact overcomes prejudices and douses tensions. Another sporting event that dominated the headlines of electronic and print media for a considerable time both in India and Pakistan was the pairing of the Indian tennis player, Rohan Bopanna, with the Pakistani tennis player, Aisam ul Haq Qureshi, in the finals of the men’s doubles in the 2010 U.S. Open Tennis Championship. It was hailed in both countries as an event that could bring people of these two nations closer and help in breaking the ice to create favorable public opinion.

In the same manner, efforts should be made to explore the fields of sports in which there can be such exchanges between various countries of the Middle East and other Muslim countries, including Iran, with the United States and the West, so as to utilize this important avenue to promote better understanding and harmonious relationships among the people of these vast regions that comprise two important faiths who encompass almost half of humanity.

It is of interest to note that the understanding about Islam was far greater in the United States during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, since many slaves who had been brought into the United States during that period from Africa had been Muslims. These Muslim slaves became the transmitters of knowledge about Islam to the United States. A very informative program was telecast by the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) in their *History’s Detectives* series, which not only brought out this aspect but also talked about the translation of the Quran into English in America in the eighteenth century. The program highlighted the appreciation of the American War of Independence by the Muslims of North Africa, who had become well aware of it because of certain naval incidents that had taken place between the British navy and the United States at that time off the coast of North Africa. In fact, Morocco was the first country to recognize the U.S. government after its independence.
During the early period of Islamic history when Islam spread to distant lands in large parts of Central Asia and North Africa in the seventh and eighth centuries A.D., the need was felt to establish institutions to teach Quranic tenets, Hadith (Prophetic sayings), Sunnah (Prophetic practices), and Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence). The spread of education and enlightenment among the people took precedence and was more important than the military victories of early Muslims.\(^\text{12}\) During the Abbasid period of Islam, Muslims became proficient in literature, Greek philosophy and Indian sciences, and the institutionalization of learning came about with the establishment of Al Azhar University in Cairo in 975 A.D. In Baghdad the Nizamiah Madrasah was established in 1065 A.D. by Al Mamun, the grandson of the founder of Baghdad, Abu Jaafar Mansur, the second caliph of the Abbasid Empire.\(^\text{13}\)

About the importance of ancient Baghdad, Antony Shadid writes, “Its cultural legacy was indisputably one of the great flowerings of human achievement in history…. The ancients studied in places like ‘Bayt al Hikma’ (House of Wisdom). Not a simple library, it was a true marketplace of ideas, a pristine place of scholarship whose translators of Plato, Aristotle, Hippocrates, Galen, Euclid, and Ptolemy created intellectual heritage that was not Islamic but universal…. Baghdad became the intellectual battlefield upon which Roman law, Greek medicine and philosophy, Indian mysticism, Persian subtlety and Semitic genius for religion could meet on common ground.”\(^\text{14}\)

Likewise, during the Middle Ages, Spain (Andalusia—Islamic Spain, with its universities at Granada and Cordoba) and Central Asia (Samarkhand and Bokhara) were the two seats of higher learning where Muslims had reached the zenith of their educational and cultural advancement, and had made tremendous strides in scientific knowledge from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries. They made very rich and everlasting contributions to the world in the fields of social and natural sciences, as well as humanities and traditional sciences. Students from all over the world, and particularly from Europe, flocked to these universities, “Buyut-ul-Hikma” (Houses of Wisdom), to seek knowledge in Greek thought and philosophy, Indian sciences, and the latest knowledge in the fields of medicine, mathematics, astronomy, architecture, and all the other disciplines of knowledge available to mankind at that time.

When Europe was still in the Dark Ages, the Muslims became the bridge and transmitters and torchbearers of knowledge and translated all the old Greek thought and literature and Indian sciences, which had been lost to the world. Most scholars in the West today concur
with the view that it was the Muslim influence on Europe, through their seminaries, which brought about the Renaissance in Europe. Alas, the ebb and flow of history has reversed the conditions today and unfortunately the Muslim world has lost the zeal, passion, and hunger to seek knowledge and explore new avenues and pathways and thus have lost out on modern education resulting in their backwardness. Muslims themselves have to rise to the occasion to change their condition; no outside power can do it for them. The Quranic verse, “Verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves” (Quran 13: 11), signifies that God will only help those who strive in his path to attain a better life through rightful actions and education.

There is a crying need today to reestablish such exchanges of knowledge so as to remove the veil of ignorance from the minds of the people of both the East and the West. There is now a need for the reverse flow of scientific and technological knowledge from the West (the United States and Europe) to the Muslim world. The West likewise can benefit from the Muslim world in the fields of spirituality, mysticism, cultural mores, and other areas such as social sciences and creative arts. This will go a long way in removing the causes of tension between the United States and Muslims around the world, and support the cause of a safer world.

The other area where the United States needs to focus is on the economic betterment of the people of the Muslim world so as to enable them to lead a prosperous life. There is a need to build capacity, which generates job opportunities for the people in these countries. While the Muslim countries of the Middle East do not lack resources and wealth, what is lacking is proper governance, which has resulted in lack of proper direction from their leadership for economic development of their countries, which is the key to prosperity. Some of the countries of Africa and South Asia would require economic aid to uplift their masses from poverty since they lack resources. There are relatively few heavy industries in Muslim countries, and many lack other modern infrastructure as well. Detailed thought must be given to this aspect and a comprehensive plan must be drawn up for short-term and long-term development.

The strategies for economic development must be translated into pragmatic and realistic goals, and action plans must be put into effect. Looking at the trade statistics, many U.S. strategic analysts are of the view that the economic policy of the United States toward the Muslim world does not take into account its security interests. This can be illustrated by the fact that, excluding oil, imports from Muslim countries
to U.S. markets have increased marginally (only by 3.2 percent) since 2000. According to U.S. trade statistics, their growth was suppressed by the imposition of a tariff of 20 percent or more on key goods such as textiles. Meanwhile, countries of the Andean region, sub-Saharan Africa, and elsewhere, which are granted preferential, duty-free access to U.S. markets, enjoy a comparative boom with exports to the United States rising to nearly 40 percent in some cases. Paul Blustein wrote in the *Washington Post* that these figures reflect a bias in U.S. trade rules; because of the de facto trade discrimination against the Muslim countries, the United States was not utilizing this very important leverage in the interest of world security and the war on terror.

Also it is worth noting that the oil money benefits only the big national oil companies, which are controlled by rich Arabs and the Arab governments. It does not reach the people, whereas in the case of the textile industry it provides jobs to a multitude of poor people. Cooperation in the creation of other such labor-intensive industries that benefit the common man needs to be explored and preferential trade agreements drawn up for them. The United States must recast its trade policies and accord equal preferential concessions to Muslim countries. Such an action would enable these nations to enjoy the economic benefits by becoming its trading partners, would help in winning their confidence, and make them feel they have a stake in shaping a safer world.

The next important aspect where there is a great need for cooperation between the United States and Muslim countries is in the sphere of governance; in fact, this is the fountainhead from which should flow other acts of reform in the Muslim world, where the picture of people’s inclusivity in governance is very bleak. There are many countries where autocratic rulers have been holding power for too long. They do not provide space to the people to participate in democracy or allow them to have a say in governance, and freedom of thought and expression is stifled, and political dissent is ruthlessly curbed. It is under these conditions that extremist ideology takes shape, for if the populace has no other avenue to better their lot or voice their concerns, then a climate of intolerance and rebellion is created, leading to violence and other forms of extremist activities.

While the woes of the Muslim world, particularly lack of education and the connected lack of prosperity, are the creation of their own leaders, and to a substantial extent the ordinary Muslims themselves, then why and how does the United States come into this equation? Even though the United States professes to be the champion of democracy, it helps perpetuate the rule of such autocratic rulers
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to further its own agenda, instead of promoting democratic governments to be established. This is the main complaint the Muslim world has against the United States, besides the reasons that have already been mentioned.

Another aspect with regard to promoting democracy in the Muslim world is the fact that the United States is averse to the emergence of any Islamist party in the Middle East. A new phenomenon that is sweeping the Muslim world is the rise of Islamic parties and movements with moderate social and economic agendas, representing pro-democracy and pro-economic-justice currents that seek peaceful coexistence with the West. These parties must be encouraged and U.S. policies must be modified to suit these on-the-ground realities and the climate of change that is taking root in Muslim countries. There is no danger if such parties come to power democratically; the Turkish elections of 2007 amply prove the point. If democratic systems take root in these countries, the electorate itself will show the door to the Islamic parties, if they fail to measure up to their expectations. What is essential is to give them a chance to prove their bona fides. Other checks and balances should also be incorporated into the system to ensure that no single ruler or party can hold on to power indefinitely or without the approval of the people.

The United States needs to impress on the leaders of the Muslim world the necessity of reforms, such as the promotion of civil and political liberties, free and fair elections, social justice, and transparency and accountability in governance. Other areas include the building of institutions for proper and effective administration, establishment of a fair and independent judiciary, and eradication of corruption. Unless there is willingness on the part of Muslims to confront all the ills that are responsible for their backwardness, the malaise will not disappear. Outside powers can only provide assistance, whereas the actual implementation will have to be done by the Muslim countries themselves. Therefore, there is an urgent necessity for Muslim leaders and the intelligentsia all around the Muslim world to be introspective and to analyze the reasons for all their woes and to find ways to better their lot.

Building Bridges

It is time to build bridges between the West and the Muslim world to achieve the common goal of humanity—peace and prosperity for all. In this connection, a very crucial role can be played by India, Turkey, and Egypt. Even though India is not a Muslim country,
it has the second largest Muslim population in the world, and is a secular democracy with proven credentials. India can play a significant role because of its proximity to Pakistan and Afghanistan—the two hot spots of current times. Unlike in several other countries, the Muslims of India have not fallen into the trap of the extremists. India is also home to two very important Islamic seminaries, the Dar-ul-Uloom, Deoband, and at Bareilly. These two seminaries, and particularly Dar-ul-Uloom, Deoband, have been at the vanguard of disseminating Islamic tenets for more than a century in the Indian sub-continent, with significant influence in Afghanistan, and in the countries of Central and Southeast Asia.

The Dar-ul-Uloom, Deoband came out against terrorism in unequivocal terms when its Grand Mufti Habibur Rehman issued a fatwa (religious edict by renowned ulama [religious clerics] in June 2008 stating that “the religion of Islam came to wipe out all kinds of terrorism and spread the message of peace.” Earlier in February 2008, more than 20,000 Deoband scholars had condemned terrorism in their landmark statement that “Islam has taught its followers to treat all mankind with equality, mercy, tolerance, justice—all kinds of violence and terrorism are against Islam.” These fatwas are very significant since the Islamic edicts promulgated by them have a great influence on the lives of Muslims in this entire region, which comprises the largest concentration of Muslims in the world. Even though in the past there were certain apprehensions about this school because of its puritanical views, it must be understood they are totally against all acts of terrorism and what they promulgate has greatly influenced the Muslims of this region for centuries. Therefore, the services of this institution should be utilized to disseminate the correct teachings of Islam, both the Quran and the Sunnah, which regard living in peace and harmony with all human beings as an essential article of faith. In this information age their message about the correct teachings of Islam can be conveyed, through print and particularly through electronic media and Internet, to all regions of the subcontinent. They should be coopted by the government to issue edicts about how the acts of terrorism perpetrated by extremist groups are in contravention of the tenets of Islam, where the killing of even one innocent individual is equated to killing all of humanity, and how the Muslims themselves are suffering untold misery because of the actions of the terrorists who are not only killing innocent individuals but are also giving a very bad name to the religion which they profess to safeguard.

Turkey is an important Muslim country that occupies a very strategic location; it is situated at the confluence of the East and the West,
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straddling both, and can thus be an important link between them. Also, Turkey was the leader of the Muslim world, the seat of Ottoman Empire, for a long time, almost six and a half centuries, from 1299 to November 1, 1922 when the Ottoman Empire was dissolved after the First World War. Turkey is a part of NATO and has good relations with the Western world as well as with all the Muslim countries including Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan. It can therefore once again take up the role of being the bridge between the West and the East. During his visit to the United States in the first week of December 2009, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey emphasized this aspect to President Obama. Turkey can foster better understanding, forge healthy relationships, and foster socioeconomic ties between the West and the Muslim world. The war on terror is in effect dependent on closing the ideological gap and Turkey is well placed to do this.

Egypt likewise occupies an important place in the Muslim world because it has been the seat of higher learning for Islamic thought and Islamic jurisprudence from the earliest days of Islam. Its Al Ahzar University at Cairo is the most reputable Islamic university and has been the leading light in shaping Islamic teachings throughout the Muslim world. Al Ahzar, like the schools at Deoband and Bareilly, must be utilized to disseminate the correct Islamic tenets to the entire Muslim world, and particularly to the radical scholars and other extremist groups in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and Indonesia. It will be particularly beneficial in influencing the younger generation of Muslims who will be made aware of the correct teachings, and who will thus distance themselves from the terrorists and their organizations.

It is undeniable that the most important tool to understanding another’s point of view is through the exchange of ideas. The global challenges of the present age can only be tackled through joint effort, and to achieve this goal the building of harmonious relationships between the West and the Muslim countries is a prerequisite. Disdain for others’ sentiments breeds hatred, and hatred breeds more hatred and ultimately creates greater division. We should not judge others from our own standpoint or view them through tinted glasses, but understand them for what they are, and factor in the background of their cultural underpinnings. It is only then that the true and clear picture will emerge, enabling friendships to be forged without fear of the “unknown other,” whom we imagine with prejudiced eyes as being the “devil.” Despite the information age we live in where there is free access to the latest knowledge in every field, we all are the
prisoners of our prejudices and biases, which have caused so much hate and ill will to spread. It is time we break these shackles for the sake of a better future for our children and for all of us. We must break new ground and find new pathways to prosperity so that mankind can live in harmony without ill will, rancor, and the feeling of superiority of color, race, or religion against fellow humans.

The message of God Almighty is universal and therefore it is incumbent on all humanity to strive toward goodness, justice, and promotion of human dignity and to prevent evil. There is no clash of civilizations as some cynics suggest. Both the Western and Islamic civilizations have very strong bonds, which have been cemented over centuries, and which have benefited mankind. It is for us to harness the good that exists and to chart a path of friendship for the ultimate goal of peace, prosperity and progress of mankind. President Obama’s approach is quite correct in reaching out to the Muslim world so that they are equal partners in resolving the various problems facing them.
Any meaningful study of the current situation in Afghanistan requires a critical assessment of the realities on the ground, the aspirations of the Afghan people, the country’s national interests, and the role it should play on the international stage, so that it does not become a safe haven for terrorist organizations in the future. Based on such an assessment U.S. policymakers need to formulate a new direction for conflict resolution in Afghanistan, to make it a progressive and stable democracy. For a candid appreciation of the situation, it is essential to take into consideration the characteristics of the Afghan people, their customs and traditions, the peculiarities of their different tribal languages, and other sensibilities and sensitivities such as intense religious faith and code of honor in respect to guests and elders. The cultural dimension has a very important bearing on the conduct of operations as well as on the rebuilding and reconstruction effort, which has been all but absent for many years.

After his inauguration President Obama rightly appreciated that there was a requirement to shift the center of gravity of the war on terror back to Afghanistan since the Taliban had not been eliminated and were staging resurgence. In addition, the main source for the inspiration and direction of terrorist operations around the world had remained intact in the form of Al Qaeda leadership under Osama Bin Laden and his deputy Ayman Al Zawahiry. Accordingly the president appointed a new team in Afghanistan under General McChrystal to carry out a strategic reappraisal of the situation and to analyze the mistakes of past eight years so that corrective measures could be instituted.

The strategic reappraisal for the rebuilding and stability of Afghanistan was carried out by various stakeholders, and included recommendations of the military and civil leadership and the allies.
After a careful review and prolonged deliberations, a new policy directive was issued by President Obama on December 1, 2009, when he addressed the cadets of the United States Military Academy at West Point, enunciating his plan of future action for that region. The details of the new policy directive and its implications are discussed subsequently.

**BACKGROUND**

Afghanistan’s location, geography, history, and the resultant culture of the various tribes and ethnic groups have greatly shaped the ethos and philosophy of the different people that inhabit this vast and remote country. Afghanistan is a landlocked country, divided by the Hindu Kush mountains and other ranges. These geographical conditions have created a strong wall of tribalism that blocks all ruling systems from covering the entire territory effectively, which is the case even today, despite modern means of transportation and communication.

From time immemorial Afghanistan has been at the crossroads, an ancient focal point of trade and migration, and a meeting ground for different cultures of both East and West. During its long history, the land has seen various invaders and conquerors crisscrossing its territory; on the other hand, local chieftains also invaded the surrounding vast regions to establish their own empires. Historian Arnold Toynbee described the country as a “roundabout of the ancient world” as waves of migrations left behind a mosaic of ethnic, religious, and linguistic influences.

Alexander the Great passed through Afghanistan in the fourth century B.C. en route to India. Islamic armies arrived in the seventh century A.D. and the Afghan people adopted Islam as their religion, which has had a great influence in their daily lives ever since. The Mongol conquerors came in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and in the nineteenth century, British and Russian armies faced off against each other over control of Afghanistan in what came to be known as the “Great Game.” Lord Curzon, the British Viceroy of India (1899–1905) had said, “Turkistan, Afghanistan, Trans-caspia, Persia . . . are the pieces on a chessboard upon which is being played out a game for the dominance of the world.” Britain granted Afghanistan independence in 1919, and from 1926 until 1973 Afghanistan was ruled by a monarchy.

Mohammed Daoud Khan became the first president of Afghanistan in 1973 after the monarchy was overthrown. However, soon thereafter,
with the “Saur Revolution” of April 1978, the Communist Party of Afghanistan, also known as the People’s Democratic Alliance of Afghanistan (PDPA), came to power, ousting the Daoud government. Soon internal rebellion and rivalry surfaced within the two factions of the PDPA, the Khalq and the Parcham, creating unstable and unpredictable conditions, with frequent changes in the leadership. As a consequence, the Soviet leadership of that time feared that the southern provinces of the USSR would be adversely affected and encouraged to break away. This prompted the Soviet Union to intervene by invading Afghanistan in 1979, ostensibly to come to the assistance of its communist ally. This was in accordance with the Brezhnev Doctrine, in which Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev outlined his policy to expand and increase the area of influence of the Soviet Union by extending support to emerging governments with socialist ideologies.

The country remained in total turmoil and disarray over the next decade (1979–1989) during the Soviet occupation, as the Afghan Mujahedeen, assisted by United States and Pakistan, fought fiercely against the Soviet and Afghan government troops. The Soviet troops withdrew in 1989. This costly war was a major cause of the breakup of the USSR, in addition to other reasons. After the withdrawal of Soviet troops, the United States, which had achieved its aim of defeating the USSR, instead of assisting in the formation of a responsible government in Kabul, virtually abandoned the Afghans to their own fate. This was a grave mistake with strategic consequences as it created a vacuum in governance; consequently, law and order could not be re-established and other developmental activities could not be put into effect. Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates admitted in his interview to Al Jazeera television its serious repercussions when he said, “The United States will not repeat the mistake of abandoning Afghanistan again.” Moreover, there were thousands of people who did not have any jobs or any other occupation but were well-armed and well-trained, adding to the chaotic conditions in the entire country.

This state of near anarchy resulted in fierce internecine struggle between the various ethnic groups and warlords vying with each other to establish their own fiefdoms, which led to further destruction of the Afghan social fabric, resulting in the spread of lawlessness, until the extremist faction, the Taliban, were able to oust the rest of the groups and assume leadership in Kabul, assisted by Pakistan. The Taliban, led by Mullah Omar, were able to bring a semblance of order to this war-torn country and among the fractious people by adopting
very severe measures for governance.14 From 1995 to October 2001 much of Afghanistan was under their control until they were overthrown when the United States removed that regime through the invasion of Afghanistan following the 9/11 attacks.

Afghanistan is a culturally mixed nation that has an important geostrategic location, connecting South, Central, and Southwest Asia. It is in this context that an understanding of the geopolitical characteristics of Afghanistan is essential. Afghanistan shares its borders with six countries. It has as its neighbour Pakistan on the south and southeast with a boundary of approximately 1500 miles. The Durand Line demarcates the boundary with Pakistan, named after the British foreign secretary of colonial India, Sir Henry Mortimer Durand, who demarcated the frontier of British India with Afghanistan in 1893.15 Although the line was drawn under an agreement between the British government and King Abdur Rahman of Afghanistan, it has been the cause of tension and constant friction between Pakistan and Afghanistan, particularly after the British left in 1947. Kabul did not recognize the international boundary, since the largest Afghan tribe, the Pashtuns, who comprise 42 percent of Afghanistan’s population, inhabit the area along both sides of the Durand Line.16 However, according to international law, the successor governments were required to honor the bilateral agreements signed earlier. As per the Vienna Convention on Succession of States in Respect of Treaties (VCSSTT), the World Court universally upheld the concept that binding agreements with or between colonial powers are “passed down” to successor independent states.17 As mentioned earlier, the Kabul government did not fully recognize this treaty and thus it has been the source of constant friction between Afghanistan and Pakistan ever since, especially because of tribal allegiances that did not recognize the old frontier demarcated by the British.

On the west of Afghanistan lies Iran and in the north are three countries—Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. The Uzbek and Tajik tribes inhabiting the northern area are also divided between Afghanistan and its northern neighbors as in the case of the Pashtun (Tajiks and Uzbeks formed the Northern Alliance as part of the invasion force under the United States in 2001). Afghanistan also has a very small border with China on its northeast, along the Wakkan Corridor. Afghanistan has four major tribes, the Pashtuns inhabiting the areas in the south and west, Tajiks and Uzbeks in the north and east, and the Shia minority, Hazaras and Qizilbash (the other three groups are mainly Sunni). All these realities create an element
of complexity in the process of integration and reconstruction of Afghanistan and also for the stability of the country.

The Afghans are a very proud people and do not want to be ruled or be dictated to by outsiders. They are very hardly, conditioned by the difficult and harsh terrain they live in, and also due to their historical background where they have witnessed invaders passing through their land for centuries and leaving behind their imprint on the Afghan people. History and geographical location has thus had a very profound impact in shaping their lives and their destiny. They have learned to survive under most severe conditions over all these centuries. One of the main difficulties of operating in Afghanistan is to understand the complex nature of the Afghan people and their shifting allegiances. This perhaps is the central problem, since their allegiance cannot be taken for granted. However, the single disturbing event of the recent past which has caused the most traumatic upheaval in the lives of the people of Afghanistan has been the Soviet invasion of their country in 1979, which completely changed the complexion of Afghan society. Prior to the Soviet invasion they were a very traditional society and practiced moderate, that is, the correct form of Islam, albeit along with certain age-old tribal customs. But the Soviets tried to impose their way of life on the Afghan people, which affected the very roots of this conservative society.

The spread of Soviet philosophy, together with their high-handedness and utter disregard of local traditions, and, more importantly, the defilement of Afghan religious beliefs, gave rise to the radicals who replaced the moderates. The Soviets did not have any respect for Islam, the core of traditional Afghan faith and culture, and they imposed their patterns of life, especially among the young, which caused great consternation to the elders of the society. They also destroyed Afghan cultural identity by laying greater emphasis on loyalty to the ethnic groups, which created divisions among the various peoples—the age-old policy of “divide and conquer.”

There was violent reaction by Afghan society to the onslaught of the Soviet cultural invasion and the near godlessness of communist ideology, which was vehemently opposed by the Afghan elders, some of whom went to the other extreme by encouraging radicalism in thought and in action, culminating in the rise of the radical mullahs as leaders. These leaders, such as Mullah Omar, were totally intolerant and promulgated their own brand of Sharia laws, which were in contravention of basic Islamic teachings, any minor infringement meeting with brutal punishment in an arbitrary manner. They also lacked contemporary knowledge, and hence were averse to modern ideas,
whereas, as per the teaching of the Prophet Mohammed, exercising moderation in governance and acquiring the latest knowledge in all fields is urged on all his followers, even if it meant going to far-off lands. Thus the counterreaction to the Soviet invasion resulted in the rise of extremist ideology.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan provided an ideal opportunity to the United States to humble the USSR by drawing them deeper into the “Afghan Trap,” making Afghanistan a “Soviet Vietnam.” In pursuit of the aim, the United States engineered covert activities to achieve its goal. In fact, U.S. covert assistance to the Mujahedeen started in July 1979, almost six months prior to the Soviet invasion. The United States correctly appreciated that the Soviets would not remain as mute spectators to the U.S. designs and would surely intervene in Afghanistan, which was its close ally and was in the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence. More importantly, the southern Soviet republics had close cultural affinity with Afghanistan; the Tajiks and the Uzbeks who inhabit the northern provinces of Afghanistan are spread on both sides of the Afghan and former Soviet Union border. Given these realities the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was a foregone conclusion.

The United States took full advantage of the situation and supplied weapons and funds in abundance to the Mujahedeen for covert operations. All assistance was channeled through Pakistan. The CIA and Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) organization were solely responsible for this covert and secret venture, as detailed in the account given by Brigadier Mohammed Yousuf of the Pakistan Army and his coauthor, Major Adkins, in their book *The Bear Trap.* The rise of the ISI and its later activities in grooming, training, equipping, and financing of radical elements has caused much havoc all around the world, resulting in the ongoing violence and lawlessness in the border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Mumbai attacks of November 26, 2008, and the terrorist attacks on the Sri Lankan cricket team and on trainees of the police academy in the heart of Pakistan in Lahore, in March 2009, and the ongoing suicide attacks in Pakistan are the handiwork of the hard-core Taliban. These are just a few examples of their activities in the ongoing violence and lawlessness that is prevalent in Pakistan.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, coupled with the revolution in the neighboring Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, provoked a strong response from the Islamic world to resist the communists. Among the volunteer fighters was the Saudi millionaire, Osama Bin Laden. These volunteers were provided support in the way of training, weapons, and finances by the United States to fight the Soviets. After the Soviets
left Afghanistan, Osama Bin Laden formed the Al Qaeda organization to fight the United States, since U.S. troops were stationed in Saudi Arabia, which, in the perception of Al Qaeda, amounted to desecration of the Holy Land.\(^\text{22}\) Also, these volunteers played a significant role in the guerrilla wars in Algeria, Egypt, Bosnia, Tajikistan, Chechnya, and in attacks on American and Western targets, including the attack on the destroyer USS *Cole*, since they had gained valuable experience in guerrilla warfare fighting the Soviet troops. On October 12, 2000, the *Cole* was attacked by a small boat laden with explosives during a brief refueling stop in the harbor of Aden, Yemen. It is believed that the terrorist attack was carried out by members of Al Qaeda.\(^\text{23}\)

Another fallout from the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, and subsequent period of lawlessness under the Taliban, was that more than four million Afghan refugees fled to the neighboring Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) and to the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) region of Pakistan.\(^\text{24}\) They later spread to other cities of Pakistan as well. Since weapons were supplied in large quantity, many refugees became ready recruits to fight the Soviet troops and thus the Kalashnikov culture took root in Pakistan, becoming the bane of all civilized society.

**Post 9/11 Situation**

Following the brazen and horrendous terrorist attacks of 9/11, the U.S. administration decided to attack and destroy its perpetrators wherever they were. In pursuance of this policy, the doctrine of preemptive strategy was formulated, under which the United States reserved the right to attack and destroy the terrorists and their hideouts in any country harboring them in total disregard of the sovereignty of such states.\(^\text{25}\) Initially it was not clear which terrorist group had carried out the attacks. After further investigation, when more information became available, it was concluded that Al Qaeda was behind these attacks, and therefore it was decided to attack them in Afghanistan where the 9/11 attacks had been conceptualized and planned. President Bush, in his address to the nation on September 20, 2001, gave an ultimatum to the Taliban, which had already been conveyed to them earlier privately, namely that, “The Taliban must act and act immediately. They will hand over the terrorists or they will share in their fate.”\(^\text{26}\) When the Taliban refused to comply, the United States, assisted by the Afghan Northern Alliance, launched an attack on the Taliban on October 7, 2001 under the code name “Operation Enduring Freedom.”\(^\text{27}\)
The war commenced with a colossal aerial bombardment of all the Taliban and Al Qaeda positions, following which the other phases of the war were launched. The Taliban regime collapsed very quickly and a sizable portion of the Taliban and Al Qaeda leadership, along with scores of its operatives, were killed or captured. However, Mullah Omar, the Taliban leader, and the Al Qaeda leaders Osama Bin Laden and his deputy Ayman Al Zawahiri were not captured or killed, and have not been captured since. They had been cornered in the Tora Bora mountain range at that time, but due to lack of adequate effort on the part of coalition forces they escaped from the dragnet.

The greatest mistake committed at that time, besides the lack of adequate forces, was that the escape routes on the Pakistan side of the border were not sealed off effectively either by the coalition forces or by the Pakistani army, thus enabling the remnants of the Taliban and their leadership to escape to the FATA region of Pakistan where their fellow tribesmen provided them the much needed refuge, protection, and sanctuary. Adding to the difficulties was the fact that the Coalition Forces were being assisted by the Northern Alliance, which consisted of Tajiks and Uzbeks who were not familiar with the terrain in this part of southern Afghanistan, which was inhabited by the Pashtuns. This area had a series of interconnecting tunnels and caves, which had been constructed by the Mujahedeen during the period of Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, to fight the Soviet army in the Pashtun area. Because of lack of knowledge of the ground, the Northern Alliance could not prevent the escape of these individuals. In addition to the tribal loyalties, the Pashtuns were resentful of the Tajiks and Uzbeks, who, besides being of different ethnic stock, were intruding in the Pashtun backyard.

With a determined “push” with Special Forces, U.S. ground troops, and locals of the area acting as the hammer, and with the Pakistan army providing the anvil by effectively covering the escape routes, the mission to capture the top leadership would have been successful. It was a very grave mistake not to have destroyed the complete structure of the Taliban and Al Qaeda at that time. Thus the main leadership in the form of three top leaders remained intact with serious repercussions to the strategic paradigm of the future course of the war on terror, which will be discussed subsequently.

Formation of the Afghan Government

An interim government with Hamid Karzai as interim president was formed following the Bonn Conference in December 2001. His
appointment as interim president was later ratified by the “Loya Jirga” (Grand Assembly) of Afghan leaders in June 2002. The interim government drafted a new constitution for Afghanistan, which enshrined democratic institutions and citizen’s rights, especially those relating to women. This new constitution was subsequently ratified by the second “Loya Jirga,” enabling war-torn and war-weary Afghanistan to transition from dictatorship to popular empowerment. This indeed was a milestone in the history of the country and promised an encouraging and positive future.

Elections were held on October 9, 2004 for the installation of a constitutionally elected president. There was a very large turnout of voters and it is estimated that over 10 million eligible people voted despite the threat from the Taliban to boycott the election process, indicating the popular desire for democracy and stability in the country. Another very positive development was that the women exercised their franchise in large numbers, again reinforcing the fact that women have equal rights and equal desire in the governance of their nation, which is very much in conformity with the tenets of Islam. Hamid Karzai was elected president by a huge margin. Later, parliamentary elections were held in September 2005, and the parliament was convened on December 18 of the same year, after a lapse of 32 years, ushering in a new dawn for the Afghan people. However, in spite of the elected representatives of the people governing the nation for over eight years, including the period of the interim government, and international peacekeeping forces combating the Taliban and Al Qaeda militants, the hopes for a terror-free and stable Afghanistan have not been realized. In fact, the situation has deteriorated considerably instead of improving, and there is no end in sight for the elimination of the Taliban or Al Qaeda in the near term.

The U.S. National Intelligence Estimate Report of 2008, though not made public, indicated that the situation had become very serious and additional troops would be required to protect Kabul, and that the Northwest region of Pakistan remained a safe haven for the terrorists. It is essential to analyze the reasons for the failure to achieve the aims in Afghanistan so as to enable a new approach to be charted and to take necessary steps to ensure that Afghanistan does not become a failed state, and once again the epicenter of terrorist activities and a sanctuary for Al Qaeda and extremist Taliban.

After the fall of the Taliban, the writ of the Afghan government could not be established completely over the entire country, even though a tenuous and fragile peace was maintained with the help of the international peacekeepers, and the Coalition and NATO
forces, who were underresourced for the task. There was also a lack of “strategic direction” from Washington as to their exact goals in Afghanistan. To add to the woes and confusion, a second front was opened in Iraq, compounding the problems. These unsettled conditions provided an opportunity to the warlords to reestablish their control over their respective areas of influence in the country.\textsuperscript{37} Thus the militias of various warlords increasingly turned their attention to building their ethnic and factional power bases in the outlying provinces and thereby prevented effective government control to be established over these areas.

To a great extent these conditions also helped in facilitating large-scale cultivation of poppies,\textsuperscript{38} thereby promoting the production of narcotics, which in turn financed the Taliban insurgency, even though, when the Taliban were in power, they had banned the cultivation of poppies\textsuperscript{39} and enforced it ruthlessly. The U.S. Special Envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, the late Richard Holbrooke, while addressing the Brussels Forum conference in Belgium, on March 20, 2009, was very critical about U.S. efforts to eradicate poppy crops in Afghanistan, and termed it “wasteful and ineffective.” He said that the United States was spending $800 million a year on counternarcotic operations, which could have been better utilized for supporting the farmers.\textsuperscript{40} Therefore the United States planned to revamp the entire reconstruction effort in Afghanistan by focusing on aid for agriculture, and at the same time curtailing counternarcotics campaigns, which only drove the poor farmers to support the Taliban. The aim was to have greater concentration on improving food production by assisting small-scale farmers who comprise more than 80 percent of working-age males in Afghanistan,\textsuperscript{41} providing them an alternative that would also help in turning them away from Taliban recruitment. This approach would be beneficial in the long run since agriculture is the key to economic sustainability in a predominantly agricultural economy.\textsuperscript{42}

The conditions of ambivalent governance, or, one may say, lack of governance, in areas other than Kabul, were responsible for the resurgence of the Taliban and Al Qaeda, since they had not been totally eliminated; they had merely relocated and repositioned themselves on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border to conduct their terrorist activities and further operations around the world.

Why is it that even after almost nine years of the formation of the government, the political institutions in Afghanistan remain very weak? The civil administrative infrastructure and institutions like the police force, army and the judiciary have not been built up to
the desired levels of efficiency and numbers. Enforcement of the rule of law, security, administration, and governance of the nation have suffered a great deal, necessitating induction of additional American forces to combat the resurgent Taliban to bring a sense of security among the people, and to prop up the weak and fragile government of Hamid Karzai.

The rebuilding and reconstruction of the infrastructure of the country, which had been totally destroyed during almost 25 years of fighting that had been raging in Afghanistan in one form or another since the Soviet invasion in 1979, should have been the first priority of President Karzai’s government. Nation-building activities should have included eradication of poverty and meeting the basic necessities of the common man like health care, electric power, adequate water supply, functioning roads, construction of schools and hospitals, and, more importantly, creating job and employment opportunities so that the people could earn a decent living and at the same time be gainfully engaged in development activities.

An interview done for the BBC Question Time Programme aired as late as December 2009, with the governor of Uruzgan Province, Saeed Osman Sadaat, and the people of Dehrawad town, located only 65 miles from the capital of the Province Tirin Kot, revealed the concern of the population regarding lack of development. They asked him questions like why the road linking their town to Tirin Kot had not been constructed; why there was lack of good teachers in schools; and what the government was doing to improve the irrigation system since their livelihood was mainly dependent on agriculture, and lack of water was a great problem. The governor’s answers were evasive and what was surprising was that he said that there was no money for the developmental work despite the large allocation of finances for this purpose by the United States and its allies. For implementation of the above tasks it was also imperative to provide security in towns and villages by enforcing the rule of law strictly. Insecurity was the most pressing threat to the public, particularly in the far-flung Northern provinces.

The reconstruction efforts should have been the visible face of the government’s efforts and would have gone a long way in assuaging the fears of the ordinary citizen. At the same time it would have distanced the people from the Taliban since they would have been gainfully employed and thus would not become victims of the radical propaganda of the Taliban. Also, the public would have seen that they had a responsible and responsive government that cared for their needs. The economic growth of the nation is essential for the uplift
of a society; however, this has not been achieved even after eight years and there is no visible improvement in any of these fields.

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and American forces should also have laid equal emphasis on providing security for the rebuilding and reconstruction activities to take shape instead of just focusing on elimination of the remnants of the Taliban. However, the ISAF’s main focus was on military solutions alone and hence it has not succeeded for the past eight years since concomitant nation-building activity was not undertaken in any meaningful and integrated manner.

The main reasons for the government’s inability to establish its firm grip on proper governance and ensure peace and stability can be attributed to the following reasons. After the invasion of Iraq, the Afghanistan front was relegated to second priority and not enough attention was paid to the tactical and strategic requirements in Afghanistan for preventing the regrouping and resurgence of the Taliban. Afghanistan should have remained as the “Center of Gravity” for the war on terror, but instead a new front in Iraq was opened unnecessarily, grabbing all the resources, attention, and headlines, with disastrous consequences to both theaters of operations. Afghanistan became the “Forgotten Front.” As in the past after the departure of Soviet troops in 1989, Afghanistan was left to fend for itself; in the war against terror too, the United States once again abandoned Afghanistan, resulting in the resurgence and reinvigoration of the Taliban.

The complete institutional infrastructure of Afghanistan, that is, the administrative services, police force, the judiciary, and the army had been destroyed during the Soviet occupation, and subsequently when the Taliban were the rulers. Obviously these take time to rebuild; hence, in their absence, proper governance could not be ensured. However, eight years was a long enough time and it was imperative to have achieved the rebuilding of all these institutions during that period. However, due to lack of strategic direction and necessary impetus and push not being given by both the United States and the Afghan governments, it remained neglected.

There was no rule of law during the Taliban regime; they administered justice in a capricious manner. After Hamid Karzai took charge, the judicial system was not resurrected and there was an absence of accountability and lack of enforcement of law and order. Furthermore, there was rampant corruption at all levels of governance, particularly among the officials and various construction agencies, which also hampered reconstruction. The extent of disenchantment
with the government and the scale of corruption can be gauged from the comments of Haji Hakimullah, a resident of Laghman province, recorded in the Washington Post. “He said that he celebrated when the Taliban were ousted in 2001, because he did not believe in extremist ideology. However the Karzai Government was so corrupt and the officials demanded hundreds of bribes just to let him run his moderate fabric shop, therefore he would be happy if the Taliban returned.” According to other residents, the governor misappropriated money from the sale of state land, took bribes from the local timber trade, stalled international development work until the contractors paid bribes, and prevented construction of a bridge until he was paid $30,000. Thus besides lack of security, corruption became the bane of Afghanistan, and the main concern of the Afghan people. The Taliban and even common criminals took full advantage of this prevailing vacuum in governance and did not allow smooth reconstruction efforts to proceed.

Another major cause of governmental dysfunction was the Pakistan factor. Since the Pakistani military were the main mentors and supporters of the Taliban regime, they had very close links with them. Pakistan admitted this for the first time in July 2009 when President Zardari said that the Taliban were “created and nurtured” by them as a policy to achieve short-term tactical objectives. He also said that the “terrorists of today were the heroes of yesteryear until 9/11 occurred and they began to haunt us as well.” After 9/11, even though Pakistan abandoned its ally, the Taliban, and provided full support to the United States in its war on terror in Afghanistan, it did not go far enough in the elimination of the Taliban, which can be attributed to fact that the Pashtuns who inhabit the area on both sides of the Durand Line have tribal loyalties across the border, and as such the border region on either side provided safe sanctuaries and protection to the Taliban. Moreover the FATA area was itself loosely administered by Pakistan, which facilitated their resurgence.

The Pakistan army was also not fully equipped for counterinsurgency operations. Pakistan wanted to “run with the hare and hunt with the hounds” at the same time; the underlying motive of all Pakistani actions in the past in this region reflects its concerns about strengthening its security against India. In Pakistan’s perception, Afghanistan provides the necessary strategic depth, and thus Pakistan intends to maintain its influence over Afghanistan after the foreign troops depart, when that eventually happens. Pakistan was therefore playing the waiting game, and when foreign troops left, Pakistan would have an ideal opportunity to reassert its control over
Afghanistan with the remnants, or reincarnations of the Taliban. Unfortunately this strategy of Pakistan boomeranged on them as discussed later in this chapter.

**THE ROAD AHEAD—A NEW APPROACH**

The prevalent conditions of instability and the resurgence of the Taliban necessitated a strategic shift in the conduct of operations. A totally new and a very “bold, imaginative and innovative approach” with an all-inclusive strategy encompassing military, economic, social, and nation-building activities was needed to address the entire lot of issues in a holistic manner, avoiding the pitfalls of the past. The United States needed to recalibrate its entire war effort so that conflict resolution could be worked out. With this aim in view a blueprint was worked out after very careful deliberations, and President Obama announced his new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, on December 1, 2009. The highlights of the new strategy included:

- Deployment of an additional 30,000 American troops in Afghanistan along with troops from allied countries (approximately 7,000) by the first part of 2010 so that they could target the insurgency and secure key population centers and deny Al Qaeda safe haven and reverse the Taliban’s resurgence.
- A preliminary timetable to begin withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan starting in July 2011.
- The training of Afghan security forces so that they ultimately take over the responsibility of their own security.

The above strategy was to be carried out in three areas simultaneously. First, implement the military strategy to break the Taliban’s momentum in 18 months, that is, by July 2011. Second, follow the civilian strategy to strengthen Afghanistan’s government, and provide assistance based on its performance. In this connection President Obama said, “The days of providing blank checks are over.” Toward this end, steps were to be taken by Afghan government to eradicate corruption and hold functionaries at all levels accountable for proper governance. Third, since success in Afghanistan was inextricably linked with the elimination of extremists from the border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan, the United States would work in partnership with the Pakistan government to prevent the “cancer from spreading.”
The speech was meant to convey a message to various groups at the same time: to the domestic audience where public opinion was turning against the war in Afghanistan and on his handling of it, and to Afghanistan and Pakistan who would have to do their part more vigorously, particularly Afghanistan, because the Afghan government would be forced to get its act together by the timeline of July 2011 set by the president. In addition it was a very good move to indicate that the U.S. and ISAF forces would not be staying on in Afghanistan beyond its stabilization. It would thus placate the war weariness of the domestic audience in the United States and at the same time also address the apprehensions of the neighbors of Afghanistan, that is, Iran, Russia, India, and China who were much concerned with the indefinite presence of such a large U.S. force in their neighborhood.

The initial results of the new strategy were very encouraging. However, its ultimate success would be visible in due course, and General McChrystal, the commanding general of ISAF at that time, was confident that it would take about 18 months to turn around the Taliban insurgency. As regards the commencement of withdrawal after 18 months, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said that the date was not rigid and would depend on the progress and ground conditions then. Speaking about the State of the Union address on CNN, National Security Adviser James L. Jones echoed the same view when he said, “2011 is not a cliff, it’s a ramp.”

The Obama strategy enunciated for Afghanistan and Pakistan is sound and has taken into consideration the important issues affecting that region, nonetheless there are some essential aspects that need due consideration to ensure its success. The new approach must be guided by the main determinants, which are the “imperatives,” as it were, for any Afghan strategy to succeed. These consist of the historical background of Afghanistan, its geographical location and the cultural underpinnings of its people, and how the stability and security of Afghanistan affects the safety and security of the rest of the world in terms of eradication of terrorism. While the new U.S. Af-Pak strategy for Afghanistan was combined with Pakistan because of the intimate connection between the two, it is also important to analyze and factor in the sensitivities of its other neighbors, such as Iran, which shares its border, and also those of India, Russia, and China who too have a stake in the stability of Afghanistan, in addition to the concerns of the Western nations. Afghanistan must not become the hub for terrorist activities once again in the future.

However, what is of greater importance is to understand the expectations of the Afghans—what do the people of Afghanistan want and
what are their aspirations for their own future? For far too long, the national interests of other nations, particularly those of the West, vis-à-vis the “new great game” in this region, have guided the policy framework for Afghanistan, which have been at cross-purposes to the interests of the Afghan people. Therefore this thinking requires a quantum change.

The time has come to concentrate on “development-based governance” with the aim of tackling different issues simultaneously. The important areas the government needs to concentrate on are proper governance and establishment of the rule of law, security and protection of the people, and economic development of the country through developmental projects, with benefit to all the people throughout the provinces, not just confined to the capital, Kabul, but spread to the remotest corners of the country. With visible improvements on the ground in all these activities, the people would be dissuaded from assisting the Taliban or joining their ranks. “Afghanization of the country,” that is, full involvement and participation of the people of Afghanistan in all the developmental activities and in the country’s future is the need of the hour. Effective and accountable institutions must be created that are responsive to the needs of the people. The way forward to achieve this is to enable Afghans to govern themselves and to build “Afghan Capacity” for the nation’s progress.

**STABILITY AND NATION-BUILDING**

The first priority is to draw up a blueprint for the reconstruction and rebuilding of the infrastructure while at the same time ensuring security of life and property and enforcement of the rule of law for the Afghan people. Simultaneously, socioeconomic development is essential. In the words of a highly educated and Westernised Afghan citizen, Dr. Safi Ahmad Ahadyar, who spoke to Adam Day of *The Legion* magazine regarding what Afghanistan needs, “I trust only my own country to be independent. We just want to be stable. If NATO wants to help Afghanistan they have to pave the ground for education. They should invite the people to not fight. There is no need for the military to bring guns and more guns, bombs and aircraft in here. There is no need for the military to patrol all the time. Everybody is tired of all these things. . . . If you want to help Afghans should try to develop education, try to develop the economy, and try to discover some resources like petrol and gas that the Afghans can use. That is the way to help us. . . . I’m not saying that everyone should take out their military from here right now and that there should be
no fighting here, because then I know there will be no development here. We just want the United Nations, if in reality they want to help Afghanistan, they should invite all the leaders of Afghanistan and they should pave the ground for them to have the same unity and to have the same brotherhood with each other and stop fighting. They should talk to all sides. With the Pashtun, the Tajiks, the Hazara, the Uzbeks. They should bring them all to the same table. They should talk with them, discuss with them. And divide the power for all. When all are in agreement, they won’t fight with each other. We will have good unity and they will have good security.”

The above sentiments by and large adequately sum up the feelings and desires of the Afghan people. Therefore, the question is how to implement these on the ground. Besides nation-building activity, other important issues like the training and equipping of the administrative services including the police and the army also have to be undertaken simultaneously; some concrete suggestions in this regard are offered later. Corruption, which is the bane of this poor country, has to be eliminated so that the funds allocated are utilized for legitimate purposes.

The prerequisite for any reconstruction and rebuilding activity is to create a secure environment for the workers so that they are not intimidated, but rather feel safe to carry out their tasks without fear of attacks and reprisals from the Taliban and other Anti-National Elements (ANE). One of the methods to achieve this is to deploy self-contained Civic Action and Reconstruction Teams (CARTs), something like the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), but with an expanded mandate and inbuilt security apparatus, and greater accountability with oversight mechanisms to eradicate corruption and ensure timely completion of projects. These CARTs should be deployed in a grid pattern covering various villages and towns. The CARTs should be self-contained with necessary wherewithal in terms of requisite number of troops from the army, police, and construction workers for the building and repair of schools, hospitals, roads, electric and water supply, and other infrastructural development. In addition there should be administrative staff, teachers, and doctors to provide the civic amenities to the population. Locals must be employed for the various tasks mentioned above which would ensure employment for them. Also, the projects must be planned in consultation with the elders of the area and the representatives of the people so that they have a stake in the development of their villages and towns. In this manner economic development of the area would also take place side by side with other activities mentioned above. It
would be prudent to raise local militias in their respective areas, as the United States did in Iraq, so that these militias can combat the resurgent Taliban. It is essential that the activities of such militias be coordinated and dovetailed with other forces operating in the area, and also be overseen and strictly monitored so that they do not end up fighting each other or with the government forces. One way to keep them under control and to employ them properly would be to mesh them into the overall operations of the CARTs. It is also essential that they be properly organized and structured, and be put under the control of a responsible authority, and not just armed independently.

Requisite funds should be allocated for all the projects depending on the requirements in each location, as these are bound to vary. All projects must be completed on a basis of “Turn Key Projects” to avoid or minimize the possibilities of corruption. What has happened so far is that only a fraction of the money allocated has been utilized for the reconstruction effort, while the major portion has been siphoned off as commissions and bribes by middlemen and corrupt officials at various levels up the chain, due to rampant corruption and lack of accountability and transparency at all levels.55

The troops allocated for such a grid pattern of deployment must be sufficiently strong and have necessary manpower, weapons, equipment, and other facilities like air support for emergencies. Such a force must be positioned in a tactical deployment, covering the sensitive sites and areas, and must remain in position until completion of the project and return of normalcy. A mix of ISAF and Afghan troops along with the locals should be aimed for so that they are strong enough to deal with the Taliban effectively. While their primary task should be to provide security to the population and to the CARTs, and at the same time to counter the influence of Taliban, they should be able to fight and destroy the hard-core Taliban and prevent them from making inroads into the population in their respective areas of operation. It is also very important for the troops to build relationships with the elders of the villages in the vicinity of their deployment areas, and all tasks that are undertaken for rebuilding must be carried out in consultation with them. It must be remembered that in Afghan society it is the village elders—Shura (meaning “in consultation”)—who exercise control over all activities in their respective areas and villages.

Stationing troops only in strong fortresses like Bagram Airbase, who venture out only to carry out specific missions and thereafter return to base will not solve the problem; to make a difference they have to be deployed tactically in positions outside their main base in
the areas where reconstruction and rebuilding is being carried out. This new concept of deployment and change in operational stance may appear to be expensive in troops; however, mixed deployment of NATO and Afghan troops and the armed militias recommended would be able to fulfill the numbers required. The other advantage of such deployment and presence of troops nearby is that it would make the citizens feel safe, and they would realize that their government is interested in their welfare and progress, and at the same time the Taliban activity would be kept in check.

When required “Quick Reaction Teams” from these deployment areas could undertake raids on the Taliban and their hideouts with the least amount of time delay. Too much reliance on vehicle-borne patrols must be avoided, since that is one of the major reasons for casualties due to improvised explosive devices (IED). Instead, foot patrols should be employed, which would be quite feasible if the deployment is done in the vicinity of villages as suggested above.

The intelligence apparatus needs to be strengthened substantially so that actionable and real-time intelligence is available to the agencies that need it most, enabling them not only to react in real time but also allowing them to take measures to prevent Taliban suicide bombings. Good intelligence is the key to successful conduct of counterinsurgency operations. The vulnerability of complexity of intelligence operations in Afghanistan can be gauged from the suicide attack on CIA Forward Operating Base Chapman in the eastern Afghan province of Khost on December 30, 2009, where eight CIA operatives (seven Americans and one Jordanian working for CIA) were killed by what was believed to be a Taliban suicide bomber. The initial report indicated that the CIA agents had invited him inside the base for intelligence gathering. However, detailed investigations later identified the bomber as a Jordanian named Humam Khalil Abu-Mulal al-Balawi who was a trusted informant of the CIA, and had lured the intelligence officers into a trap promising new information on Al Qaeda, indicating the extent to which the intelligence apparatus has been penetrated. The individual was in fact a double agent, having been an Al Qaeda sympathizer early on. Being aware of the modus operandi of Al Qaeda and the Taliban, he was of considerable use to the U.S. intelligence agencies. There were also reports of the shortage of Afghan interpreters, opening the door to the Taliban to easily infiltrate, posing as interpreters.

The ISAF and Afghan government intelligence needs to be revamped so that such incidents are prevented; in fact, these agencies must devise means to keep ahead of the Taliban’s intelligence-gathering
capability. Unfortunately the intelligence about the “human terrain,” which is so vital for the conduct of counterinsurgency operations, has not been factored in the overall strategy by the ISAF. So far emphasis has been on gathering information about the insurgents so that they can be targeted and killed, whereas efforts should be on getting information about the causes that support insurgency, so that these can be addressed properly. Accurate, timely, and actionable information can be obtained from the security forces and other agencies that are in contact with the population. If troops and development agencies (CARTs) are deployed in the vicinity of villages as recommended, better intelligence could be obtained.

Along with the above, imparting education should be the key priority, since it is crucial for empowerment of the populace, and eradication of ignorance. The importance of education in Islam can be gauged from the fact that the word Quran itself comes from the root word *Iqra*, meaning “Read,” and in the very first verse of revelation to Prophet Mohammed Archangel Gabriel (*Jibraeel* in Arabic) commanded him, “Read in the name of thy Lord…. He who taught (the use of) the pen, taught man that which he knew not” (Quran 96:1, 4–5). Therefore, proper education of all human beings, and particularly the young, is incumbent on Muslims. It is essential to impart the correct teachings of the religion, concurrent with emphasis on other subjects of modern education, this should be undertaken as a priority by religious and teachers of other subjects who do not have a radical ideology. For this purpose it is necessary to build more schools, both for boys and girls, and this must be done by the local elders (*Shura*), so that it has the acceptance of the people. Moreover, it has been found that in Afghan society the women are eager to get their children educated so that they can lead a better life and also are not swayed and misled by the extremists, which would also be the case if they knew the correct teachings of Islam.

Another method to spread the message of Islam, and here it means both the religious tenets and the literal meaning of Islam—“message of peace and brotherhood of man”—should be undertaken from the pulpits of all the mosques for the residents of various localities. This will have a salutary impact as Afghans, and, for that matter, all Muslims are very much influenced by the sermons in the mosques, particularly during Friday prayers, where large congregations gather. In this way the message of peace, which is the cornerstone of Islam, propagated by respected religious leaders, will reach even the remotest corner of the country. However, it must be ensured that the Imams in the mosques and religious teachers who deliver the sermons are not
seen as the lackeys of the government; otherwise the effort will lose its credibility.

Likewise the Imams should be posted as religious teachers in all the units of the Afghan national army to teach the correct practices of the religion (Islam) to all the troops. This will have a double advantage; besides benefiting the individual soldiers it will also carry the correct message and teachings of Islam to the family members of the soldiers when they go home on leave. The Indian army has a religious teacher posted in the various units to cater to the spiritual needs and development of troops; a similar system can be adopted in the Afghan army. An additional advantage of this would be that the radical elements of the Taliban and Al Qaeda would be denied the ideological battle space to indoctrinate the youth, because when the religious leaders preach the correct tenets of Islam and condemn violence and the killing of innocents it will carry weight and undercut Al Qaeda’s ideological base. An illustration of this was when the Ulema of Deoband Seminary in India (which received much criticism in the past for some of their edicts), in fact came out openly against acts of terrorism59 and condemned them as totally un-Islamic during their annual meeting, which was presided over by India’s Home Minister, Mr. P. Chidambaram and was attended by over 500,000 Muslims, a message that was very well received by Muslims all around the country. All these actions go a long way in distancing the people from extremist ideology, which is the single most important factor for defeating the militants and their ideology of hatred. When the population is against them, the Taliban, or, for that matter, any other militant group, cannot survive. The young, too, would understand that there is no place for terrorism or extremism in Islamic tenets and that it is a religion of peace, and therefore they must detach themselves from the Taliban.

A very sore point with the people has been the high toll of civilian casualties because of American air strikes by Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) which have been responsible for the deaths of many innocent civilians, including women, children, and disparate groups such as members of wedding parties, people celebrating other festive occasions, and even members of the government police force. Such drone strikes have become a routine affair, and have been termed very lightly and insensitively in some cases as “mistaken identity” or collateral damage, causing enormous suffering to the affected families that have lost their children or parents, leading to greater suffering for them and consequently to anger and animosity of the population against the Afghan government as well as the Americans. The drone strikes are counterproductive because they are responsible for
creating more terrorists as the innocent family that suffers resorts to taking revenge, thus defeating the very purpose for which these strikes are launched.

The importance of this can be gauged from the fact that in an interview with BBC correspondent Lyse Doucet, President Hamid Karzai said his “first demand” to America’s new president was to stop the growing toll of civilian casualties largely caused by U.S.-led air strikes.\textsuperscript{60} Civilian casualties by air strikes were acknowledged even by the former U.S. Commander of International Force in Afghanistan, General David D. McKiernan, on February 18, 2009, in Washington, when he was commenting about the introduction of additional ground troops into Afghanistan, as ordered by President Obama. He said, “The relatively heavy use of bombing and other air power in Afghanistan has caused an increasing number of civilian casualties. The increase of ground troops could allow for use of fewer airstrikes.”\textsuperscript{61}

Unfortunately one such incident took place in early May 2009, while presidents Asif Zardari and Hamid Karzai were in Washington to discuss the Af-Pak strategy with President Obama, when a large number of civilians were killed in an air strike on the Taliban in Farah province of Afghanistan due to not following the laid-down procedures correctly. It was reported that a 2000-pound bomb was dropped by a B-1 bomber on a building without proper visual and ground confirmation of the target.\textsuperscript{62} It was also reported that the targets were normally designated by Afghan informers in the pay of the U.S. forces. Many a time these informers have indicated the targets (houses) of people they want to settle scores with. The procedure involves the mere placement of a small and innocuous electronic chip at the target, indicating to the drone that it houses a Taliban leader. Such incidents, besides causing much embarrassment, are also a major cause for alienation of the population. General Stanley A. McChrystal, during his confirmation hearing as the new commander in Afghanistan, told the U.S. Senate that “it is one of the most dangerous things we face in Afghanistan particularly with the Afghan people.”\textsuperscript{63} These drone attacks are self-defeating, both politically and strategically. Realizing its importance, General McChrystal issued orders to the effect that the NATO forces should break from fights when militants resort to hiding in Afghan houses so that civilians are not killed.\textsuperscript{64} This was a welcome change and an important step toward reframing the rules of engagement (ROE).

A lesson learned by Bill Blair’s covert operations in Laos in the 1960s can also be successfully applied in Afghanistan. He was a CIA
operative who trained Hmong tribesmen to resist the Communist onslaught into Laos. He says, “Initially the tribesmen were trained by Thai Army personnel who understood their language and customs and looked like them and could therefore train them well. The tribesmen were very successful in their task. Later when more American troops were deployed for their training and also there was greater reliance on air power to assist them in their missions, the tribesmen became over dependent on air power and foreign aid, which eroded their fighting skills. American air power led to untold civilian death and tremendous resentment of the United States.” He says to flash forward 40 years to Afghanistan; his advice, “keep your footprint small; don’t use trainers who do not know the language or culture; don’t let the locals become dependent on American air power. Train them to tactics suited to their circumstances and don’t let the locals think that Americans will fight their battles for them; get them ready to fix their own problems.” American missile attacks by UAVs in the FATA and in Waziristan areas of Pakistan have also resulted in a large number of civilian casualties and have been the cause of alienation of the population and consequently filling the ranks of the terrorists.

As is often the case, it appears that things haven’t changed much and lessons learned from the past have been forgotten. Similar lessons can be learned from the Soviet experience in Afghanistan. Lieutenant General Ruslan Aushev of the former Soviet Union, considered a hero of the Afghan war, while speaking to BBC correspondent Richard Galpin in February 2009, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, said “the U.S. and NATO led forces [are] making the same mistakes as the Soviet Union and have learned nothing from Soviet experience. The doubling of forces won’t lead to a solution on [the] ground. The conflict cannot be solved by military means, and no one can reach any political goal in Afghanistan relying on military force. There are parallels with the strategy followed by the Soviets; once again U.S. is trying to stabilise a foreign friendly government and once again they are facing rebellion by Islamist militants, which is growing in strength and has increasing support of the population as the occupation drags on inflicting a mounting number of civilian casualties.” The United States commanders in Afghanistan will be well advised to apply these and other lessons, which have been learned over the past eight years in Afghanistan.

The Taliban and Al Qaeda leadership operates from its bases located along the Afghan-Pakistan border and the FATA region of Pakistan. For the reasons that have been mentioned earlier, the
Pakistan government under President Musharraf was very ambivalent in combating the Taliban, with the result that they have grown in strength and in geographic spread. Even though the elected civilian Government of President Zardari of Pakistan tried to reverse that trend, there are a number of non-state actors located on the soil of Pakistan who continue to assist the Taliban. The recent Mumbai attacks in India were also the handiwork of such elements and their associates. The scale of sophistication in planning and execution suggests that it must have been the work of experts.

The terrorist outfits located in the FATA region, flushed with their successes in Mumbai and in the outlying region of North West Frontier Province of Pakistan, were emboldened and shifted their terrorist activities to the cultural center and heartland of Pakistan itself—Lahore. This was evident from the terrorist attacks on the Sri Lankan cricket team in Lahore on March 3, 2009, killing six policemen. The laxity of the security arrangements can be gauged from the fact that all the terrorists managed to escape. This must have made them more confident because less than four weeks later they embarked on the most audacious attack on the police academy at Manawan on the outskirts of Lahore on March 30, 2009, and held a number of police trainee cadets hostage, killing eight of them. The Pakistani commandos were able to kill and capture the terrorists after a gun battle that lasted for over eight hours (one terrorist was captured alive, three blew themselves up, and one managed to escape).

Baitullah Mehsud, the head of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) at that time (he was later killed in a U.S. drone attack), located in the FATA area, claimed responsibility for these attacks and even boasted that he would carry out more such attacks elsewhere in future including on the White House in the United States. Incidentally, Baitullah Mehsud was also implicated in the killing of Benazir Bhutto in December 2007.

These incidents indicate that the security situation in Pakistan is very precarious and that there is a nexus between the insurgents and terrorists in the Frontier area with the militants in Punjab and perhaps with other such outfits in the other provinces of Pakistan as well. Some analysts who have studied the modus operandi of these terrorist groups say that a number of groups may have been involved: one providing the terrorist fighters, another the logistics and intelligence, and yet another the finance. While Baitullah Mehsud may have been boasting, Al Qaeda in Afghanistan could perhaps be the mastermind behind these attacks. What is clear is that there is a web of terrorist cells in the tribal region of Pakistan, and in Afghanistan, which must be eliminated.
The radical extremists hurt Pakistan more than anyone else. In the interest of peace and security around the world, Pakistan must take stringent action against all militant groups and against the Taliban in the FATA region and the NWFP. The civilian government of Pakistan will require all the help and assistance to tackle this menace urgently and effectively. President Obama’s new strategy for the war in Afghanistan includes providing assistance and working in partnership with Pakistan when it meets certain conditions. The broad regional approach, and the elevation of the importance of nonmilitary efforts toward the Af-Pak region is a positive strategy.

The Pakistan military successfully undertook the offensive in the Swat region in May 2009, and later was engaged in counterinsurgency operations in the Waziristan region where too it was able to eliminate a number of Taliban fighters. However, there was a substantial difference between the Swat operations from those in Waziristan. In Swat the TTP did not have roots and hence were considered outsiders, thereby the support of the locals was absent. In Waziristan the TTP has roots as a home-grown organization, and it is thus fighting in home territory, with a greater ability to get local support, a fact that the Pakistan army must factor in, in its operations in Waziristan. Pakistan must also undertake to prevent militants and extremists from carrying out cross-border attacks in Afghanistan and elsewhere, that is, Jammu and Kashmir and other parts of India as well.

It is interesting to note the findings of a study by the American Center for Progress (CAP), which concluded that insurgencies across the mountainous area along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border were inextricably linked to the entire region of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. The study also suggested that tensions between India and Pakistan on Pakistan’s eastern border adversely affected Pakistan military’s operations in combating the militancy effectively on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border; consequently a broad regional approach was recommended by the study addressing Pakistan’s security concerns with India.

While it is true that the militants cross over freely into Afghanistan and into the Jammu and Kashmir region of India from the FATA region and from Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK), the assessment of the above CAP study, that the Pakistan military is hampered in its counterinsurgency operations against the Taliban and other militant groups in the FATA and NWFP regions because its security is threatened from the eastern border with India, is totally unfounded and is misleading. For instance, it is a fact that India did not threaten Pakistan even after the Mumbai attacks on November 26, 2008, in
which the complicity of nonstate actors operating from Pakistan has been established without a doubt. Therefore, Pakistan’s apprehensions are unfounded. However, both India and Pakistan need to work out arrangements bilaterally to allay such fears. The elimination of the terrorists and their organizations is in the interest of both nations and would be beneficial from a near- and long-term perspective.

In view of the foregoing, President Obama needs to be pragmatic and realistic in his reappraisal of the policies to be put into force in respect to the Kashmir problem. Solving the Kashmir problem is of utmost importance for both India and Pakistan and the people of Jammu and Kashmir; however, this would have to be done bilaterally between these two neighbors, as India is very sensitive to third-party involvement. On the other hand, Pakistan is interested in internationalizing the problem by getting third-party involvement in the dispute. Such a solution would not be in the national interest of India and would not be acceptable to the government or people of India. Moreover Jammu and Kashmir is an integral part of India; its ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh, signed the Instrument of Accession to India in October 1947 after the partition of the Indian subcontinent, when the British ended their Raj. It was a mandatory requirement according to the terms and conditions of the partition for the princely states to either accede to India or Pakistan. However, India and Pakistan need to come to an understanding for easing tensions and eliminating the terrorists from this region. The United States should devise a different strategy to resolve this problem. While it cannot be the mediator, it could be a facilitator in the peace process in resolving the dispute.

It is also essential to understand that Pakistan too is a victim of terrorism. While the problems which are manifesting today have been the creation of its military governments of the past, the United States must also share an equal blame for creating these conditions, which have come about as the result of its arming, equipping, training, and financing the Mujahedeen to fight the Soviets during their occupation of Afghanistan, and its subsequent abandonment of Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal. The Taliban too had the tacit support of the United States in their earlier formation. The lawlessness in the FATA and NWFP regions and the surfeit of weapons availability over all these years has made this area an epicenter of militancy; the “Frankenstein’s monster” is now consuming its creators. While Pakistan must take stringent action to eliminate the militants, it must at the same time ensure that it does not alienate the population of that region. The way to achieve this is for Pakistan to involve the elders of
the area in negotiations, to resolve their grievances, and simultaneously to keep strict vigil on the militants and deal with them severely and effectively.

The “Swat Deal” which was signed between the government of Pakistan and pro-Taliban leader Maulana Sufi Mohammed of Swat Valley in February 2009 turned out to be a bane for the government of Pakistan. Many analysts in Pakistan, and in Washington and New Delhi, were wary of this deal since they felt that, like the past “deals” with pro-Taliban elders of that area during President Musharraf’s administration, it would once again give the Taliban space and time to regroup further, and would also encourage other regions to seek similar concessions. World opinion on this agreement was also divided. Some subscribed to the point of view held by U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates that the Swat Deal could lead to eventual stabilization of the region since it would distance the hard-core Taliban from the population and, therefore, could be worthy of emulation by the Afghan government. Others believed, as did the U.S. Special Envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Richard Holbrooke, that the agreement was tantamount to the capitulation of the state to the extremists and would only further embolden the militants. It appears that the latter view has turned out to be true, since the Taliban went on a rampage in Buner and Dir provinces, and Mingora township of the Swat region.

It is reported that the Pakistan government’s intention behind the deal was restricted to the setting up of Shariah courts, which in any case had existed in Swat in the past when it was a princely state, and their restitution again was meant to ensure speedy dispensation of justice. The government had contemplated that properly constituted Shariah courts with state-appointed qualified judges would be established for this purpose. This was a folly, given the track record of the Taliban, since they could not be relied upon. Thus these intentions of the government were belied because the hard-core Taliban utilized this opportunity to strengthen their hold further in the region. It is aptly said, “When you sow the wind, you reap the whirlwind.” Unfortunately for Pakistan, their scheme did not work out as desired; the Taliban went out of the control of the Pakistani establishment and posed a grave security threat to the very existence of the country itself as a secular democratic nation. Baitullah Mehsud, who was initially propped up by the ISI, turned against them by not conforming to the dictates of ISI and Pakistan army, and created mayhem in South Waziristan, and acts of terrorism in the heartland of Pakistan. A vivid example of the brutality of the Taliban following the Swat
deal was witnessed when the Taliban took law into their own hands and flogged a 17-year-old girl named Chaand, in March 2009, in the district of Matta in Swat valley, merely because she went out with a person who was not her husband. Its footage, filmed on a cell phone, was aired on Pakistan TV on April 2, 2009. This incident outraged the Pakistani public and Muslims all around the world.

Since the Pakistan government did not take stringent action against the culprits and also did not institute measures to prevent such flagrant violation of human rights, the Taliban were emboldened and made mockery of the rule of law. The Pakistan Human Rights Commission also revealed that the Taliban had committed many atrocities since the signing of the deal, and had taken control of the entire district, displacing the legitimate government. This blatant defiance of the law of the land by the Taliban created serious security concerns for Pakistan, and demanded an immediate response. The precarious situation, together with pressure from the United States, forced the Pakistan army to launch a full-scale offensive against the Taliban in the Buner and Dir provinces and the Mingora township of the Swat valley in May 2009, after the Taliban wrested control of these areas from the government machinery.

The employment of the army in an all-out bid to destroy the Taliban put the Pakistan government in a dilemma. Whereas rooting out the Taliban had become an absolute necessity due to the existential threat posed by them, with the very survival of the country at stake, the offensive resulted in a large-scale displacement of the civilian population. An estimated 2.5 million people had to flee from their homes to escape being caught in the crossfire of the Pakistan army and the Taliban, and became internally displaced persons (IDP) from these provinces. It was a cause of grave concern as it could have serious long-term effects on the security of Pakistan and Afghanistan. While the offensive was a success militarily and resulted in a short-term gain of winning the battle against the Taliban in the Swat valley, what was required was to ensure that it did not end up in losing the war on terror in the long run because of the suffering of the people; the collateral damage was considerable and many a hearth and home were destroyed and those who were affected adversely could easily fall prey to Taliban propaganda and join their ranks. Therefore their proper resettlement was of great importance. In spite of initial glitches, the Pakistan government was able to meet the commitment to a large extent.

The offensive in Swat was undertaken in the interest of the security and integrity of the country and had the support of the majority of the Pakistani people as well as the people of the Swat Valley, who were fed
up with the excesses of the Taliban. Nevertheless, the Taliban ideology has made inroads into the thinking of some of the gullible tribal people, mostly among the poor, and will not just fade away into history easily. Therefore, it was essential for the Pakistan government to take very effective measures to resettle the displaced population with massive economic assistance so that they could rebuild their lives, and, more importantly, to condition them psychologically to withstand the radical propaganda of the Talban through well-thought-out education programs. The predicament of convincing and assuaging the feelings of the affected people remains a daunting task.

To convince the people of the bona fides of the government’s actions and intentions remains a difficult task, since the majority of the people of that region feel that Pakistan is fighting America’s war. Pakistan therefore must carry out a detailed strategic reappraisal to combat and arrest the onward march of the Taliban ideology into other areas in Pakistan’s heartland. Just eliminating the Taliban leaders is not enough; the radical ideology has to be destroyed from its roots. How deep the ideology has permeated was illustrated when the new leadership of Hakimullah Mehsud took charge of TTP immediately after Baitullah Mehsud was killed in a U.S. drone attack on August 5, 2009, and resorted to a spate of suicide attacks in Pakistan since September 2009 and which continue despite the crackdown by the security forces. It has been reported that Hakimullah is even more brash and radicalized than Baitullah Mehsud.

It is essential to reach out to the people so that they do not fall prey to the Taliban philosophy. One method could be to encourage the moderate elements of the Taliban, both in Afghanistan and Pakistan, to shun violence, and to involve them in the peace process. Governor Gulab Mangal of Helmand Province of Afghanistan, in an interview with the BBC, said that, “Reconciliation with the Taliban is possible.” According to him the Taliban can be divided into three categories, “first are hard core militants with international links with Al Qaeda; there can be no compromise with them. Second are nationalist Jihadis who are primarily fighting to expel foreign troops and who could be brought over eventually into the government. The third category [is] comprised of groups that have joined the insurgency for personal reasons such as resentment of weak government or abuse at the hands of the authorities, who too can be reconciled with.” He opined that it was possible to get the majority of the militants, comprising the second and third category of Taliban, whom he termed as “Moderate Taliban,” to renounce violence and join the mainstream and fight the hard-core Taliban.
It is reported that in the past, moderate Taliban leaders had indicated that they had broken off with Al Qaeda since the 9/11 attacks and were amenable to support the Afghan government. It is also believed that they were ready to concede that the Afghan territory would not be used to launch terrorist attacks in future if the foreign troops withdrew from Afghanistan. In view of their willingness to participate in governance there is a necessity to engage the moderate Taliban in negotiations so that they shun violence and get involved in nation-building. They should also be persuaded to participate in the parliamentary elections in the future. This is one of the ways to wean them away from the hard-core Taliban.

This aspect was also discussed during the London Conference on Afghanistan held on January 28, 2010, where foreign ministers of 70 countries held a one-day meeting to discuss the future assistance to be provided to Afghanistan to develop its capacity for proper governance. A sum of $140 million was pledged as a “reintegration fund” for the national reconciliation and reintegration of the reformed insurgents so as to provide jobs and security to them.

The other issue of importance in Afghanistan is the creation and build-up of the “Afghan Capacity,” that is, the necessary political and administrative infrastructure. So far it has not come up to the required level of efficiency and also lacks requisite numbers to perform effectively. President Obama had planned to build up the Afghan national army into an effective counterinsurgency force, of up to 134,000, with the necessary wherewithal, like airlift capability and other weapons and equipment. A joint panel of officials from Afghanistan, the United Nations, and troop-contributing countries went even further and approved plans to train an additional 100,000 security forces, increasing the strength of the Afghan national army to 171,000, and the police force to 134,000 by the end of 2011, and ultimately expanding it further to 240,000 soldiers for the army and 160,000 for the police force in the next five years. This plan for the increase in force levels was also endorsed at the London Conference on Afghanistan.

Najmuddin Shaikh, the former foreign secretary of Pakistan, had a word of caution for the Americans; he was of the view that the Afghan national army would mainly be officered by Tajiks, as the Pashtuns were reluctant to join the force. This could pose a very serious problem in maintaining ethnic balance, and consequently the regional connection would bring up the question of loyalties. Therefore, the Afghan national army must have a proper balance of officers from all regions, particularly the Pashtuns.
In view of the growing menace of the Taliban due to the paucity of troops, among other reasons, President Obama ordered the deployment of an additional 30,000 American troops in the first part of 2010. This was in accordance with the earlier recommendations of the then commander of ISAF in Afghanistan, General McChrystal as also per President Obama’s own plan which he had outlined in his address to the cadets at the U.S. Military Academy in West Point on December 1, 2009. General McChrystal was later dismissed in June 2010, because of his derisive remarks about some of the Obama administration’s top officials regarding the handling of the war in Afghanistan to a reporter from Rolling Stone. General David H. Petraeus, the head of U.S. Central Command, who had earlier successfully commanded the troops in Iraq during the “surge” operations in 2007, was made the ISAF commander in his place.

In addition to more U.S. troops, the shortage of troops can also be overcome by a novel alternative method. The British, during their Raj in the Indian subcontinent, utilized the local (native) troops for all their battles, not only within India, but also in foreign lands; Indian troops took part in the three-Anglo Burmese wars (1823, 1852, 1885), and the three Anglo-Afghan wars (1839, 1878, 1919). They also took part in operations in far-off places like Abyssinia (1867–1868), Sudan (1880s), South Africa (1899–1902), in Hong Kong against the Chinese in the Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901), and in the Young Husband expedition in Tibet (1903–1904). The Indian troops also fought in both world wars with over two million Indian troops in the Second World War.86

The Indian troops were officered by the British until the mid-1920s, and later by a mix of Indian and British officers. They were the backbone of the British Empire. They performed brilliantly in all the battles and the majority of troops in the recapture of Burma were from the Indian army under Field Marshal William Slim,87 who himself belonged to the Indian army. Likewise Field Marshal Claude Auchinleck, the British Commander of the Middle East during the Second World War, was also from the British Indian army.88 At the height of their Raj the British had only about 40,000 British troops in the whole of India, and a handful of civil servants for the security and administration of the vast Indian empire.

A similar experiment could be tried in Afghanistan by the Americans. The Afghan army units, with Afghan troops, could be officered by a mix of American and Afghan officers. The American officers selected for this task should be highly motivated, and should know Afghan languages (Pashto, Dari, etc.), and the customs, traditions, religious
beliefs, and cultural underpinnings of their troops. One such unit could be raised on an experimental basis and its performance evaluated before adopting it as a policy. The advantages that would accrue from this would be as follows:

- The shortage of American troops would be overcome to a great extent.
- The core of the officer cadre would be provided by the American officer corps. Such units would therefore be well trained and have greater staying power. It would also achieve the aim of training the Afghan army simultaneously.
- It would help in building the “Afghan Capacity,” which is essential under the prevailing circumstances. There will be greater participation of the Afghans themselves in the security and rebuilding of their country, which would provide them greater incentive and job opportunities.
- The troops, being locals, would have better knowledge of the ground and “human terrain.” The Afghan officers would provide the necessary interface between the American officers and the Afghan troops, thus ensuring better understanding and coordination and execution of operational tasks.
- There would be substantial saving in money since deployment of American troops is considerably more costly. The money thus saved could be utilized for developmental work in Afghanistan.
- Both from the short-term and long-term perspective it would be beneficial to Afghanistan. In the short term enough troops would be available to tackle the Taliban and prevent their resurgence, and in the long term a well-trained Afghan army would be available to cater to the security needs of the country.

It is estimated that the funding of the army would require about $2.5 billion annually to maintain, and another $1 billion for the police force. Funds for reconstruction and rebuilding would be separate, and thus a total of about $10 billion would be required. Afghanistan does not earn enough revenue to maintain such a large army and police force, yet it is essential, if law and order is to be enforced and the Taliban activities countered. Therefore it would be necessary for the international community and the United States to provide the necessary funds to Afghanistan for its development, as well as for the administrative services and the army and police forces.

Some of the U.S. generals are of the view that a “generational commitment” for Afghanistan, like that done for Germany and Europe
in the Marshall Plan, would have to be provided until Afghanistan can undertake all its responsibilities on its own, which may take up to ten years. Even the incoming British army chief, General Sir David Richards, voiced similar views in August 2009 when he said, “The Army’s role will evolve, but the whole process might take as long as 30 to 40 years.” He also said, “We need to focus on expansion of the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police.”

There is, however, a down side to this proposal; the prolonged presence of foreign troops on Afghan soil would be highly resented by the Afghan people. This approach will also create other problems in the region, since a long-term U.S. presence is not viewed favorably by the other countries, particularly Iran, which fears that the United States may attempt a “regime change” from Afghan territory. Russia, China, and India would also not like Western troops in their neighborhood for such a long period. Therefore, a comprehensive policy would have to be evolved keeping in mind the sensitivities of all these countries, as they could then be coopted in the overall development plan for Afghanistan.

The requisite training to bring up the efficiency of Afghanistan’s administrative services and security forces will also have to be ensured, and, in addition to the United States, facilities available from some of Afghanistan’s neighbors can be utilized to train them in the institutions in the countries where necessary infrastructure and expertise already exists. In fact, some training in this regard has been conducted for personnel of various Afghan ministries in India. For instance, the Administrative Staff College of India, Hyderabad, has conducted a few short and intensive courses for Afghan administrative staff of different ministries in 2008.

However, all the actions mentioned above cannot be implemented in isolation, and a comprehensive, all-inclusive strategic plan needs to be formulated in the larger context of the other problems confronting the Muslim world. As such the war in Afghanistan is connected to the overarching question of militancy in Pakistan, resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq, and eradication of poverty and illiteracy in the Muslim world. All these issues have to be addressed simultaneously to combat the scourge of terrorism.

President Obama is rightly concerned with the problems in Afghanistan, confronting not only the United States but also the entire region and its fallout on the overall issue of combating terrorism and the spread of radicalism worldwide. He addressed this crucial and vexing problem by appointing a special envoy for both Pakistan and Afghanistan, the late Richard Holbrooke, who was a
very seasoned diplomat having earlier been a special envoy of President Clinton to Bosnia, where he successfully brokered peace. The acting special envoy, Frank Ruggiero, must continue to bring peace and stability in the region, and to coordinate all efforts to achieve the United States’s strategic interests in Afghanistan and Pakistan. He would do well to follow the advice given to Holbrooke by his former colleague, Jeremy Ashdown, who was UN High Representative for Bosnia, where both worked together. The pertinent points of his advice, published in *Dawn* newspaper of Pakistan, are as follows:92

- Engage Iran in the negotiations; this could pave the way for Islamic countries, rather than the West, to help Pakistan regain control of its lawless borders where Al Qaeda and the Taliban have their sanctuaries.
- Involve China as well; this could open the way for a broader U.S.-China strategic relationship, which would be beneficial to all in the long run, as the world moves into deeper instability.
- Do not shy away from talking to the Taliban since the answer to the problems in Afghanistan lies not in the military battles but in finding a political solution for which the Taliban’s involvement would be necessary; however, they are at the moment gaining strength and would not be amenable to talks until they are weakened considerably and pushed back, militarily—which is where the surge in troops would be helpful. However, the operations after the surge should be so orchestrated that they do not become the cause for further alienation of the population, for if that happens the surge would prove to be counterproductive.

The other important point raised by Ashdown was that the international community had failed in Afghanistan to get its act together on a clear-cut joint plan. According to him, “the British think Afghanistan is Helmund, the Canadians think it is Kandahar, the Dutch think it is Uruzgan, while the Germans think it is the Panjshir Valley and the United States thinks it is chasing Osama bin Laden, and thus everyone sees Afghanistan through their own national prism.”93 These views were also expressed by European Union defense officials and analysts during an interview in February 2009.94 The interview revealed a perception gap and divergence of views between the United States and its allies regarding the strategy to be followed. The Europeans felt there was a need to carry out “strategic reassessment of their mission.” There was reluctance on the part of NATO allies contributing forces in Afghanistan to increase the number of their troops,
and also they did not want to get involved in combat operations. For example, Germany mandated its troops to remain in a relatively quiet area of northern Afghanistan and not get involved in combat operations in the south, where the Taliban are strong. The European allies also emphasized greater and better coordination between the military and development efforts; the Americans, on the other hand, pursued the military goals only, by applying the "hammer," as they put it.95

The resultant effect was that a unity of effort was not achieved and a joint strategic aim was lost sight of. All concerned must realize the mistakes committed in the past and formulate a joint strategy regarding the future goals in Afghanistan. However, what is of greater importance is to ascertain the wishes of the Afghan people and factor them into the overall strategy for it to have any meaningful outcome.

The London Conference of January 28, 2010 also saw a welcome change in the functioning strategy of the ISAF when British Foreign Secretary David Miliband emphasized the necessity for a joint strategy. He said "the biggest deliverable of all" from the gathering was "unity and cohesion in international effort, and the alignment between ‘that effort’ and a clear ‘Afghan plan,’ which would be further spelled out at the follow-up conference in Kabul in spring of 2010." President Karzai too, reiterated his pledge to tackle corruption and build Afghan capacity, promising to meet the aspirations and demands of the people of Afghanistan, which in his view could be summed up as "Afghan leadership and Afghan ownership," by the given time frame of five years.96

A very important factor not given due attention has been the absence of the UN in the overall scheme of things for the future of Afghanistan, because of the aversion of the previous U.S. administration to any involvement of the UN. Since a long-term commitment would be required for the rebuilding and development of Afghanistan, it would be more pragmatic to involve the United Nations in the lead role so as to coordinate the various complex activities of so many different nations who are involved in Afghanistan. This would also assuage misgivings of the neighboring countries. The UN could work in close cooperation with the United States and Afghan governments and assume the role of the main strategic coordinator for implementing a cohesive and all-inclusive strategy for ensuring the security, political stability, and social and economic development of Afghanistan.

The outcome in Afghanistan is closely intertwined with the happenings in Pakistan, particularly in the FATA and Waziristan regions.
Therefore, it is essential to understand the complexities of the problem and the difficulties and current challenges being faced by Pakistan itself due to the faulty policies of its various past governments, which has brought about this state of lawlessness in these two important regions bordering Afghanistan, and has affected many other cities of Pakistan. Pakistan should be given all possible help to eradicate the rogue elements from within its society. The key to this is a proper education of the people, firm handling and reining in of the ISI, and elimination of the rogue elements by the Pakistan government. The government must fulfill its mandate to its people and at the same time to the international community by ensuring that its territory is not utilized by any group or organization that violates international law and helps terrorists in any way.

Pakistan is a nuclear state and its stability is of utmost importance not only for the region but also for the entire world. The fallout from a volatile and unstable Pakistan would have very serious consequences in the region, and in particular in Afghanistan and in India. Therefore all possible steps must be taken to help Pakistan to strengthen its security and to prevent its territory from becoming a hotbed of terrorist-related activities. Besides education, other important issues need equal emphasis, like ensuring peace and development so that stability can be attained, and lasting democracy take root in Pakistan.

In the recent past anti-American feeling has been growing among the population of Afghanistan and Pakistan, which has been aggravated by the written accounts of torture by the released prisoners of Guantanamo Bay. Many books have been written by the released prisoners, including by Mullah Zaeef, who was the Taliban government’s ambassador to Pakistan at the time of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2002. These books give graphic accounts of the torture and have become instant bestsellers in Afghanistan and have been translated into Urdu and French as well. According to BBC Pashto correspondent Dawood Azami, these books have inflamed public opinion against America and have increased anti-American feelings both in Afghanistan and in Pakistan, making the task of winning “hearts and minds” very difficult, despite the fact that President Obama’s decision to close Guantanamo Bay had been welcomed by them earlier. With public opinion increasingly becoming hostile toward foreign troops, the support of the population for fighting the Taliban militants may not readily be forthcoming, making the task of the troops more difficult.

The American troops must be very careful about civilian casualties in such a changed and surcharged atmosphere. The complexity of
operations in Afghanistan can be gauged from the case of an incident in Logar Province in southern Afghanistan where a suspected terrorist was killed by American troops in a night raid on a house, on February 20, 2009. According to the owner of the house the said individual was his brother and not a terrorist and the Americans got wrong information from an Afghan spy, whereas the U.S. troops maintained they had authentic information about the individual being a bomb maker and had ascertained his background, past history, and had been tracking all his activities for days before the raid.

The *Washington Post* reported,98 “While the raid was a tactical success, it was a strategic disaster, because it provided tremendous propaganda value to the Taliban who exploited it to the maximum by magnifying it through the growing influence of Afghan TV on the population.” The governor of the province, Atiqullah Ludin, was also bitter about it since United States had promised to avoid civilian casualties and to conduct such raids accompanied by Afghan troops. He said, “We have to build their trust or else the enemies of Afghanistan will take advantage from it.”99

Notwithstanding the deficit of goodwill presently for the foreign troops and the difficulties that are being encountered, it is imperative to stabilize the situation in Afghanistan as expeditiously as possible. The hard-core Taliban militants must be isolated and their sanctuaries both in Afghanistan and Pakistan must be destroyed, and they must be prevented from gaining ground and subverting the population to their cause. The additional troops that have been inducted should be able to accomplish this task and provide security to the population. A good beginning was made with “Operation Moshtarak” (meaning “together” in the Dari language), a joint American, British, and Afghan army operation, which was launched in the second week of February 2010, and which was successful in eliminating the Taliban stranglehold in Marja city of Helmand Province in southern Afghanistan, long considered a fortress of the Taliban.100 What is of importance is to ensure that the Taliban are not able to return to such areas after they are cleared of hard-core Taliban, by deploying troops in the vicinity who can keep a close watch on all the activities of the insurgents and prevent them from resurfacing by taking timely action against them; General McChrystal’s strategy suggests such action in the future.101

A holistic approach involving an inclusive strategy must be evolved to win over the support of the population and moderate Taliban. The key to achieving this, as mentioned earlier, is good governance, economic development, creation of infrastructure and other facilities,
and an all-around improvement of civic amenities. Other important goals should include the eradication of poppy cultivation and provision of alternate cropping patterns to farmers to enable them to earn a decent livelihood, reconciliation between various groups, provision of employment opportunities, and, above all, ensuring the safety and security of the people.

Historically the Afghan people have never reconciled to the presence of foreigners on their land. Therefore, the Americans must attempt to strengthen the government so that they can withdraw as order is established. A long-term presence should be avoided and President Obama’s plan to start withdrawal of troops in August 2011 must be made clear to the Afghan people. However, the geographical realities of Afghanistan must be taken into consideration for the authority of the central government to extend over the entire country. When the physical world of Afghanistan is examined in detail, it is evident that the mountainous terrain determines its political geography, which makes physical unity difficult, and any unity would therefore be nominal and fragile. This reality, combined with the historical fact that a strong central authority has never had total control of the whole of Afghanistan, necessitates greater devolution of power to the provinces.

During the past eight years the power vacuum was filled by local leaders and chieftains of their respective tribes, because President Karzai had laid too much reliance on a number of regional commanders, which had stunted the government’s development, thereby preventing and limiting its reach beyond Kabul. However, to prevent a repeat of earlier mistakes, a mechanism for greater devolution of power to the provinces would have to be worked out. It is essential to curtail the writ of the warlords and this aspect must be factored into the overall scheme of governance. The Afghan government must pay particular attention to this. President Karzai will have to change direction and institutionalize the role of provinces so that there is overall development and security in all of them. A properly formulated policy regarding his relationship with the power centers in the provinces will also have to be worked out.

During the second presidential elections held on August 20, 2009, the Afghan people braved the Taliban threat and exercised their vote. However, the turnout was not as large as in 2004, because of the disenchantment of the people with the past performance of the Karzai government. President Karzai was elected president for a second term after numerous allegations of fraud and rigging of elections. The allegations of fraud necessitated recounting the vote and
this resulted in President Karzai securing less than the mandatory 50 percent of the votes (he got 47 percent) to be declared elected. As per the Afghan constitution, a second round of voting is required when no candidate secures the mandatory votes. However, the second round of voting was cancelled when his nearest rival, Abdullah Abdullah, his former foreign minister, withdrew his candidacy, leaving Mr. Karzai the lone candidate. Thus he was elected president for a second term.

Mr. Karzai was sworn in as president on November 18, 2009. During his inaugural speech he said that the Afghan army will assume full control of security in the country within five years and also promised to fight corruption and create a transparent and accountable government. However, because of allegations of fraud and the disillusionment of the population, his second-term presidency has been weakened considerably. He will have to take tough measures for the immediate enforcement of the rule of law and proper governance, dealing with corruption firmly, so as to establish the credentials of his government. The dissatisfaction with his first term can be gauged from the fact that the Afghan parliament rejected 17 of the 24 nominees selected by President Karzai to be ministers in the new cabinet, because many of these nominees were criticized for being selected for reasons other than competence. This was a very positive development, as the parliament has become the watchdog for proper governance, boding well for the future of democracy in Afghanistan.

Despite the resurgence of the Taliban, Afghanistan is on the road to recovery and there have been a number of positive developments in the empowerment of the people, particularly women. The second parliamentary elections were held on September 18, 2010, in spite of the call by the Taliban to boycott and scuttle them under very tight security arrangements. Over 2,500 candidates contested for 259 parliamentary seats, of which 68 seats were reserved for women, and what was encouraging was the turnout of women in large numbers. Afghanistan has the making of a stable democracy in the time to come. However, it will require a concerted and sustained effort in all the aspects of governance discussed above, particularly eradication of corruption and providing security to the people, and, above all, continued financial and material support by the international community.
When the United States decided to go to war in Afghanistan to eliminate Al Qaeda it had the support of almost all the nations of the world, despite their differing ideologies. The war on terror basically involved the eradication of terrorism and radical ideology from the main source located in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, the United States opened up another front in Iraq which had no relevance whatsoever to the war on terror, since no actors from there were involved in the 9/11 attacks, nor was Iraqi territory being used for carrying out acts of terrorism anywhere else in the world. Saddam Hussein did not have any connection with Al Qaeda and in fact there was great animosity between the two.1

Yes, Saddam Hussein had invaded Kuwait in 1990,2 in defiance of international law, for which he was adequately punished. As a consequence of this misadventure and great folly of Saddam Hussein, the people of Iraq suffered untold hardship and misery because of the sanctions that were imposed on Iraq by the international community at the conclusion of the First Gulf War in 1991.3 However, Iraq did not possess any weapons of mass destruction (WMD), which was the ostensible reason forcefully propagated by the United States and the United Kingdom as the basis for going to war the second time—the “Second Gulf War,” code named “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” in March 2003.4

The absence of WMDs was verified by Mohamed ElBaradei,5 the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and Hans Blix, who headed the UN inspection team, prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003.6 After the invasion, Charles Duelfer, who had been appointed as head of the Iraq Survey Group by the U.S. government, also concluded that Iraq neither had WMDs nor had the wherewithal to produce them, as all its capabilities had been destroyed during the “Sanction Regime”7 which was in force from 1991 onward and was only lifted on May 22, 2003, after the invasion.
and occupation of Iraq. Charles Duelfer’s predecessor, David Kay, who had headed the Iraq survey group earlier, also held the same view. Therefore, possession of WMD by Iraq was a fabrication and obfuscation of the truth, and merely an excuse for the invasion.

All the nations of the world are well aware that the United Nations was specifically created after World War II to act as an international forum for the pacific settlement of disputes between nations and to foster better international relations among nations of the world. Accordingly all the nations pledged to adhere to the statutes of the United Nations Charter, which clearly laid down the purpose of the UN. According to Article 1 of the UN Charter, “the purpose of the organisation is to maintain international peace and security, and towards this end to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of peace and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustments or settlements of international disputes or situations which might lead to peace.” As per Article 2.3 of the UN Charter, “all members are required to settle their international disputes by peaceful means in a manner that international peace and security and justice are not endangered,” while Article 2.4 states, “All members shall refrain in their international relations from threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any manner inconsistent with the purpose of the United Nations.” Articles 2.5 and 2.7 also pertain to actions required to be taken by the United Nations with respect to international peace and security.

The invasion of Iraq was not sanctioned by the UN Security Council despite all the attempts by the United States and United Kingdom to portray that Iraq posed a most urgent and imminent threat to world peace and security, and that it had the capability to carry out a nuclear strike within 45 minutes. The then U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell, made a definitive case for war against Iraq by displaying satellite pictures of alleged nuclear sites, and President Bush claimed that Iraq had imported aluminum tubes for uranium enrichment from Niger, clearly indicating its nuclear intentions, and that it had also developed unmanned aerial vehicles for delivery of the weapons of mass destruction.

The case for the invasion of Iraq was made on false intelligence, and had been fabricated to win the support of the world body; no nation was misled by these pretensions. The motives and the intentions of both the United States and the United Kingdom were seen
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through by the world body, which was not convinced, and the invasion of Iraq was not sanctioned. Hence the war was an “unjust war” in the modern day formulations of just and unjust wars, and the then UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, rightly termed the invasion as illegal.17 In addition, the invasion can be termed as an “unjust war” as per the past definition of such wars from ancient times.

In medieval history, the writers and thinkers judged war from two different standpoints. These were *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*. The first was “justice for war,” that is, with reference to the reasons nations go to war, and the second was “justice in war,” that is, with reference to the means adopted for conducting war. The first aspect, *jus ad bellum*, judges reasons for going to war, such as whether the war was waged in “self defence” to protect the state against enemy aggression, or whether that state itself was an aggressor and carried out unprovoked aggression on other states for a variety of other reasons, like annexing territory or to punish a weaker power, etc.

The latter, *jus in bello*, or “justice in war,” is about observance or violation of the customary and positive rules of engagement during the actual conduct of operations—in modern day concepts, adherence to the International Humanitarian Law, as laid down in the Geneva Conventions of 1949, and the Additional Protocols I and II of 1977 to the Geneva Conventions, to which almost all nations of the world, including the United States, are a signatory.

In light of the foregoing, the invasion of Iraq in 2003 did not meet either of the criteria of *jus ad bellum* or *jus in bello*,18 because Iraq had not threatened the United States or any other country, making the invasion unjust. The war also violated the rules of engagement *jus in bello*: the abuse of the prisoners of war and torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison, and rendition of prisoners by the CIA being the most glaring examples of the violation of the UN statutes of the laws of war.

Besides these there were many other such abuses, violation of laws of war, and human rights abuses, such as the killing of 24 unarmed civilians, mostly women and children, by the U.S. Marines at Haditha in Iraq in 2005, which the Iraqis call “Majzara” meaning “massacre,”19 that is still fresh in the minds of those who lost their family members in this incident. In addition, there was the killing of 17 innocent civilians, and the injuring of another 24, on September 17, 2007,20 in Nisour Square in Baghdad by security guards of Blackwater USA, a private contractor, that had been employed by the U.S. State Department for protection of American officials deployed in Iraq.
In addition, it was also reported that the actions of this private security agency went beyond the mandate of just providing protection, as they also participated in raids on Iraqi targets, overseen by the CIA. This amounted to outsourcing of the operational military tasks to private contract personnel, who essentially operated without the accountability and oversight normally applied to military and CIA personnel, which is again a gross violation of the UN Charter, and a serious departure from the laws of war and the rules of engagement. All these abuses and violations gave an impression that the actions of the occupation force, both military and civilian, were above the law, and that they could do as they wished and violate all statutes of war engagement.

The various actions involving total and wilful violation of human rights and the laws of war had a very adverse effect on U.S. prestige; they tarnished the moral high ground and high values which the United States aspires to, and which it wants to export to other nations. It is ironic that the high moral values were thrown to the wind by the very power that was the supposed “conscience keeper.” It also alienated the Iraqi population, the very people the United States was trying to protect against a brutal dictator.

These actions not only had an adverse affect on the moral standing of the United States, but also resulted in the world becoming a more unsafe place. Many nations are acting with impunity in settling their disputes and are using weapons and ammunition banned by the various provisions of the Geneva Conventions. More importantly, it has given a new lease of life to terrorism, and a greater number of young people have joined the ranks of terrorist organizations all over the world due to the high-handed manner in which the war was conducted, in total contravention of the rules of war, of which the United States is the chief architect.

The war also had a very serious negative impact on Muslims all around the world. As stated earlier, in the perception of many Muslims the war appeared to be waged against Islam. The wrong policies followed by the previous American administration and the violations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, and the other human rights abuses, gave an impression that the war was deliberately being waged to undermine the religion and beliefs of Muslims, even though that was not the intention of the United States; however, perceptions once embedded are hard to dispel. The radical elements exploited these perceptions to the hilt in their recruitment drive. Thus the ranks of the radicals have swelled considerably even in areas which were not known to harbor terrorists. The United States will have to
try very hard to remove this perception, and President Obama and his team appear to be working earnestly in this direction. President Obama rightly emphasized this aspect in his first formal television interview as president. The interview, given to the Saudi-owned, Dubai-based Al Arabiya TV news channel on January 27, 2009, was meant to deliver a message to the Muslim world. In the interview he sent a clear message that the United States was not at war with Islam or against its basic tenets, but was rather against the small groups of violent extremists and he emphasized this by saying, “Americans are not your enemy.” The interview underscored Obama’s commitment to repair relations with the Muslim world that had suffered under the previous administration.22

The world is aware of the various acts of commission and omission in the invasion of Iraq and the subsequent conduct thereafter, therefore these need no enumeration here. However, it is not clear why the Bush administration went to war in Iraq despite all the misgivings of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the other negative signals emanating from all quarters. In fact, the majority of the public in the United States itself, and in many other parts of the world, was against the invasion. Therefore, it is very difficult to fathom the rationale, the real reason for the invasion of Iraq.

It is interesting to note what some of the analysts have suggested as the main reason for the invasion of Iraq. According to them the reason could be any one of these: to get control of Iraq’s oil wealth; to enrich the military-industrial complex in the United States from the war (colossal monetary and material expenditure is involved in waging war and its recoupment, which benefits the war industry), and the subsequent reconstruction of war-ravaged Iraq; to remove Saddam Hussein from power; to give a greater say to Israel in the Middle East; to curtail the power of Iran in the region; to install a friendly regime well-disposed toward the United States with the aim of not only redefining the political order there, but also to use Iraq as a base for expanding U.S. influence in the region, and to utilize it as a launching pad for operations against hostile regimes in the region. Or was the invasion of Iraq part of the “Bush Doctrine” of preemption which appeared to resemble the political strategy formulated by Paul Wolfowitz in 1992 at the end of the First Gulf War? That strategy had three main ingredients: first, the United States must remain the world’s only superpower, unchallenged by other nations; second, the United States may use preemptive force in self-defense to confront hostile regimes; and third, if necessary, the United States will act unilaterally to confront and eliminate the threat. While this strategy did
not find favor with the first President Bush in 1992, Vice President Cheney and Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz found a ready listener in his son, who it appears was egged on by them to adopt it, and the right opportunity presented itself by way of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. However, the real motive for the invasion will remain a mystery, for the war did not fulfill any of the above goals, and no one seems to be clear even at this stage as to what has been achieved thus far and what the end state or the future of Iraq is likely to be. In fact, instead of curtailing the power of Iran, it has enabled Iran to gain greater influence in the region since Iraq has a majority Shia population, as does Iran, and Saddam was an obstacle to Iran’s aspirations for predominance in this region.

An inquiry was ordered by the U.K. government in 2009, chaired by Sir John Chilcot, to ascertain the detailed reasons and the circumstances that led to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the unequivocal support to the Bush administration of the United Kingdom. The inquiry’s revelations are quite damaging to both the United Kingdom and the United States. The inquiry clearly brought out the fact that it was evident to both Prime Minister Tony Blair and President Bush right from the beginning that Saddam Hussein did not possess any WMD, yet they invaded Iraq, fully aware of this fact.

During the conduct of the inquiry, Ken Macdonald, Britain’s former Director of Public Prosecutions, was very critical of the former prime minister, Tony Blair, on the Iraq war, and accused him of sycophancy toward Washington, and of using “alarming subterfuge” to mislead the British people into the conflict.23 The legality of the invasion was also in question. Sir Michael Wood, the chief legal adviser to Jack Straw, the former British foreign secretary, in his statement to the inquiry said that he had advised Jack Straw before the invasion about the fact that it was illegal and would “amount to the crime of aggression.” He said Mr. Straw told him “he was being ‘dogmatic’ ” and that “‘international law was pretty vague’ about it.”24

Lord Goldsmith, who was the attorney general and had the responsibility to give correct advice to the government about the legality of the war admitted that initially he had thought that a second UN Resolution was necessary, but later he changed his mind and “gave green light,” since the military needed an “unequivocal” decision on the legality of its actions before they went into battle.25 Tony Blair also appeared before the inquiry on January 29, 2010 and was quite adamant about the necessity for going to war and said that it was “the decision I took—and frankly would take again,” because the Iraq war had made the world a safer place without Saddam, who was a monster.26
Clare Short, who was the International Development Secretary in Tony Blair’s cabinet, stated before the Inquiry that the prime minister had misled them on Iraq war legality. She said that the attorney general was “leaned on” to change his advice before the invasion, and further added, “Mr. Blair and his mates decided war was necessary and everything was done on a wing and a prayer.” She had resigned because of her difference with Mr. Blair two months after the invasion. Prime Minister Gordon Brown, who was the Chancellor of the Exchequer in 2003 at the time of the invasion, also appeared before the inquiry on March 5, 2010 and said that removing Saddam Hussein was the right decision and also spoke about the lessons learned from the war. He said that there was “informality of procedures” in the cabinet committee when the decision was taken for the invasion and this has now been put right.

The Netherlands too ordered an inquiry into its government’s support for the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The Dutch Committee of Inquiry on Iraq, whose findings came out in January 2010, also came to the conclusion that the invasion had no legal basis as it was not sanctioned by the UN Security Council. It accused government ministers of selective use of intelligence, which led the Netherlands to join the “Coalition of the Willing,” indicating that the government’s loyalty to its alliance with the United States and United Kingdom had taken precedence over the need to ensure legality of the invasion. The Dutch parliament had opposed the decision for the invasion. The report said that a memo of that time, from the Dutch foreign ministry lawyers, had suggested that the war was illegal under international law. The committee report also said it could be used to reinforce the international case against the Iraq war.

What has been the net result of the Invasion? Over 4,400 American soldiers have been killed, approximately 50,000 have been wounded, and the majority of the troops who were deployed in Iraq are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Over 2 trillion dollars have been spent on the war. There is no proper count of Iraqi casualties and some estimates put the figure at more than a million. The John Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, which carried out extensive research in July 2006, put the figure of those killed by that date to approximately 654,965, which obviously could well have crossed the one million mark by now. Due to the conditions of lawlessness that prevail as a result of the lack of governance in the absence of a permanent government, the Iraqi civilian casualties mount by the day. Almost 5 million Iraqis have become displaced persons (2.5 million displaced within Iraq and 2.1 million refugees
in Syria and Jordan). The UNHCR reported that some of the refugees have started to return; however, the lack of basic services, physical security, and employment opportunities remain. Many towns and cities were destroyed and there is a lack of basic civic amenities like electricity, clean drinking water, schools, hospitals, and proper roads. It will take billions of dollars to repair and rebuild the devastation caused by the war.

Besides the economic downturn in the United States due to sub-prime lending, the war in Iraq also had a devastating effect on the United States economy and its prestige is at an all-time low, while the Iraqis lack security and stability and the means to earn a decent livelihood. No tangible victory has been achieved, and when President Obama was asked in an interview whether the mission in Iraq was a success, he replied that in terms of the goals set for the army, they achieved their goal, and, commenting about the U.S. civilian leadership's goal, he said, “I don’t think that we can rightly say that the strategy cooked up by our civilian leadership, with respect to either going in, in the first place, or how the war was managed, was a success. But I think that we can say without equivocation that our military was successful, and if we get it right over the next few months and years, then there is the strong possibility that we can leave Iraq as a stable, peaceful partner in the region.”

The American troops in Iraq were redeployed following the implementation of the Status of Force Agreement (SOFA), and have not been employed in an active operational role since June 30, 2009, the date which had been agreed upon between the United States and the Iraqi government for the commencement of redeployment as a part of the different stages set for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq. Following the repositioning of the American forces, the Iraqi army security forces took over the complete responsibility of combating insurgency on their own, even though the insurgency was not of the same magnitude or at the same level as it was earlier in 2007, at the time of the “surge” of American forces; however, there was a sharp increase in suicide attacks, particularly since September 2009. The Iraqi security forces were not able to come to grips completely with the increased level of violence after the redeployment American troops. Is there any end in sight for this violence? It does not seem so at the moment, and perhaps it will take considerable time and effort to bring back normalcy in Iraq.

These are the existing realities on the ground. However, what the future holds for Iraq is of greater importance. After President Obama assumed office he announced that he would withdraw American troops...
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in 16 months, which was in accordance with his campaign promise. However, the schedule was revised and a realistic plan was drawn up in consultation with the commanders on the ground, and President Obama gave directions to complete the withdrawal of combat troops in 18 months, that is, by August 31, 2010.\(^{38}\) The Iraqi government too, had earlier endorsed troop withdrawal by December 31, 2011,\(^{39}\) which was ratified by the Iraqi parliament in November 2008.\(^{40}\) The pact was necessary to determine the role of the U.S. military in Iraq after their UN mandate was to expire on December 31, 2008.\(^{41}\) As per the schedule of the withdrawal plan, the complete exercise was to be carried out in various stages of disengagement. The U.S. forces have adhered to the schedule, and, as mentioned above, on June 30, 2009, they withdrew from towns and cities\(^{42}\) and handed over security to the Iraqi forces; they redeployed in other areas in the vicinity of towns so as to be available in case the Iraqi government requested their assistance. All American combat troops withdrew from Iraq on August 31, 2010, the date set in SOFA. However, approximately 50,000 troops were left behind for training purposes and in an advisory role\(^{43}\) even though there is no specific mention about it in the Security of Force Agreement with Baghdad.\(^{44}\) President Obama has promised that these troops too, will be withdrawn by the end of 2011, after which there would be no American troops stationed in Iraq.

The Iraqi army, police and the other organs of government machinery have to take over the complete responsibility for governance, which is quite achievable in the long term. However, they would have to be trained to the degree of efficiency that would enable them to undertake this onerous responsibility. The pace of withdrawal is also critical and therefore needs to be worked out pragmatically so that too rapid a withdrawal does not create conditions of instability, providing the space for resurgence of extremists. Following the June 30 handing over of responsibility to the Iraqi forces there has been a sharp increase in sectarian violence and this needs to be handled firmly, otherwise conditions of lawlessness will return. Prime Minister Maliki was, however, confident that his government would be able to undertake all the tasks without the assistance of American troops after their departure. He also said that the Iraqis had been able to rid themselves of sectarianism and racism.\(^{45}\) This is reflective of his optimism, but has not been achieved as yet, and the conditions on the ground are quite different. The security situation is very fragile and tenuous, and reconciliation between the three main communities (Shia, Sunni, and Kurds) has not been achieved to the desired level to enable violence to end and stability to be achieved.
Unfortunately, the well-trained Iraqi army and police force, which had maintained law and order under the Saddam regime, had been disbanded post haste, immediately after the so-called liberation of Iraq in 2003, resulting in a total vacuum in maintenance of law and order, and consequently it had a devastating effect on the governance of the state, giving rise to lawlessness that is still prevalent even seven years after the invasion. It will require some very tough measures and firm handling to bring back normalcy, because when such an atmosphere of near anarchy prevails, the criminal and extremist elements get emboldened, more so when they realize that the government is weak and is unable to enforce tough measures. It is imperative that after the balance of U.S. troops withdraw from Iraq at the end of 2011, the country must not slide back into sectarian violence, as has been the case in these past seven years and which still continues. Therefore a new strategy has to be adopted for maintenance of law and order.

Tough measures alone will not work, a lesson which is loud and clear from the operations of past seven years. Rebuilding and reconstruction of the shattered economy and the infrastructure of the devastated country with the help of people of all the three communities—Shia, Sunni, and Kurds—has to be undertaken as a priority. Basic necessities like water, electricity, proper shelter, and jobs must be provided so that people can rebuild their lives. The internally displaced Iraqis and those who have taken refuge in Syria and Jordan will need to be rehabilitated into their own homes. All this will entail allocation of massive resources and above all a secure environment. Something like the Marshall Plan for the reconstruction of Germany after World War II should be worked out for Iraq also. Ensuring security and stability side by side with reconstruction and economic development needs to become the number one priority.

The representation of all the three communities in the army, police and other administrative bureaucracies has to be ensured in equal number so that there is no partisanship or favoritism in the enforcement of law and order, and in governance. The demographic, geopolitical and politico-economic realities and cultural geography of Iraq and of the surrounding countries of the region have a great bearing on all aspects of Iraq’s governance and, in fact, on all features of day-to-day life of the Iraqi people, which needs to be correctly understood and factored into a pragmatic policy formulation for Iraq.

On the positive side, the gain has been that a rudimentary form of democratic government was installed in 2004, initially as an interim government, and then in December 2005 parliamentary elections were
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held. The elections were conducted smoothly and there was a large turnout of voters (estimated at 70 percent), indicating the desire of the public for proper governance and a stable government. A national unity government under Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki took office in May 2006. Even though the government was weak and fragile, it survived the political turmoil and vicissitudes of various political parties and the sectarian conflict of the past few years, and was able to establish a semblance of order. Prior to the national parliamentary elections, provincial elections were held in 2005 that were boycotted mainly by the Sunni parties. However, they realized their mistake and participated in the second provincial elections held on January 31, 2009, which was an important step forward toward democracy and reconciliation.

Parliamentary elections were again due in December 2009, but had to be postponed because of the problem seat-sharing among the three communities. After much wrangling, and under pressure from the United States, in a last minute compromise the three communities agreed to a seat-sharing formula. Under the new proposal the seat distribution was to be according to population data from 2005, accounting for a 2.8 percent population increase. The election date was fixed for March 7, 2010. The elections were held on the due date and over 62 percent of the registered voters cast their ballot. Even though the voting percentage was less than that of the 2005 elections, it was a significant step forward, indicating the desire of the people to vote and have a stable government. Another important change was that the Sunnis voted in the elections and this too was a very positive step, Sunni participation in governance being essential for a stable Iraq. The other encouraging development was that the Iraqi security forces were able to manage proper security on election day, despite a few incidents of violence and bombings. This indicated that the Iraqi security forces would be able to measure up to their task after the departure of the American forces.

Though the government had not been in total control of all aspects of governance, it did show signs that this could be achieved in due course of time. The fledgling and emerging democracy requires full support from the United States and the international community so that it is strengthened further to govern effectively, and the nascent democracy takes root. It may be more beneficial if the overall rebuilding and reconstruction effort in Iraq is done under the aegis of the United Nations. This would enable other members of the international community to be coopted in this endeavor, since many countries were reluctant to do so in the past as they were not in consonance with the U.S. views on the invasion of Iraq and the subsequent developments.
What remains to be achieved is the national reconciliation among the three major communities, that is, Shia, Sunni, and Kurds. This is a very major problem, deeply rooted in history, and thus requires very careful, imaginative, and ingenious handling so that a lasting solution can be achieved. It will require a lot of give and take by all parties concerned and is only possible through negotiations for which these communities do not seem to be fully ready. The greatest hurdle is the distribution of the oil revenues among them because of the peculiarities of the geographic location of the oil fields and the demographic layout of the population. Therefore, they would need to be conditioned to come to an understanding, and an amicable settlement encompassing the sensitivities of the people would have to be arrived at, if the integrity of Iraq is to be maintained, which is imperative for the country and is also in the interest of the three communities. Their leaders, and in particular the Sunni and Shia leaders, must establish and maintain order in their respective communities so that other pressing security and development issues can be addressed seriously at the same time.

Also, regional players like Iran, Syria, and Saudi Arabia have a stake in Iraq. Therefore, the future of Iraq is intertwined to some extent with the goals of Iran, Syria, and Saudi Arabia in this region. It would be prudent to involve these foreign players in the policy formulation for the future of Iraq. Even though the United States does not have cordial relations with Syria, and in particular with Iran, the geographic and demographic realities dictate that an amicable solution to the problems can only be found with their involvement. A good beginning was made in the past under President Bush’s watch when Iran participated in direct talks with the United States for the first time after three decades, in a conference in Baghdad in May 2007, in which Syria also participated, with regard to the policy measures needed to ensure the stability of Iraq, and to facilitate the promotion of the democratic government.

This conference was held in pursuance of the recommendations of the Baker-Hamilton Study Group (James Baker, the former secretary of state, a Republican, and Lee Hamilton, a Democrat), which had been ordered by President Bush in March 2006 to recommend a new strategic approach to bring normalcy to Iraq, and to recast policies for the Middle East. The bipartisan panel submitted its report in December 2006, recommending a phased withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq, and shouldering of greater responsibility for security by the Iraqi government. It also recommended direct dialogue with Syria and Iran, with regard to stabilizing the situation in Iraq and in the Middle East.
As a sequel to this recommendation the Baghdad Conference was held in May 2007 as mentioned above. This conference was attended, among others, by Iran and Syria. It made substantial gains in thawing the relations between the United States and Iran, and there was a broad agreement among the participants in the declared policies and principles about the war and the necessity of ensuring a stable and democratic Iraq. However, this was not followed through and the relations between the United States and Iran deteriorated during 2008, and have come to their nadir with Iran’s continuance of its uranium enrichment program, and more particularly after the June 2009 presidential elections in Iran.

Notwithstanding this, with President Obama’s avowed aim of having direct talks with Iran without any preconditions, the threads can again be picked up after the current face-off eases. This would have two advantages. First, it may help as a confidence-building measure and in due course pave the way for improvement of relations with Iran, and through such a process Iran could be persuaded to see reason with regard to the nuclear issue. Second, it could help to rein in the radical Shia clerics and other such disruptive groups, particularly in southern Iraq.

While the United States is looking for a way out of Iraq which it will be able to achieve in due course, the important question of how to achieve reconciliation among the three communities remains. The United States must impress on the leaders of these three communities the importance of setting aside their differences and working toward the unity and integrity of Iraq. There would have to be equitable distribution of wealth (particularly the oil revenues) and representation of all the three communities in all aspects of the administration for a modicum of reconciliation to be achieved. The problems in Iraq can only be resolved through the participation of all three communities working toward establishment of an all-inclusive pluralistic society with strong federal political and security institutions. The Iraqi government must desist from showing a leaning toward or preference for any particular community and all efforts must be directed to bringing about togetherness and reconciliation among all sections of the society. It took nine months of political wrangling since the March 2010 elections before Nuri Al Maliki claimed a second term as president. For the first time the government includes the major parties. The new government must reflect the spirit of reconciliation in the power-sharing by the three communities. Iraq as a state must not fail or become a safe haven for extremists and terrorists, and it must not slide back to sectarian civil war, for that would spell instability in the entire region.
The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the most emotional and resonant issues not only for the Palestinians, but also for the entire Muslim world. It is a cause of great frustration and disquiet for Muslims, due to the perception that the United States has a different standard when dealing with Israel. It is unfathomable to many Muslims as to how the United States, that champions the cause of freedom, democracy, rule of law, and adherence to human rights in other countries, can ignore the excesses of Israel and the suffering of the Palestinian people. This conflict thus fuels passions and consequently gives rise to anti-Americanism in the Muslim world.

Michael Scheuer, the author of Imperial Hubris (written as “Anonymous”—Senior U.S. Intelligence Officer), has expressed this view thus, “America’s non-credibility in the Muslim world encapsulates the consequences of a half-century of U.S. Middle Eastern policy that moved America from being the much admired champion of liberty and self-government to the hated and feared advocate of a new imperial order.” He further added, “It is no longer the nation to which the Muslims will give the benefit of doubt in situations where America claims to be an even-handed, honest broker in dealing with them vis-à-vis Israel or other matters…. Rather, America is now regarded as a nation that has abandoned multiple generations of Palestinians to cradle-to-grave life in refugee camps, and blindly supports Israel.”

Regrettably the United States did not use its tremendous influence and leverage with both the Israelis and the Palestinians in the past to bring about a negotiated settlement of this dispute, thereby permitting it to become more complex and intractable with the passage of time. The attitudes of all parties to the conflict have also hardened during this period because of various events of the recent past, which has made the chances of a negotiated settlement very improbable in the near future.
How little has changed over almost four decades with regard to this dispute is illustrated by an interesting note from the State Department of the Nixon era. A March 1973 cable released by the National Archives in December 2007 recounts remarks by Saudi Arabia’s King Faisal who said then that the terrorist threat to U.S. interests could be resolved when Washington impresses on Israel the need to withdraw from the territories it had seized. The king’s remarks were made after Yasser Arafat and his Fatah party had seized the Saudi embassy in Khartoum on March 1, 1973, during the reception for the departing U.S. Chief of Mission. This note also brings out the fact that if problems are not addressed in earnestness, right at their inception, but rather are allowed to linger, they become more complicated and pose a greater danger with the passage of time, as the events follow their own dynamics, gather greater momentum and get out of control. This is exactly what has happened in this case.

It must be clearly understood that the Arab-Israeli dispute must be settled for peace to prevail not only in the Middle East but also to halt the spread of radicalism elsewhere. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is also at the heart of East-West relations. Seema Sirohi, writing in the Times of India, rightly says, “No single cause breeds more terrorism and anger than the dispossession and humiliation of the Palestinians. It fuels mullahs in their mosques and propels factories of fanatics.” The Bush administration unfortunately did not give it due importance in the overall foreign policy considerations and consequently did not take necessary steps to bring about a just and durable peace between the two sides. In fact, President Bush’s leaning toward Israel was clearly visible in all dealings, which emboldened Israel to take many actions which were unlawful under international law and that only made matters worse. The construction of the 436-mile-long separation barrier, and the expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank are just a few of the many Israeli excesses.

The international community made another grave mistake when it refused to recognize the results of the democratically held elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council on June 25, 2006, when Hamas gained an absolute majority in the legislative council. The refusal to recognize the legitimacy of the results discredited the democratic process. It also led to the split between Fatah and Hamas, which has made the negotiated settlement of the dispute more difficult and complex. According to the European Union it was a strategic mistake whose ramifications continue to be a serious setback to the peace process.
The blockade of Gaza is another issue that has caused tremendous humanitarian problems for the 1.5 million Palestinians. The Bush administration did not do anything to alleviate the human tragedy, which has assumed acute proportions after the recent invasion of Gaza by Israel in 2008–2009. In the meantime, the strategic context too has changed substantially in the region because of the global war on terror, and the American preoccupation in Iraq and Afghanistan, which have adversely affected the image, credibility, and military prowess of the United States.

The 22-day Israeli offensive in Gaza during December 2008 and January 2009 has further compounded the problems. It is believed that the aim of the Israeli offensive was to cripple Hamas’s capability to launch missiles into Israel, while others suggest its aim was to crush Hamas altogether. Another connected issue was its timing. Perhaps Israel wanted to complete the mission under President Bush’s watch because it was not sure what would be the reaction of the new president of the United States. Therefore, it undertook the offensive during the closing days of President Bush’s term and announced a ceasefire and withdrawal on January 18, 2009, just two days before President Obama took office. Also some suggest that the attack was launched to influence voters in Israel for the subsequent elections on February 10, 2009.

Notwithstanding the real motives, neither the goal of stopping missile launches nor crushing Hamas has been fully achieved. On the contrary, it is reported that Hamas has emerged stronger from the conflict despite the horrendous suffering of the population of Gaza. The invasion instead has had an adverse effect on Israel’s image all around the world, because of its massive and disproportionate use of force, which resulted in a huge number of civilian casualties and enormous destruction of life and property in Gaza. According to the UN Development Project’s estimates 14,000 homes, 219 factories, and 240 schools were destroyed or damaged. The alleged use of weapons like incendiary white phosphorous munitions and cluster bombs, which are banned by UN conventions and unlawful under international law, has also put Israel on the spot. The United Nations and a number of other international organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have carried out independent assessments of the after-effects of the Israeli offensive into Gaza. Their findings are quite similar and very critical. Even certain Israeli organizations and soldiers have been critical of the use of excessive and disproportionate force. Donatella Rovera, who headed an Amnesty International fact-finding mission, says, “Israeli forces used white phosphorus and
other weapons supplied by the U.S. to carry out serious violations of international humanitarian law, including war crimes. Their attacks resulted in the death of hundreds of children and other civilians, and massive destruction of homes and infrastructure. . . . At the same time, Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups fired hundreds of rockets that had been smuggled in or made of components from abroad at civilian areas in Israel. Though far less lethal than the weaponry used by Israel, such rocket firing also constitutes a war crime and caused several civilian deaths.” She also said that the Israeli forces engaged in “wanton destruction” of Palestinian homes and cited an example of the account of an Israeli group that circulated the testimonies of Israeli soldiers to substantiate her finding. Yehuda Shaul, one of the members of such a group, said, “From the testimonies that we’ve gathered, lots of demolitions, buildings demolished either by bulldozers or explosives, were done after the area was under Israeli control.”

A UN investigation team led by the Sri Lankan lawyer Radhika Coomaraswamy found that the Israeli army used an eleven-year-old boy as a human shield during the Gaza offensive, making him walk in front of them for several hours under fire. Her report also accuses Israeli soldiers of shooting Palestinian children, bulldozing a home with a woman and child still inside, besides many such actions which are prohibited according to the laws of war. There are reports that the Israeli military has charged two of its soldiers, who took part in the Israeli offensive of 2008 into Gaza, of using a Palestinian boy as a human shield.

The Israeli organization Physicians for Human Rights released a report stating, “Israel had violated international law and ethics code during Gaza operations.” It also accused Israeli forces of “attacks on medical personnel, damage to medical facilities and indiscriminate attacks on civilians not involved in fighting.” Even some of the Israeli troops themselves have admitted to killing civilians and vandalism during the offensive; the testimonies of soldiers were published by the Israeli military academy at Oranim College; its Director Dany Zamir told public radio that “the testimonies conveyed an atmosphere in which one feels entitled to use unrestricted force against the Palestinians.” One soldier said, “The climate in general was that lives of Palestinians were much less important than lives of our soldiers.”

On April 3, 2009, the UN Human Rights Council appointed South African justice and former war crimes prosecutor, Richard J. Gladstone, to head an independent fact-finding mission to investigate
international human rights and humanitarian law violations during the conflict in Gaza in December 2008 and January 2009.\textsuperscript{16} The fact-finding mission presented its report to the Human Rights Council on September 29, 2009. Israel had refused to cooperate with this team, hence the report was one-sided. According to its findings, there was evidence that both Israeli and Palestinian forces committed war crimes. The report criticized Israel for using “disproportionate force” and accused it of imposing a “blockade on Gaza” which amounted to “collective punishment” in the lead-up to the conflict. The report found that there were serious violations by Israel of international human rights and humanitarian laws, which amounted to war crimes and crimes against humanity. The report also found that the Palestinian armed groups committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in their repeated rocket and mortar attacks on Israeli civilians.\textsuperscript{17}

The report recommended that the Security Council should require both sides to take necessary steps to launch investigations into war crimes committed. If this was not undertaken, it recommended that the Security Council should refer the matter to the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. However, because of the political sensitivity of the case, it could jeopardize the peace process and negatively impact it, hence this issue was not pressed. Nevertheless, the report was referred to the UN Human Rights Council at the request of the Non-Aligned Movement and Arab Group, and was discussed by its members on October 15 and 16, 2009. In the resolution, adopted by a vote of 25 in favour, six against (which included the United States), and 11 abstentions, the Council strongly condemned all policies and measures adopted by Israel during the conflict, as well as the Israeli limits on Palestinians access, particularly in occupied East Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{18} It also recommended holding independent inquiries on the facts mentioned in the report and called on the parties to ensure that its recommendations were followed up.

Even though both Israel and Hamas have denied any wrongful acts, they both are to be blamed and must be condemned for their willful violation and defiance of international human rights and humanitarian law statutes. America has suffered even greater damage strategically because of this Gaza offensive for two reasons. First, the United States was once again seen as the main supporter and protector of Israel, which was further reinforced in the minds of the public in the Muslim world because of U.S. indifference to the great suffering and catastrophe that befell the population of Gaza; scores of Gazans were made homeless, besides over 1,400 being killed, of whom 440 were...
children and 110 women.\textsuperscript{19} Second, the leaders of some Arab countries blamed Hamas for triggering the Israeli invasion.\textsuperscript{20} This put the leadership at cross-purposes with the public mood prevalent in those countries, which has the potential to destabilize these countries, creating fresh problems for the United States in the region.

The time has come to take more prudent action to repair the damage caused by the neglect and other missteps of the past. Unfortunately many opportunities have been lost to bring about a settlement because of not applying enough pressure on both sides. A renewed opportunity was created when President Obama declared his intentions to become actively involved in resolving the dispute. In his Cairo speech, delivered in the first week of June 2009, he reiterated and reinforced his stand about the necessity of a two-state solution—a Palestinian state side by side with Israel and the freezing of Israeli settlements in the West Bank.\textsuperscript{21} The United States must act as an honest broker, without taking any sides. Many bold compromises will have to be made for an equitable and sustainable solution to emerge. Recriminations of the past must be set aside for the sake of a peaceful solution to this long-standing dispute. Both sides have suffered immensely for a long period for not coming to an agreement. Thus an amicable way forward must now be chalked out—in fact this is the only way forward if both the Israelis and Palestinians do not want to live in a state of perpetual fear and perpetual war for generations to come.

The Way Forward

What is the way forward to break this impasse? President Obama appointed George J. Mitchell as special envoy for overseeing Arab-Israeli affairs\textsuperscript{22} on January 22, 2009, just two days after he became president, thereby signaling the urgency for addressing this complex problem of bringing about a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. George Mitchell has a proven record of brokering peace agreements, having chaired the successful Northern Ireland peace talks that came to be known as the “Good Friday Agreement” in 1998, and in 2000 he led a presidential commission to end the violence between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also visited Israel and the West Bank in March 2009 to get first-hand knowledge of the situation. She renewed her commitment to an Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement saying it was a “commitment I carry in my heart, not just my portfolio.”\textsuperscript{23} These are welcome signs and indicate that the United States is serious in finding a solution to
this intractable problem, which has not received its due attention in
the past.

Since both the Israelis and the Palestinians are stuck in their respec-
tive positions, the international community, especially the Quartet,
led by the United States, and including Russia, the EU, and the UN,
must rescue these two from their self-imposed predicament. It is not
only their security which is at stake, but their intransigence is putting
the region, and, in fact, the whole world, at risk. It will take political
sagacity and a strong dose of realism and pragmatism to resume the
defunct peace process under the present high voltage atmosphere.
The following are some suggestions for such a beginning.

The international donors’ conference for the reconstruction of
Gaza was held at Sharm el Sheikh, the seaside resort in Egypt, on
March 2, 2009, and $4.5 billion in aid was pledged for the recon-
struction of Gaza, and the reformation of the Palestinian Authority.\(^{24}\)
They called on Israel to lift the blockade to enable movement of aid
and construction material. While Israel and the United States have
made it clear that the aid would be channeled through the Palestinian
Authority only, this stipulation is impractical in that Hamas is in con-
trol of Gaza and also has the trust of the people of Gaza, where the
mandate of the Palestinian Authority is absent.

Hamas and Palestinian Authority leaders had earlier held recon-
ciliation talks in Cairo on February 25, 2009 in a bid to resolve their
differences, and to form a unity government. In pursuance of this
aim Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad submitted his resig-
nation to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, to facilitate the
process and pave the way for formation of a unity government.\(^{25}\)
The resignation was to come into effect after the formation of the unity
government. However, Hamas dismissed this gesture saying that his
appointment was unconstitutional, since he had been appointed by
President Mahmoud Abbas after Hamas had seized power in Gaza
in June 2007. The Hamas takeover in fact created two separate
Palestinian administrations: the Palestinian Authority administra-
tion of Mahmoud Abbas in the West Bank, which was recognized by
the Western governments, and Hamas control of Gaza, which was
not recognized. Unfortunately, there has been no progress on the
formation of a unity government. Reconciliation between the two
factions is essential for any meaningful progress in the negotiations
not only between the two Palestinian factions but also with Israel.
More importantly the formation of a unity government would enable
coordination of the rebuilding of Gaza and at the same time allay
somewhat the fears of the United States and Israel, since the aid will
be channeled through the unity government comprising both the factions.

To resume the peace process, it is crucial that Israel lift the blockade of Gaza completely to allow humanitarian aid to get through for the rebuilding of Gaza, which is the cause of great hardship to the population. Hamas must guarantee that no warlike material enters Gaza which would go toward the making of missiles and rearming of the militants. Hamas, too, must stop launching missiles into southern Israel and also ensure that other elements that are not part of Hamas do not in any way prejudice this arrangement by acting as spoilers, by launching such missiles or indulging in any other activity prejudicial to peace. Concurrently Israel should stop missile attacks and incursions into Gaza. Time is of the essence and any delay would be catastrophic for the people of Gaza. Therefore urgent steps should be taken for the movement of humanitarian aid and material for the rebuilding of Gaza. Commenting on the plight of the people of Gaza during the donors’ conference at Sharm el Sheikh, French President Sarkozy rightly said, “Gaza should not become an actual prison with open skies,” and the blockade must be lifted to ease the situation. These words were spoken in March 2009; there has been no appreciable progress in the lifting of the blockade since then. The UN Humanitarian Chief, John Holmes, also criticized Israel for the Gaza blockade, which was further tightened by Israel following the clashes in East Jerusalem resulting from the announcement on March 10, 2010 of the construction of 1,600 additional Israeli homes in that area. He warned that Gaza was “de-developing” and urged relaxation of the blockade. Unfortunately the announcement for building these additional homes in the Arab part of East Jerusalem came at a time when U.S. Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. was visiting Israel, who had gone there specifically with the aim of improving the atmosphere for the resumption of peace talks between the Israeli and Palestinian leaders. Such moves only create more problems for a negotiated settlement and were taken by the U.S. administration as an affront to them. This action was also condemned by the Quartet of Middle East peace mediators.

Even though there is anger and outrage on both sides, especially in Gaza, bridges must be built and a healing touch needs to be applied, rather than indulging in name-calling and the blame game. The question is how this can be achieved. It is revealing and encouraging, knowing that a majority of Israelis and Palestinians crave peace and are fed up with the constant state of fear. Their hands must be strengthened so as to enable them to force their respective leadership
to face the stark realities; the neverending war and conflict will not solve the problem, it will only cause more harm and misery. The only answer is negotiated settlement. Because of its close relationship with Israel, a heavy responsibility rests on the shoulders of the United States. The United States and the world community must play their role forcefully and make this aspect clear to the leadership of both Israel and Palestine, and that includes Hamas.

There have been a number of peace accords in the past starting with the Oslo Accord, the Camp David summit, and the “Road Map” to peace drafted by the United States, all of which unfortunately came to no avail. The Annapolis Conference of November 27, 2007 promised much and raised hopes for a final settlement by year-end 2008. However, it was not a realistic assessment of the situation as the time frame was unrealistic, and moreover any settlement was also not practicable, because without the participation of Hamas and the people of Gaza no peace could be achieved. At Annapolis the United States was dealing only with Mahmoud Abbas minus the representatives of Hamas and Gaza.

It has been reported that there is a change in the atmospherics with the possibility of thaw on the horizon in the relations between the two Palestinian factions, Fatah and Hamas. It is essential for both these factions to reconcile their differences for the peace process to move forward, for which formation of a unity government is indispensable. It is time for the Hamas leadership to realize its responsibility to the people of Gaza, who have suffered immensely because of them, and to work toward a peaceful solution to the conflict.

While it is incumbent upon Hamas to renounce violence and recognize Israel, the commencement of the peace process should not be held hostage to this clause as a precondition. Moreover, when the unity government participates in the negotiations, it must be understood that it is representing all the Palestinian people and not just Hamas or Fatah factions. After the speech of President Obama in Cairo University, which was welcomed by Muslims around the world, the Hamas leader, Khaled Meshaal, also appeared to have become more conciliatory and pragmatic. At the end of the Palestinian crisis talks in Egypt on June 10, 2009, Khaled Meshaal, commenting on President Obama’s speech, said, “Hamas welcomes any serious opportunities that lead to self determination.” He also said that Hamas will not obstruct any political movement toward the establishment of a Palestinian state on 1967 borders. These are welcome developments and could be a precursor to a change in stance in Hamas’s ideology.
The Arab peace initiative put forward by then Crown Prince Abdullah (now King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia), during the Arab League Summit in Beirut in 2002, was also endorsed by the Riyadh Summit in 2007, and it offers the best approach to recommence negotiations. The “Arab peace initiative” attempts at ending the Arab-Israeli conflict and normalizing relations between all the Arab countries and Israel in exchange for complete Israeli withdrawal from territories occupied after the 1967 conflict, and the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. The details of the proposal are as follows:

- Complete Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan Heights, to the June 4, 1967 line, and the territories still occupied in southern Lebanon
- A just solution to the problem of Palestinian refugees to be agreed upon in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution No. 194
- The establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state in the Palestinian territories occupied June 4, 1967, in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital. In return the Arab states will do the following:
  (a) Consider the Arab-Israeli conflict over, sign a peace agreement with Israel, and achieve peace for all states in the region
  (b) Establish normal relations with Israel within the framework of this comprehensive peace.

While the plan in itself is simple and is also in accordance with UN Resolutions 194 and 242, there are many obstacles and hurdles to its acceptance and implementation, particularly by Israel. The contentious issues are Jerusalem, return of Palestinian refugees, demolition of settlements, and the security barrier constructed in the West Bank.

The International Court of Justice declared in July 2004 that construction of the security barrier by Israel was in violation of international law and must therefore be demolished. The security barrier makes deep intrusions into the West Bank, encompassing many Palestinian homes and villages, making them unviable for habitation as they are surrounded by Israeli settlements. It imposes intolerable hardships on innocent people, severely restricting their movement in the West Bank, and separates them from their agricultural lands and from their workplaces, and their children from their schools. It also annexes almost 35 percent of Palestinian land. Seema Sirohi, writing in the Times of India, says, “Today, more than 280,000 Israelis live
in 121 settlements, occupying 35 percent of the West Bank through an elaborate system of jurisdiction, security rings, separate roads and industrial hubs. Palestinians are barred from entering or using the special road system.... Then there are settler outposts of mobile homes within shooting distance of an existing settlement. These contentious issues have been the main obstacles to a peace agreement in the past, and finding a solution to them is imperative.

The peace process must now be renewed with vigor through dialogue and pragmatism. Nothing will bring peace between the Palestinians and Israelis until there is a change in attitude toward each other. The peace process must start in earnest to find a negotiated settlement to the dispute that takes into consideration Israeli security concerns and establishment of a viable Palestinian state, with the Arab peace plan as the basis for negotiations. This plan can only succeed when the United States puts its entire weight behind its success and makes it clear to both the Israelis and the Palestinians that there is only one option for them; the bottom line is that the negotiations must succeed.

It is time for the United States to redeem its pledge to bring about peace in the Middle East and to create a Palestinian state. While President Obama has taken very tough decisions on the domestic front to revive and resuscitate the dire and ailing economy, which have been hailed as a “lifesaver” to revitalize the U.S. economic downturn, a similar dose is required in the Arab-Israeli conflict. To achieve peace in this region the United States has to make a break from the past of its total and unquestioning support for all Israeli policies; criticism of any Israeli action is considered a taboo in the official circles of the U.S. Government. Some analysts argue that through its one-sided support of Israel, the United States is neglecting its own security interests to advance the interest of another state.

One of the high-profile victims of such prejudice was Charles Freeman, who had been nominated to head the National Intelligence Council, a key post that produces security assessments that help in shaping U.S. Middle East policies. He withdrew his candidacy from the top U.S. intelligence post after his past criticism of Israel came under fire. In a message posted on the website of Foreign Policy magazine, Mr. Freeman said he believed the “barrage of libellous distortions of my record would not cease upon my entry into office.... I do not believe the National Intelligence Council could function effectively while its chair was under constant attack by unscrupulous people with a passionate attachment to the views of a political faction in a foreign country.” He said the incident showed “Americans cannot
any longer conduct a serious public discussion or exercise independent judgment about matters of great importance."40

According to the Washington Post, Mr. Freeman’s withdrawal of his name from the appointment to the top intelligence post drew a lot of comments from the press in the Middle East regarding the overriding Israeli influence on U.S. foreign policy. It confirmed their perceptions that the “Israeli Lobby” in the United States controls U.S. foreign policy. The comments of various newspapers across the Middle East, starting with Abu Dhabi’s National newspaper to the Daily Star of Beirut, to Jeddah’s Arab News online and the Syrian paper, Al Thawrah, were all listed in the Washington Post. One such comment brings out this aspect clearly. The Washington Post said, “A commentary in Abu Dhabi’s The National, a newspaper owned by an investment fund controlled by the government, said Freeman’s decision Tuesday to withdraw as chairman of the National Intelligence Council threw the Obama administration into the heart of a long-running controversy over the alleged supremacy of pro-Israel hawks in determining U.S. foreign policy after having taken a cautious approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict so far consistent with previous administrations.”41

Notwithstanding the above views, it would be beneficial for the United States to initiate some confidence-building measures toward Hamas. Roger Cohen, a British-born journalist and author, has suggested that the United States could emulate the British in this regard. The British government is reestablishing links with the political wing of the Lebanese movement, Hezbollah, since it is part of the unity government in Lebanon. The “aim according to UK is to do “all it can” to support the Lebanese government and to encourage Hezbollah to move away from violence and play a constructive, democratic and peaceful role.”42

Writing in the New York Times, Roger Cohen said,

Like Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah has long been treated by the United States as a proscribed terrorist group. This narrow view has ignored the fact that both organisations are now entrenched political and social movements without whose involvement regional peace is impossible….Hamas won the free and fair January 2006 elections to the legislative council of the Palestinian Authority, only to discover Middle Eastern democracy is only democracy if it produces the right result….With respect to Hamas, the West has bound itself to three conditions for any contact: Hamas must recognise Israel, forswear terrorism and accept previous Palestinian commitments. This was reiterated by Clinton on her first Midcast swing. The 1988 Hamas
Charter is vile, but I think it’s wrong to get hung up on the prior recognition of Israel issue. Perhaps Hamas is sincere in its calls for Israel’s disappearance—although it has offered a decades-long truce—but then it’s also possible that Israel in reality has no desire to see a Palestinian state. One view of Israel’s continued expansion of settlements, Gaza blockade, West Bank walling-in and wanton recourse to high-tech force would be that it’s designed precisely to bludgeon, undermine and humiliate the Palestinian people until their dreams of statehood and dignity evaporate. The argument over recognition is in the end a form of evasion designed to perpetuate the conflict. Of course it’s desirable that Hamas recognise Israel before negotiations. But is it essential? No. What is essential is that it renounces violence, in tandem with Israel, and the inculcation of hatred that feeds the violence.

M.J. Rosenberg has also expressed similar views as Roger Cohen. Writing in the Washington Post, he stated, “So why is Israel dragging its feet rather than accepting the plan and starting to negotiate? The reason is, almost surely, the settlers. It’s always the settlers.” He further went on to add, “That is not America’s problem. Our problem is to resolve a conflict that harms American interests throughout the Muslim world, and has done so since 1967. Perhaps the American interest hurt most of all is Israel’s long-term prospects for survival. Time is running out. The Arab Peace Initiative presents an unprecedented opportunity. Obama should run with it.”

The Palestinian state can become a reality provided there is resolve and political will on the part of the United States and other stakeholders in the conflict, particularly Israel. When all the countries of the region endeavor to work toward freedom from strife and terror, and there is peace and security in the region, it will be one of the most important achievements for the United States and, in fact, for the all the people of the world. Translating this into reality is not a fantasy, but a necessity—and time is running out.

Recently, a bipartisan panel consisting of distinguished foreign policy experts, headed by Henry Siegman and Brent Scowcroft, prepared a report calling on the Obama administration to “engage in prompt, sustained, and determined efforts to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. Success will require a careful blend of persuasion, inducement, reward, and pressure.” The view of various think tanks in the United States is that the pressure that is brought to bear on Israel must be such that it produces a shift in Israel’s attitude. It is noted, “What matters most for Israel’s security is the relationship of trust, confidence, and friendship with the U.S. If the United States believes
that a two-state solution is the best option, then it will have to convey that this “trust, confidence and friendship” can be retained if Israel changes course, but cannot be taken for granted. . . . At the end of the day, to advance its own interests, the United States will have to pursue a more even handed policy than in the past and put strong pressure on both sides to come to a settlement.  

Many of the world leaders are also of the view that in the interest of peace in the region, it is essential to have a separate Palestinian state for the Palestinian people. Pope Benedict VI, who visited Israel and the West Bank in May 2009, also expressed his strong support for its creation and also emphasized the need on both sides to shun violence. There are also some very unorthodox solutions suggested by very prominent and respected Israelis. For example, Rabbi Menachem Froman, who lives in the settlement of Tekoa in the West Bank, and is in fact the founder of the settler movement there, believes that these settlements can be a vehicle for peace. Rabbi Froman is part of Jerusalem Peacemakers, an interfaith project to promote and facilitate interfaith dialogue between Jews and Muslims. He says, “From the very beginning it was very clear to me that you cannot love the country, love the rocks, the trees, the valleys, and hate the people living here.” Since the settlers are already in the Holy Land, he suggests, “Those settlers who love the Holy Land should be prepared to live under Palestinian rule—not as occupiers under the heavy protection of the Israeli army.” Kitty Cohen of the Institute for the Study of Religions and Communities in Israel says, “Rabbi Froman is well known, and he is serious. . . . I wish more people inside the political establishment listened to him.” Such moves should be encouraged.

Prime Minister Netanyahu for the first time agreed to the establishment of a Palestinian state in response to President Obama’s call in Cairo. However, he attached certain conditions for its establishment such as that the Palestinian state would not be permitted to have its own armed forces and all Arab states must recognize Israel as a Jewish state—which in effect was stipulating that the Palestinian refugees must give up their claim to return to Israel. With these conditions he said Israel could accept a demilitarized state alongside Israel. These conditions were rejected by the Palestinians. In view of the strong world opinion in favor of a Palestinian state it is time that Israel work toward bringing peace in the region by engaging in realistic and pragmatic negotiations to end this dispute.

Contentious issues, such as the expansion of settlements in the West Bank and the Israeli plan to construct 1,600 new homes in Arab East Jerusalem along with orders for demolition of dozens of Arab
houses in the Silwan area of East Jerusalem, have created a new impasse for the resumption of negotiations. The Palestinians have refused to reopen the negotiations that broke down in 2008 until Israel halts all settlement construction. Israel had accepted the U.S.-backed “Road Map” peace plan in 2003 according to which it agreed to a total freeze on settlement construction activity. This, however, was never implemented. In November 2009, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu announced a ten-month moratorium on construction in the West Bank so as to encourage resumption of talks. However, it did not include public buildings, or the building of 3,000 settlements that had already been sanctioned and were under way. It also did not include East Jerusalem, which, according to the Israelis, is part of the “indivisible and eternal” Israeli capital. However, the Palestinians too claim East Jerusalem as the capital of their future state. Moreover, construction of settlements on occupied land is illegal as per international law, and the annexation of Arab East Jerusalem, occupied after the 1967 Arab-Israeli conflict, has rightly not been accepted by the international community. The two Palestinian factions also must resolve their differences expeditiously and together get down to serious negotiations with the Israelis for a lasting peace to emerge, paving the way for the two-state solution. A way out has to be found to this vexing problem so as to “reset” the path to future peace and settlement of this long-standing dispute.

The fragile nature of peace in this region can be gauged from the incident of the Israeli attack on the Turkish aid flotilla consisting of six ships, carrying humanitarian aid to Gaza, which tried to break the Israeli blockade of Gaza. The flotilla was attacked by Israeli commandos in international waters on May 31, 2010, approximately 80 nautical miles off the coast of Gaza. Nine Turkish civilians on board the aid ship MV Mavi Marmara were killed. This triggered a very serious reaction from the Turkish government, with the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan accusing Israel of “state terrorism.” The subsequent recall of the Turkish ambassador from Israel has soured Turkish-Israeli relations to the breaking point. Turkey had close relations with Israel prior to this incident and any breakdown of this relationship will adversely affect Israel and the mediatory role which Turkey had been playing so far in the Arab-Israeli dispute. It also isolated Israel internationally as the attack was condemned by all nations, including by the UN-appointed Human Rights Council’s fact-finding mission, more so because the attack was carried out in international waters and was therefore illegal according to
the international law of the seas. The UN Human Rights Council further said that Israel’s naval blockade was unlawful because of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.\textsuperscript{53} It was also a great embarrassment to the United States. Turkey, a close ally of the United States, is a member of the NATO alliance and has provided air base facilities to the U.S. air force since the invasion of Iraq. Following the raid, pressure has started to mount on Israel, internationally, to ease or lift the Gaza blockade.\textsuperscript{54}

A positive development has been the resumption of direct talks between Israeli and Palestinian leadership. Prime Minister Netanyahu and Mahmoud Abbas held direct negotiations in Washington on September 2, 2010, under the aegis of President Obama, who said in his opening remarks, “All of us are leaders of our people, who, no matter the language they speak or the faith they practice, all basically seek the same things; to live in security, free from fear; to live in dignity, free from want; provide for their families and to realise a better tomorrow. Tonight, they look to us, and each of us must decide, will we work diligently to fulfil their aspirations.”\textsuperscript{55} Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas have agreed to meet every two weeks for the negotiations, which indicates their earnestness to settle the dispute. It is hoped that despite the complexities of the issues involved and the rigid stand each of them had adopted in the past, both the Israeli and Palestinian leaders will find an amicable and lasting solution to this seemingly intractable problem for sake of their respective people. Howsoever hard the going may be, they must move forward with perseverance, patience, and with determination to translate their intentions into concrete action to achieve durable peace, taking bold steps to break the deadlocks that prevented and blocked attempts in the past for the achievement of peace.
IRAN’S NUCLEAR AMBITIONS

BACKGROUND

The United States’ relationship with Iran has a long and turbulent history dating back to 1953, when the British engineered and the CIA executed a coup in Iran that overthrew the regime of the elected prime minister, Mohammed Mossadegh, because he had planned to nationalize the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company.1 Mohammed Reza Pahlavi was installed as the Shah of Iran; he did the bidding of, and granted concessions to both the British and American oil companies. Unfortunately, the Shah was an unpopular ruler, and his reign was detested by the public due to his arbitrary rules, his self-indulgence, and his self-importance, in disregard of people’s needs. He also created a network of intelligence and security services that brutally crushed any dissent2 and many other such excesses; eventually his behaviour led to a popular uprising against him.

Led by religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini, the 19793 Iranian revolution overthrew the Shah and changed the Iran-United States equation completely. It still haunts the prospects of any rapprochement between them even after three decades. Subsequent events also cast their shadow, and the relationship plummeted further because of incidents like the long sequestering (442 days) of the 52 American diplomats taken hostage when the American Embassy in Iran was seized by a group of Iranian students on November 4, 1979.4 The hostages were only released on January 20, 1981,5 leading to imposition by the United States of severe sanctions on Iran, including the freezing of its assets and investments.6 The shooting down of an Iranian passenger plane, Flight IR 655, on July 3, 1988 in the Persian Gulf by the U.S. Navy cruiser Vincennes further worsened the relationship.7 The baggage of the past thus has had a strong influence on their mistrust of each other, and has had a great bearing on the present engagement and dialogue. Adding to the already strained
relationship is the question of Iran’s nuclear ambitions, which are creating further problems.

**IRAN’S NUCLEAR QUEST**

Iran is signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), having joined the treaty in 1968, and having ratified it in 1970. There are three important provisions in the treaty that may be called its three pillars. The first is about “Non proliferation,” The second is about “Disarmament,” and the third is about “Peaceful uses of nuclear energy.” According to the first pillar of the treaty statutes, the Non Nuclear Weapon States (NNWS), as parties to NPT (Article II) agree not to manufacture or acquire nuclear weapons or to seek or receive any assistance in the manufacture of nuclear weapons. NNWS parties also agree (Article III) to accept safeguards by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to verify that they are not diverting nuclear energy from peaceful uses to make nuclear weapons or other nuclear devices.

The third pillar of the treaty is important, and it is here that Iran is insisting that it has the right to utilize nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. The third pillar allows for and agrees upon the transfer of nuclear technology and materials to NPT signatory countries for the development of civilian nuclear energy programs in those countries, as long as they can demonstrate that their nuclear programs are not being used for the development of nuclear weapons.

Since very few of the nuclear weapons states, and states using nuclear reactors for energy generation, are willing to completely abandon possession of nuclear fuel, the third pillar of the NPT under Article IV provides other states with the possibility to do the same, but under conditions intended to make it difficult to develop nuclear weapons. The treaty recognizes the inalienable right of sovereign states to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, but restricts this right for NPT parties to be exercised “in conformity with Articles I and II” (the basic non-proliferation obligations under the Treaty). Thus the bone of contention has been this third pillar, under which Iran insists that it has the right to utilize nuclear energy for power generation and which, it insists, is what it is doing presently, and plans do in the future as well. Iran also categorically states that it will not manufacture nuclear weapons at any date in the future. Can Iran’s assurance be taken at its face value? That is the crux of the problem between the United States, the West, and Iran.
Climate of Distrust

In the past Iran had embarked on a program of uranium enrichment in a clandestine manner, without the knowledge of the IAEA. From 1980 to 2003 Iran had violated the Treaty obligations by not informing the IAEA about its nuclear activity which it had been carrying out secretly. This came to light in 2002 when a dissident Iranian group called National Conference for Resistance in Iran (NCRI) brought the Iranian secret nuclear activity to the notice of the world. By that time Iran had been carrying out these operations for over 18 years. It included the import of natural uranium from China in 1991. Iran did not inform IAEA of its use of the imported uranium in tests of the uranium conversion process; it failed to report that it had used 1.9 kg of imported uranium to test P1 centrifuges at Kalaye Electric Company Centrifuge workshop in 1999 and 2002, and also failed to declare production of enriched and depleted uranium. Iran also did not declare the existence of a pilot enrichment facility at the above-mentioned workshop and laser enrichment plants at the Tehran Nuclear Research center and at Lashkar Ab’ad. As stated earlier, while this activity in itself is not in violation of the treaty obligations, since members can utilize nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and since Iran has not enriched uranium to the percentage grade that could be used for nuclear weapons production, yet the manner in which it was carried out secretly for 18 years without the knowledge of, let alone inspections by, IAEA made Iran’s motives suspect.

It is also alleged that Iran did not disclose the full extent of its nuclear program, such as the activity involving advanced centrifuges and production of other material used in initiation of a nuclear explosion. However, the biggest violation of the treaty was its failure to notify the IAEA about the fact that it had introduced enriched uranium into the nuclear sites.

Even though Iran’s actions are not strictly in violation of NPT and are consistent with its stated plan of utilizing nuclear energy for power generation, the United States is much disturbed; it suspects Iran’s future intentions because of past misgivings about that country. Tensions between the United States and Iran were further aggravated following the 9/11 attacks and the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, which brought in geopolitical aspects to their relationship. Iran’s geographic location bordering both Iraq in the West and Afghanistan in the East has given it a tremendous geo-strategic advantage. Its implications will be discussed later.
Immediately following the 9/11 attacks, President Bush had labeled Iran as a member of the “Axis of Evil” along with Iraq and North Korea. He also accused it of promoting terrorism in the region, and aiding and abetting the insurgents in Iraq. Iran in turn calls the United States the “Great Satan” and is apprehensive that the U.S. government is intent on regime change, and accuses it of funding, for this purpose, the Iranian dissidents in Iran and those living abroad. The U.S.-Iran relationship reached its nadir when Iran’s nuclear quest became known. President Ahmadinejad of Iran has added to this acrimonious relationship by his unwarranted and irresponsible remarks about Israel and the Holocaust, further aggravating the problem and making Iran’s supposedly peaceful nuclear pursuit suspect in the eyes of the United States.

The subsequent developments did not help in lessening the distrust. In fact, former Vice President Dick Cheney’s statement in which he warned that if Iran did not rein in its nuclear plans, Israel might launch a preemptive air strike on its own to destroy Iran’s nuclear program, as it had done earlier in Iraq (Osirak in 1981), and let the rest of the world worry about cleaning up the mess, created further alarm. Added to this was the report by investigative journalist Seymour Hersh, in 2004, that the United States was planning air strikes on Iran’s nuclear sites, and that U.S. Special Forces had carried out covert air and ground reconnaissance inside Iran, giving further credence to the possibility of an air strike. Under the atmosphere of such deep suspicion on both sides it was not possible to reach a negotiated settlement of this tricky problem.

Mercifully, better sense prevailed and the strikes did not take place, because if they had, they would have unleashed a new crisis of unimaginable consequences, with far-reaching ramifications, and would have been very dangerous for the entire Middle East. The backlash would have triggered a new wave of terror across the globe. Also it would have imperiled the lives of hundreds of thousands of U.S. troops deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan because of possible retaliatory action by Iran. Moreover, there was no guarantee that the complete nuclear facilities of Iran would be destroyed, as they are well dispersed and deep underground, making their destruction with conventional weapons almost impossible. Thus the aim would not be achieved. Use of nuclear-tipped bunker-busting bombs or depleted uranium ammunition would have created greater problems, especially given the strongly negative world reaction that would ensue. Furthermore, use of such weapons by any country, including the United States, would give other countries the excuse to use them in
the future to settle disputes, with potentially disastrous consequences for the world.

There are still apprehensions of a possible Israeli attack on Iranian nuclear plants. A report by the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies talks about the possibility of Israeli missile attacks with Jericho-III missiles on Iran’s nuclear facilities at Natanz, Esfahan and Arak. This issue has very serious diplomatic and geopolitical implications and cannot be treated lightly. Israel must avoid a temptation of this nature at all costs, for reasons already mentioned. Also there is a report by the U.S. Defense Department (completed in the end of 2008) on page 37 of the U.S. Joint Forces Command Report, which has for the first time confirmed that Israel has nuclear weapons. Until now the U.S. had maintained the policy of “ambiguity” regarding Israel’s nuclear capability, and the army has let slip one of the worst kept secrets, reported the Washington Post. This report further complicates the U.S. bona fides in resolving the Iranian nuclear issue, and also puts Israel’s legitimacy for using force in question, when it itself is alleged to be in possession of nuclear weapons.

Some members of the European Union—the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, the EU3, as they are called—wanted to follow the path of negotiations to resolve the issue, offering Iran economic incentives and guaranteeing a supply of enriched uranium for power generation. The United States, on the other hand, wanted to follow a tougher line of imposing UN sanctions. Iran refused the offer of the EU3, stating that it preferred to enrich uranium on its own for power generation, and for research purposes in the medical field. This put Iran on a collision course with the IAEA, EU3, and the United States, and deepened the mutual distrust between them, thereby rendering resolution of Iran’s nuclear issue more difficult. Because of the impasse, the United States was able to elicit the support of the EU3, and under their combined pressure the IAEA board referred Iran’s case to the UN Security Council in November 2005 to enable sanctions to be imposed on Iran. Iran’s case of violation of NPT obligations was referred to the Security Council by the IAEA board in its emergency meeting on February 4, 2006. The UN Security Council gave Iran until August 31, 2006 to halt the uranium enrichment. Instead, Iran recommenced uranium enrichment activity on April 11, 2006, perhaps in defiance, after its case was referred to the UN. When Iran refused to comply with the deadline, the UN Security Council, under pressure from the United States and the EU, passed Resolution 1737, under Article 41 of the UN Charter, imposing sanctions on Iran, which
allowed for economic sanctions, but not the use of military force. These sanctions were renewed in March 2007, and were again to come up in 2008 if Iran did not stop uranium enrichment; the United States and the EU3 wanted to impose further tougher sanctions in case Iran did not stop uranium enrichment. Since Iran did not relent, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1803, dated March 3, 2008, extending the earlier sanctions to cover additional financial institutions, to restrict travel of additional persons, and to bar export of nuclear- and missile-related dual-use goods to Iran. The implementation of the sanctions is monitored by a Security Council committee. However, Tehran has continued to enrich uranium despite lengthy negotiations with the EU and the sanctions imposed by the Security Council. Iran maintains that it will not develop nuclear weapons.

While the UN was reviewing its position on Iran’s nuclear issue, the U.S. National Intelligence Estimate published its assessment in December 2007, stating that Iran had stopped all nuclear weapons activity in 2003. Iran was very happy with this evaluation and said that the report had vindicated its stand regarding peaceful use of nuclear energy. The present status of Iran’s nuclear program is at about the same level as reported previously. Dennis Blair, the United States Director of Intelligence, presenting his assessment to the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee on March 10, 2009, said Iran had not produced the highly enriched uranium necessary for a nuclear weapon. He also said that Iran has not decided to pursue the production of weapons-grade uranium and the parallel ability to load it onto a ballistic missile. This assessment contrasts with a stark Israeli warning, days earlier, that Iran had crossed the “technological threshold” in its pursuit of the bomb. Blair told the Senate Armed Services Committee, “The overall situation—and the intelligence community agrees on this—[is] that Iran has not decided to press forward...to have a nuclear weapon on top of a ballistic missile. Our current estimate is that the minimum time at which Iran could technically produce the amount of highly enriched uranium for a single weapon is 2010 to 2015.”

To Untie the Gordian Knot

Like Alexander the Great, who resolved the complex riddle of the “Gordian Knot” just by cutting it, the United States too must move forward and come out with a totally new solution by distancing itself from past complexities and look for a fresh and innovative solution to this intricate problem. President Obama’s declared intention of
Iran's Nuclear Ambitions

“principled and sustained engagement” with all the nations of the region, including Iran and Syria was a very positive step. His earlier view of having “dialogue” with Iran without preconditions was also very encouraging and indicated his earnestness in resolving the issues in the spirit of amicable settlement.

President Obama is a man of vision and has very original ideas and ingenious ways to reach out to the people of the world, and that is one quality that endears him to one and all. On the occasion of Iranian New-Year, Nowruz, on March 19, 2009, in an unprecedented goodwill gesture, he sent out a direct video message to the Iranian people and their leaders. Besides conveying his greeting to the nation on this occasion, he offered “a new beginning” of engagement to resolve the full range of issues confronting the two countries and to pursue constructive ties between the United States, Iran, and the international community.31 This indeed was a good beginning.

Earlier, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s invitation to Iran to participate in the regional conference on Afghanistan was also a good move as a confidence-building exercise. Accordingly, Iran’s deputy foreign minister participated in the 70-nation, one-day conference on Afghanistan at The Hague on March 30, 2009, and promised to increase the capacity of the docks at Chabahar—the nearest port to Afghanistan—to carry nonmilitary supplies to Afghanistan via Iran.32 The deputy foreign minister also indicated that Iran was prepared to participate in the projects aimed at combating drug trafficking, and in other developmental and reconstruction activity in Afghanistan.

Besides this, Iran’s role as a regional power needs to be factored into all the strategic formulations for the region, more so given the context of the changed scenario in Iraq where the Shia majority, which has an affinity with Iran, is in power. This has given Iran a double advantage. The first advantage was the removal of the obstacle of Saddam Hussein, and the second advantage is the ascendance of friends as the rulers in Iraq. Therefore, there is a necessity for a strategic shift in the U.S. thinking about this region, where the regional powers should be provided greater space in the power interplay. Fortunately the new U.S. administration is pursuing a very different policy from the previous administration that had abandoned the language of dialogue and had embarked on the path of unilateralism.

Iran’s nuclear issue is intimately connected to Russia and their relationship in this field dates back to the 1990s; the United States needs to take this into consideration. Besides building its nuclear reactor at Bushehr, which went into operation in the first half of the Iranian new year beginning March 21, 2010,33 Russia has economic,
political, and military ties with Iran. While Russia’s level of current trade with Iran is modest, Moscow has ambitious short-term and mid-term economic goals, and as per their estimates, the trade would increase manifold to about $10 billion in the next few years, with the high-technology sector showing the most promise. From Moscow’s viewpoint, the Iranian market also has considerable potential as an importer of conventional arms—one of Russia’s main sources of currency. It is reported that Russia has threatened to sell a strategic S-300 air defense system to Iran, and to boost its nuclear program in order to force Washington to review its stand on issues considered vital to Russia, such as NATO’s expansion in Russia’s sphere of influence, and deployment of a missile shield in Poland and the Czech Republic. Also, in Russia’s assessment, because of Iran’s geostrategic location with access to land and sea routes linking Europe and Asia, it is likely to become a major player in the vast land mass stretching from the Middle East to the Caucasus and Central Asia. As a result, “partnership with Iran is becoming one of the key foreign policy tasks of Russia.”

China too has large economic interests in Iran mainly related to its growing energy requirements. In 2006, China signed an agreement with Iran according to which state-owned China Petroleum & Chemical Corporation or Sinopec was to develop Iran’s Yadavaran oil field, and in return China agreed to buy from Iran ten million tons of liquefied natural gas per year for 25 years beginning in 2009. China imports 13 percent of its oil from Iran, and trade between them has been increasing at a fast rate. It was at $1.2 billion in 1998, increasing to almost $20 billion in 2007, and by July 2008 it had already reached $17.39 billion. According to Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister Zhai Jun, it was expected to reach $30 billion by year-end 2008. With the present global economic crisis the last mentioned figure might not have been achieved. However, what should be noted is the growing importance of their economic relationship, which has a crucial bearing on the international stage, particularly when it comes to the nuclear issue of Iran and the way to deal with it.

In light of the change in the political and strategic thinking of the United States after President Obama took office, in the initial stages there were a number of positive developments indicating a thaw in relations with Iran and a willingness for dialogue; thus there are many avenues available for breaking the ice, notwithstanding the present tensions that have been created after the June 2009 presidential elections in Iran. What is required is to build trust, stop
the blame game and rhetorical war of words, and get down to serious business, so that Iran can be dissuaded from building nuclear weapons. Professor William Beeman of the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, described the atmosphere correctly when he said, “There is ‘Better Weather Ahead.’ The United States has common cause with Iran on many fronts. In political terms, the United States and Iran both oppose Islamic extremists like al-Qaeda and the Taliban….Like the United States, Iran favors stability in the region. Contrary to the Bush-era accusations, Tehran’s leaders aren’t pleased with the militarism of individuals like Muqtada al-Sadr in Iraq, and have worked to quiet his opposition groups in Iraq in the name of a more comprehensive stability for the Shia community, which will eventually rule Iraq. Tehran’s leaders also want stability in Afghanistan. Iran hosts millions of Afghan refugees. It would like most of them to go home, and that can’t happen until Afghanistan is quiet once again. Other areas of potential cooperation include prevention of drug trafficking, environmental protection, health care, trade stabilization, and international transport. Iran also has a strong stake in culture and tourism. The whole world travels to Iran to see the astonishing historical and archaeological sites—except for Americans.”

With this as the backdrop, it is time for the United States to reach out to Iran with a comprehensive strategic framework that addresses Iran’s legitimate security concerns, and aims at the normalization of relations and lifting of sanctions, and that acknowledges Iran’s place in regional affairs. In this bargain the Iranians too must address the concerns of the United States regarding the nuclear issue, its support to terrorist organizations, and other problematic aspects of its role in the regional conundrum. It is understood that the Iranian leadership was amenable to such a comprehensive agenda and had sent an offer in this regard in May 2003, which was rejected by the Bush administration.

The nuclear weapons program is at the core of this grand bargain. In the past Iran had stated that it would not utilize nuclear material, including enriched uranium, for making nuclear weapons. It should therefore give a guarantee to this effect and agree to the intrusive protocols for verification. The additional inspections by the IAEA would make it almost impossible for Iran to develop nuclear weapons without being detected. Thus Iran can be prevented from taking the road to acquiring nuclear weapons and at the same time it can be brought into the fold of the international community, which it desires fervently, and which is essential for its economic development and also for the easing of tensions in the region.
In a significant departure from the past policies and in conso-
nance with the new approach to resolving the problems confront-
ning the world, and particularly to seeking diplomatic rapprochement
with Iran, the United States indicated that it would henceforth be
involved in direct negotiations with Iran along with the EU3 (the
United Kingdom, France, and Germany), plus Russia and China.39
The Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad welcomed the move
for direct dialogue with the United States. However, at the same time
Iran continues to advance its enrichment techniques and capability, as
was demonstrated at its nuclear facility at Isfahan on April 8, 2009.40
Consequently, the key questions still remain open—Iran’s uranium
enrichment program and building trust.

While the favorable atmospherics are being created and the poli-
cies of outreach of President Obama are likely to go a long way in
bringing about a rapprochement between the two countries, what
is required is that they both must be prepared to “give and take” to
build trust, and overcome the obstacles confronting them so as to
ensure a better future.

**Impact of North Korean Nuclear Program on Iran**

North Korea has chosen the path of nuclear brinksmanship ever since
the United States became aware in October 2002 of its secret uranium
enrichment program for use in nuclear weapons.41 It appears that
North Korea resorted to this game to blackmail and force the United
States to grant it further economic concessions, for it knows that the
United States is not in a position to take tough military actions, espe-
cially since South Korea is in a vulnerable position, and so are the
U.S. troops stationed in South Korea. At the same time it provided
North Korea the necessary space and time to continue its clandestine
activity of acquiring nuclear technology. The North Korean leader,
Kim Jong Il, is highly unpredictable and his motives cannot be fully
discerned. North Korea carried out its first underground nuclear test
on October 9, 2006.42 Thereafter, following the six-party talks held
in Beijing in February 2007,43 it agreed to shut down its nuclear reac-
tor at Yongbyon in exchange for energy and economic aid. It fulfilled
its agreement after further unwarranted objections on very flimsy
grounds, and created uncalled for hitches prior to ultimately disman-
tling the nuclear facility at Yongbyon.44 However, it continued its
game of escalating brinksmanship, and on April 5, 200945 launched a
rocket into space despite world opinion being against it.
The response of the UN Security Council to this provocation was not tough enough, which emboldened North Korea to carry out its second nuclear test on May 25, 2009. While its blatant disregard of its treaty obligations invited worldwide condemnation, North Korea remained unfazed and even threatened to attack South Korea, should it join the U.S.-led plan to check and inspect its vessels suspected of carrying equipment for nuclear weapons development. North Korea is also resorting to cyberwarfare, both against the United States and South Korea, as was witnessed in the second week of July 2009, when there were attacks on government and private websites which put at risk and jeopardized vital data for national security. The latest belligerent act appears to be an attempt to push for further advantages when the negotiations are resumed.

Even though the United Nations Security Council has unanimously voted for tougher sanctions, including the inspection of North Korean ships and a wider ban on arms sales and other financial measures, North Korea is reportedly planning to carry out a third nuclear test. The world community needs to meet the challenges being posed by North Korea, which is a very serious threat to international security; it has other ramifications too. Iran has been watching all these developments very closely and the U.S. response to North Korean nuclear provocation and the resultant imbroglio impacts Iran's nuclear strategy as well. It is quite possible that Iran may try to emulate the North Korean model. However, for the present, the stated aim of Iran's nuclear program remains for power generation and not for weapons development, and it is likely to stick to it in order not to further spoil its relations with the international community.

**Road Ahead**

While there was a great deal of speculation about Iran's real motive and intentions, Iran, after much dithering, finally participated in talks at Geneva on October 1, 2009 with the P5+1, the permanent five members of the UN Security Council and Germany, regarding its nuclear enrichment program. As a result of these talks Iran agreed in principle to send its stockpile of low-enriched uranium (LEU) to a third country where it could be turned into fuel and reshipped back to be used at the Tehran Research Reactor. It was also a step in the right direction as a confidence-building measure, since it would provide Tehran the much-needed nuclear fuel for medical purposes, the stock of which was running out.
It was reported that the research reactor at Tehran, which had been producing medical isotopes to treat diseases, would run out of fuel by the end of 2010. The research reactor required medium-enriched uranium up to 19.75 percent, whereas Iran had produced only 3.5 percent enriched uranium. Thus, this deal was in the interest of both Iran and the P5+1 countries, as it precluded Iran from the path to produce medium-grade uranium enrichment, which would have taken it closer to the production of weapons-grade uranium. As a follow-up to the deal, the IAEA, in consultation with Iran, France, Russia, and the United States, had proposed to ship 1,200 kg of LEU (approximately 70 percent of Iran’s stockpile) produced at Natanz to Russia by the end of 2009. After being enriched to 19.75 percent, the uranium would be shipped to France, where, along with Argentina, France would produce nuclear fuel for the Tehran research reactor. The fuel was to be sent back to Iran via Russia by end of 2010. However, Iran did not fulfill its part of the deal on some technical grounds. The United States, which had given as a cutoff date the end of 2009 for Iran to transfer the uranium, contemplated imposing tougher sanctions on Iran. However, Russia and particularly China were of the view that no new tough sanctions should be imposed since the diplomatic efforts were in progress.

Iran had also agreed to allow for the inspection by the IAEA of its newly constructed nuclear facility at Qom, which was disclosed by Iran only in September 2009, when it was nearing completion (it is 18 months away from completion). The IAEA was allowed full access to this facility in November 2009, and carried out the necessary inspection and collected samples to test nuclear material. The IAEA inspectors reported that the centrifuges had not been installed, and no uranium had been enriched at the facility. Iran reportedly told the IAEA that it had constructed this facility in bunkers in a mountain so as to have an alternative and safe site to process uranium should its nuclear plant at Natanz be attacked. Iran, however, insisted on its peaceful use of nuclear energy.

Iran must fulfill its obligations and honor its commitment by transferring the required quantity of LEU to Russia so that tensions are defused. The West too must act with patience and not precipitate matters so that a diplomatic solution is arrived at and the current crisis of confidence is overcome. Peaceful resolution to the problem must take its own course and the temptation for military action must be avoided in the interest of world peace.
United States and Russian Relations

Background

Ever since the breakup of the former Soviet Union in December 1991, with the independence of its former constituent states on its western border, and the Central Asian republics forming the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Russian Federation has been considerably weakened and this has left the United States as the sole superpower. The 1990s were a very difficult decade for Russia. It was a very painful transition for Russia to go from being one of the two superpowers, which had a lot of say in world affairs, and which could dictate terms to the Western bloc, to almost becoming an economic basket case due to the social and economic transformations, with practically no say on the international scene. Russia faced tremendous socioeconomic, political, and ideological changes during the decade after the formation of the Russian Federation; the decline caused a great shock to the Russian psyche and hurt their ego. The dissolution of the Soviet Union also brought about a sea change in the geopolitical landscape across Europe and Eurasia, consequently altering the geostrategic paradigm in the region, which had global ramifications.

With the end of communism, relations between Russia and the United States were on the mend initially. The end of the Cold War also saw Russia embark on privatization and free market economy reforms under President Boris Yeltsin which were encouraged by the United States under the first President Bush and President Bill Clinton. However, due to lack of expertise in these areas and being conditioned to tight state control and the legacy of Soviet central planning, the “shock therapy” of reforms resulted in a major economic crisis at home for the masses, corruption at high places, and...
the rise of unscrupulous Russian oligarchs who were able to amass a huge amount of wealth, power, and control of former state-owned industries at the expense of the state, and the public that was already reeling under extreme economic hardship. This also resulted in deterioration of law and order, creating conditions of instability in the country. With dire economic conditions at home, Russia also found itself sidelined and ignored in the shaping of major events of international importance that were taking place during this period, like the war in the former Yugoslavia, and particularly the Kosovo war in Serbia in 1999.

During the presidency of Vladimir Putin (2000–2008), Russia to a great extent staged a comeback, thanks to the worldwide economic boom and skyrocketing of the price of oil and natural gas. Thus, Russia was able to achieve economic recovery, and, in fact, had a surplus in foreign exchange reserves. This also enabled Russia to assert itself on the international stage more effectively, and in some cases aggressively. President Putin’s two terms almost coincided with President Bush’s two terms as well. The 9/11 terrorist attacks saw the United States getting deeply embroiled in the global war on terror. Following these attacks the Bush administration also embarked on a unilateral course of foreign policy implementation, resulting in the adoption of the strategy of preemptive strikes. Russia cooperated with the United States in the war on terror and agreed to the establishment of military logistic bases for the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in the Central Asian Republic of Kyrgyzstan. However, when the United States invaded Iraq, Russia was opposed to the war, but did not exercise its veto in the UN Security Council.

SOURING OF RELATIONS

Russia’s relations with the United State began to sour due to many reasons. The Russian leadership was very upset with the loss of its prestige in international affairs, where it had very little influence, and, to add insult to injury, many of the actions of the Bush administration were seen as a deliberate slight by the Russians. In 2002, the United States withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty with the aim of installing a missile defense system close to the Russian border, and planned to expand NATO membership to countries of the former Eastern Bloc, Ukraine and Georgia—the post-Soviet space of geopolitical importance, considered by Russia as its backyard and comprising her sphere of influence. The Russians felt humiliated at the turn of events, and the Russian leadership under President Putin
yearned to regain its power and become once again an important player on the world stage.

In addition, the United States announced in March 2007, that it planned to build Anti-Ballistic Missile Defense installations in Poland with radar stations in the Czech Republic, intended as a Missile Defense shield, ostensibly to protect Europe and the United States from possible missile attacks from Iran and North Korea. However, the Russians viewed this plan quite differently because of its proximity to the Russian border and considered it as a potential threat to them. President Putin compared this move to something similar to the deployment of Soviet missiles in Cuba in 1962, which led to the Cuban Missile Crisis. This planned U.S. move prompted Russia to test its advanced intercontinental ballistic missile, RS-24. Russia cautioned that its missile was capable of defeating any known missile defense system. President Putin also warned that Russia would target missile sites in Poland and the Czech Republic, should the United States go ahead with the building of the defense installations there. In addition, he added that the Russian missiles might be redirected toward Ukraine in case NATO built bases on Ukrainian territory.

There were other irritants too, which further strained the relationship between the United States and Russia; for example, Russia’s relations with Iran, and the help that it provided to Iran for the construction of the Bushehr nuclear plant, were viewed by the United States with great concern. In addition, Russia has economic and military ties with Iran as detailed in the previous chapter. The latest in the series of problems was the Russian-Georgian military clash in August 2008, following Georgia’s invasion of South Ossetia. Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili invaded the breakaway region of South Ossetia, and also planned to go to war in Abkhazia, another separatist region. It is also alleged that he had the tacit approval of the United States for his plan. Saakashvili overplayed his hand with the Russians in the hope that the West would come to his assistance, a miscalculation that cost him very dearly. The invasion of South Ossetia by Georgia was viewed with serious concern by Moscow and prompted Russia to invade Georgia.

Moscow was well aware that neither the United States nor the Europeans would have the will or the capability to intervene or come to the assistance of Georgia. The Russian military was able to completely rout the Georgian forces in a very short time. Immediately after the invasion Russia recognized the independence of these two regions, that is, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, from Georgia. It appeared that Russia was paying back the United States in the same
coin as the United States had done earlier in the Serbian war in 1999, with the recognition of the independence of Kosovo by the West in 2008. Serbia was a close ally of Russia, but at that time Russia was in no position to oppose this move by the United States, even though Russia and China had strongly condemned the war, and the subsequent declaration of independence by Kosovo.

Another area where there has been a clash of interests is the question of Russian gas supply to Europe, which transits through Ukraine. Ever since the breakup of the former Soviet Union, Russia and Ukraine have been sparring with each other regarding gas deliveries, prices, and transit costs. After the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004, President Viktor Yushchenko came to power. Since his government was hostile toward Russia, things took an ugly turn, more so because of Ukraine’s desire to integrate more closely into the European Union, and to become a member of NATO. Ukraine has a very different strategic equation with Russia. Besides being the home to most of the infrastructure which links Russia to Europe, like pipelines, power lines, roads, and railways, the Ukrainian and Russian heartlands are deeply intertwined, with the largest concentration of ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking people living outside Russia inhabiting the eastern part of Ukraine. In addition, the homeport of the Russian Black Sea fleet is Sevastopol on Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula, which limits Russia’s port options severely, thereby limiting its naval capabilities for power projection as a major world power. The above geographic realities make it imperative for Russia to ensure that no hostile power controls Ukraine, for, if that happens, it would sever most of the infrastructure connections to the Caucasus. Therefore, Russia is very sensitive to the expansion of NATO into this region and feels compelled to take measures that would prevent such an eventuality.

A bitter taste of this took place in the winter of 2008, when Russia’s gas giant, Gazprom, switched off the gas supply to Ukraine over disputes regarding past payments and price of gas. Earlier, too, in 2006, Russia had cut off gas supplies passing through Ukraine. The grounds were similar, that is, nonpayment for the gas supplies, and, in addition, because Ukraine had utilized some of the gas meant for Europe, thereby creating a shortage. The main problem in 2008 was not about payment, but rather the fault lines lay elsewhere. Russia has a powerful tool to beat Ukraine with—the gas supply; two thirds of Ukraine’s natural gas demand comes from Russia, and the income from the transit of natural gas to Europe through Ukraine fuels a major portion of Ukraine’s budget. Russia wanted to demonstrate
its newfound strength that could not only hurt Ukraine severely, but also hurt Europe tremendously—especially during the dead of winter, when they were “left in the cold,” both literally and metaphorically.

Europe imports one quarter of its gas requirements from Russia and 80 percent transits through Ukraine. Thus, this cutting off of gas supply affected, in varying degrees in the order of severity, countries like France, Turkey, Poland, Italy, Hungary, Romania, Austria, the Czech Republic, Greece, Croatia, Macedonia, Bosnia, Serbia, and Bulgaria. On the other hand, the 2006 standoff had affected Ukraine only and was resolved quickly. The main aim of Russia was to demonstrate its ability to hurt the economic interests of Ukraine, and thereby try to dissuade it from taking steps that were not in the interest of Russia. At the same time, it was also to caution European countries about their dependence on energy supply from Russia.

The European countries are taking steps to diversify their sources of energy supply to remove their dependence on Russia entirely. In this context, Turkey and four European countries have agreed to a new route and fresh source of gas supply from the Caspian Sea region under Project Nabucco. The new route planned would be through Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, and Austria, thereby obviating dependence on Russia. However, it will not likely be ready until 2014, and will be able to cater to only about 10 percent of Europe’s needs. As far as Germany is concerned, its supply of Russian gas is not through Ukraine but through Belarus, thus Germany was not affected adversely in the energy standoff of 2008. Germany also does not want to get involved in any dispute with Russia, as it is not in its national interest, especially since Germany is Russia’s largest trading partner, and is also heavily dependent on Russian natural gas. As tensions between Russia and the United States and the West increase due to Russia’s resurgence, Germany does not want again to become the frontline state and battleground as in the past, during the Cold War. It is in this context that German Chancellor Angela Markel opposed NATO membership of both Ukraine and Georgia, and said so in a joint press conference with President Dmitri Medvedev, at the conclusion of her meeting with the Russian leader at St. Petersburg in the beginning of October 2008. While Germany does not want to alienate the United States, at the same time it is conscious of its vulnerabilities and therefore wants to chart an independent course with respect to its relations with Russia. It is reported that the German chancellor acted with the full knowledge of the United States.

There are other areas where Moscow is trying to flex its muscles so as to gain Washington’s attention, if not respect, and to regain its influence
in the lost regions; the Central Asian Republic of Kyrgyzstan is a case in point, besides Ukraine and Georgia. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, Moscow is trying its Russification drive both politically and through economic assistance. Its leader, President Kurmanbek Bakiyev, who himself assumed power after the Tulip Revolution in 2005, had been in the process of turning his country into a dictatorship, with the close embrace of Kremlin, until his ouster in April 2010.39

In the latest economic coup, Kyrgyzstan has been promised $2.1 billion in economic aid by Russia.40 The assistance package coincided with President Bakiyev’s decision to close down the United States air base at Manas in Kyrgyzstan, which has been the main supply base for the military operations in Afghanistan since the war on terror began in 2001.41 Thus, Moscow’s motive behind the provision of economic aid is clearly discernible, and also it indicates how the area of Central Asia is susceptible to the geopolitical “Great Game,” reminiscent of the similar power play and Great Game politics of Great Britain and Russia in the nineteenth century.42 While the United States downplayed its strategic significance, an article in Foreign Policy magazine states, “Moscow was apprehensive about the base which fitted well with former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld’s notion of a system of “lily pads”—almost skeletal military outposts scattered widely around the globe that would give the United States the ability to project its military power and resources into the region where U.S. military operations were previously unthinkable. . . . In Soviet times, Kyrgyzstan was so secure and safe that it furnished an excellent testing ground for sensitive weapons systems. Now it was the site of the aggressive extension of the growing U.S. military presence in the region. The Kremlin therefore sought to shut down the U.S. operation.”43

Ever since Vladimir Putin assumed power, Russia has been on the road to greater state control, suppression of the democratic movement, and elimination of political dissent, reminiscent of Soviet authoritarian policies of the past.44 At the same time it is attempting to regain its past glory, and in the pursuit of this aim, it is looking for all possible avenues to get back to its old position. The Russians, especially their leadership, were greatly disturbed, and their pride badly bruised, by their helplessness in influencing world affairs, and at the same time they were facing domestic economic problems; these conditions at home suited the leaders in their desire to put all the blame on democracy and free market enterprise.45 Moreover, Russia had been conditioned to centuries of strong and authoritarian central government and tight state control of all internal activities. Adding to his
good fortune, Putin was greatly helped by the economic boom and skyrocketing of oil and gas prices. Thus, President Putin’s attempts to rollback democracy, and to reintroduce some sort of authoritarianism found ready acceptance with the masses without much widespread dissent.46

However, present times are substantially different from the past. The world too has changed considerably because of greater awareness, openness, and greater economic interdependence between nations. In light of this, and given the vulnerabilities of Russia, chief among them being the economy, which has been further aggravated due to the global economic downturn, any aggressive action by Russia would have very serious economic consequences for Russia, despite the energy weapon it wields against Europe. Therefore Russia will not be able to pose a serious challenge to the United States—at best it will be able to attain a great regional power status, with greater clout in the countries around its periphery.47

However, Russia has the capability and capacity for competing with the United States in the field of advanced weapons systems. This was demonstrated by Russia when it developed, and test flew, its Sukhoi T-50 Stealth fighter jet on January 29, 2010.48 It was the first advanced fighter aircraft developed by Russia in 20 years, after the formation of the Russian Federation. Russia is the only other country besides the United States to have this technology, matching the U.S. F-22 Raptor Stealth fighter. This demonstrative display indicates that Russia is still in a position to stage a comeback in the military field. In the meantime the United States too has been weakened because of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the global economic crisis. Therefore, it would be prudent for both these powers to work together to advance peace and security in the world, rather than harking back to a renewed Cold War, albeit with some variation.

**Importance of U.S.-Russian Cooperation**

There are many areas of divergence in the policies and strategic thinking, as well as geopolitical perceptions and interests, of the United States and Russia. However, what stands out is that these differences are not as irreconcilable as they appear at first. With pragmatic analysis and deft handling they can be surmounted. These differences should not become a “cause célèbre,” nor should they lead to a renewed and new type of Cold War, as it will not be in the interest of either of the countries or the world.
There are many areas of convergence of views which are closely linked to the national interests of both these countries, and which would enable them to play a constructive role on the international scene. Many of the pressing issues facing the world need a joint effort to tackle and it would be difficult for the United States to resolve them acting alone. Russia is also an important stakeholder in their resolution and its national interests are closely interlinked not only with those of the United States, but also the world at large. The important areas where they need to work together are in the fields of combating terror, preventing nuclear proliferation and spread of fissile material as well as its technology, and, in particular, ensuring that the terrorists are prevented from acquiring both of these. The question of preventing Iran and North Korea from building nuclear weapons is of great importance for the United States, and Russia has substantial leverage, particularly with Iran, and also can influence North Korea, even though China has greater influence on the latter. Global warming and finding a solution to the ongoing war in Afghanistan are two important issues which the world is confronted with and which need serious attention. Russia again is a very important player in these and it is essential to elicit its cooperation in their expeditious resolution.

What needs to be done to promote greater understanding and cooperation from Russia in these areas is to involve it as an equal partner in resolving the many complex issues, especially those where it has the necessary influence, so that it feels important and at the same time is able to assuage its hurt feelings. In the past Russia has been sidelined in the important decision-making processes for many momentous events sweeping and shaping the world during the decade after the breakup of the former Soviet Union. As far as the areas of divergence are concerned, like promoting greater democracy internally within Russia, admitting Ukraine and Georgia into the membership of NATO, energy supply to Europe, and other issues that impinge on international security where Russia’s assistance is required, these must be resolved through dialogue and negotiations, factoring in the sensitivities of Russia.

The period of the two terms of presidency of both President Bush and President Putin (2000–2008) saw the cooling-off of relations between Washington and Moscow, due to disagreement on certain contentious issues affecting the national interests of both their countries, despite the fact that both these leaders professed warm friendship for each other. However, with the change of guard, with President Obama and President Dmitri Medvedev becoming the
presidents of their respective countries, a fresh wind has started to blow and relations between the United States and Russia appear to be on the mend. Both these leaders are young and want to make a mark both domestically and on the world stage. While President Obama is the “messenger of change,” President Medvedev has to break out of the shadow of President Putin and establish himself as a capable and strong leader. Hence, he has to prove his credentials and chart a new course, without hanging on to the coattails of his predecessor. The chances for a better future are quite bright as was illustrated during their meeting on the sidelines of G20 Economic Summit in London in April 2009 and other meetings they have had thereafter.

President Obama had a meeting with President Medvedev on April 1, 2009 in London during which the two leaders got down to discussing business right at the outset to “reset” their strained relations. The duo was earnest in finding common ground so that they could repair their estranged relationship and discussed various issues confronting the two nations and also the world. They discussed the need for cutting their nuclear arsenals and the necessity to draft a new strategic arms reduction treaty (START), as the present treaty was to expire in December 2009. This was a good beginning and both the United States and Russia will need to take concrete steps not only to resolve their differences but also work out a joint strategy for other problems besetting the world.

President Obama visited Moscow for the summit meeting with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev on July 6, 2009. The two presidents had a fruitful meeting and signed an agreement to cut down nuclear warheads to 1,700 apiece within seven years. In addition Russia agreed to allow the U.S. military to fly troops and weapons across its territory to Afghanistan. While differences remained with regard to contentious issues like deployment of Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD), NATO membership of Georgia and Ukraine, and Iran’s nuclear issue, on the whole the summit was able to “reset” soured relations to an extent. In his summit speech President Obama said the two countries were both “committed to leave behind suspicion and rivalry of the past.” President Obama also met Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. It was hoped that the differences that exist are gradually resolved through negotiations.

After his Moscow visit President Obama laid out a new plan for missile defense in Eastern Europe, perhaps to assuage the misgivings of the Kremlin. President Obama has scrapped the old missile defense shield plan for placing BMD installations in Poland and the Czech Republic. Instead, a new restructured missile defense system based on
U.S. navy ships, positioned either in the North or the Mediterranean seas, will be placed for the protection of Europe, while its follow-on system will protect the United States. This system will be available sooner than the earlier planned land-based defense shield.\(^5^4\) President Obama again met President Medvedev on the sidelines of the Copenhagen Climate Summit in December 2009, and had discussion regarding putting limits on their nuclear arsenal, and also regarding a new pact as the successor to the original START,\(^5^5\) which expired on December 5, 2009, after maintaining stability between the two Cold War superpowers for two decades.

Both countries need to open up to each other through cultural and academic exchanges as well as at the intergovernmental level. The aim must be clear—the bottom line being to reach out through quiet diplomacy, which should take center stage, to come to an understanding and to patch up differences. This requires the political will to confront the problem squarely, and both President Obama and President Medvedev are capable of doing so, as displayed during their meeting where a new atmosphere of mutual trust was created. One can hope that what President Obama said on that occasion, “And what I believe we’ve have begun today is a very constructive dialogue that will allow us to work on issues of mutual interest,” is followed through in letter and in spirit by both sides, which will not only benefit these two countries but will have an impact globally as well.
Global warming and climate change are stark realities facing the planet, knowing no national, cultural, or ethnic boundaries. The advanced nations of the world have been the major cause of global warming and climate change due to unlimited emission of greenhouse gases (GHG) and chlorofluorocarbons (CFC), which have depleted and damaged the ozone layer in the upper atmosphere and caused temperatures to rise, resulting in melting of glaciers at a very fast rate which in turn has been the cause of rise in sea levels. All these manmade actions have had a disastrous effect on the global ecological balance. There is no time to be lost in squabbling, but rather it is time to address the problem squarely, and move ahead to repair the damage before it is too late. It is time to realize that it affects all humanity equally and no nation is safe from its aftereffects. What is required is a joint effort and a globally agreed-upon mechanism and regulatory regime to control further emissions of GHG beyond the limits which the planet can bear, so that not only our generation but our children and posterity can breathe clean air and enjoy the bounties of nature so gracefully endowed on mankind. The Copenhagen Summit on Climate Change was held in December 2009 for this specific purpose; even though it came out with an agreement, it did not measure up to expectations.

Causes of Global Warming

One of the greatest dangers facing mankind is global warming, caused by man’s insatiable greed to consume more and more and to accumulate material goods at a scale unprecedented at any other time in history. While it is everyone’s right to live a comfortable life and to acquire material comforts, what has happened in the process is that
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greed has overtaken the legitimate needs and acquisition of material wants in many cases is very much in excess of what is required or desirable since it is outstretching and depleting our natural resources to a breaking point. Humans are playing with nature, which can have very serious fallout on the existence of life on earth; natural resources are finite and wanton consumption will obviously lead to their depletion and eventual disappearance. This is what is happening in the present era of consumerism, which is also to a large extent indirectly responsible for the related problems of climate change and global warming.

Activities that go toward human progress but which are harmful to nature need to be replaced with efficient and nature- or eco-friendly systems, something that is surely within the reach of human ingenuity. Quoting President Kennedy, while speaking at the UN on climate change on September 22, 2009, President Obama said that “our problems are man-made therefore they must be solved by man.” It is therefore essential to identify the substances and activities that harm nature in the context of global warming resulting in climate change, and to find alternatives to replace them with more efficient systems. Former UN Secretary General and the present Global Humanitarian Forum (GHF) President Kofi Annan said, “Climate change is the greatest emerging humanitarian challenge of our time, causing suffering to hundreds of millions of people worldwide.” A study commissioned by the Geneva-based GHF has estimated that climate change seriously affects over 325 million people every year which is likely to double in the next 20 years. The economic losses due to global warming amount to $125 billion annually—more than the flow of economic aid from rich to poor nations—and are likely to increase to $340 billion by 2030. The most affected are the world’s poorest groups living in the underdeveloped world, while they are the ones who have done the least to cause the problem. The report says that the developing countries bear more than nine-tenths of the human and economic burden of climate change, while the 50 poorest countries contribute less than one percent of carbon emissions that are heating the planet.

Human activities have a tremendous impact on the emission of GHGs into the atmosphere, and these have been the cause of the rise in average temperatures across the globe during the last 50 to 60 years. The main sources of GHGs due to human activity are burning of fossil fuel by industry, generation of electricity with coal-fired furnaces, emission of carbon dioxide from automobile exhausts, deforestation, and utilization of land for agriculture and human habitation (manufacture of construction material, chief among
them cement and paints, are a major cause of carbon emissions). Agricultural activity, including use of fertilizers that lead to higher nitrous oxide concentrations, livestock and poultry waste, human sewage, industrial waste, and the use of CFCs in refrigeration, all cause global warming since they are not being regulated.

Another cause of global warming is the booming construction business that has been carried out on an unprecedented scale, and at a very fast pace, all around the world during the last decade; construction of building structures emits about 12 percent of carbon dioxide around the world. In fact all the items of daily use in a household, like detergents, cleaning materials, sprays of all description, and even the plastic bottles for bottled water all contain chemicals in their manufacturing which are injurious to humans, animals, plants, and marine life, and at the same time their manufacture releases large amounts of GHGs in the atmosphere, contributing to global warming. It is quite apparent that all the activities which are an index of modernity, progress, and development like rapid industrialization, urbanization and construction of infrastructure to sustain growth, ever-increasing automobile manufacture and insatiable consumer culture contribute immensely to global warming by leaving their carbon footprint.

The fallout from global warming is that the glaciers are disappearing at a very fast pace due to higher temperatures, ice shelves are collapsing in Antarctica and Greenland, Arctic shrinkage is taking place, sea levels are rising, and there is desertification of many areas around the world. It is also leading to the thawing of permafrost. Almost 25 percent of the land area of the Northern Hemisphere holds permafrost, which had hitherto acted as the world’s sink (storehouse), locking away carbon and other GHGs such as methane for thousands of years. The thawing of permafrost in these regions has started to release the trapped GHGs, which can accelerate the greenhouse effect all around the world. It is estimated that by the year 2050 the world will have to reduce emission of GHGs by about 60 to 80 percent to counter this effect. It has been noticed that many glaciers in the Himalayan region have either totally disappeared or have receded by more than 50 percent, and this too is the case with other glaciers in the Andes, Alps, Pyrenees, Rocky Mountains, and Northern Cascades.

Taking the example of the melting of just one glacial system as an illustration of what may happen, let us consider the aftereffects of the melting glaciers of the Himalayas, and the devastating effects this will have on the region and its river basins. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Chair, Dr. Rajendra Pachauri, has
given a stark warning about the cataclysmic consequences of climate change and receding of Himalayan glaciers. There was some controversy about the data on which the assessment was made and the alarming predictions about the likelihood of the disappearance of the Himalayan glaciers by as early as 2035, however, according to former Princeton University President, Harold Shapiro, who led the UN IPCC review of the findings, “the errors did not dent the credibility of the process.” Dr. Pachauri has assessed that over a period of time about 500 million people in the Indian subcontinent (India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh), and about 250 million in China will suffer from water scarcity as a result of the melting glaciers. At the same time most of the river systems in the northern part of the Indian subcontinent, which originate in the glacial region, will initially undergo massive floods due to the rapid melting that will take place. After a couple of decades, with the decline of the glaciers, there would be water scarcity, which would not only affect humans and animals, but also the environment, because glaciers and rivers serve the important purpose of recharging groundwater throughout the large expanse of territory. It will also adversely affect agriculture because in this region of India over 80 percent of water from the rivers is utilized for agricultural purposes. Thus, besides drinking water shortage it will also lead to food scarcity and starvation for millions. The rising sea levels in their turn will lead to many island nations being partially or totally submerged, and vast stretches of coastal areas all around the world would also be totally or partially inundated by seawater permanently, without any chance of this water receding. For example, the Maldives may totally disappear and get submerged under the sea.

In the United States the burning of various fossil fuels, especially coal, for power generation accounts for 41 percent of all carbon dioxide emissions. Another 33 percent of emissions come from burning of gasoline in cars, light trucks, and SUVs. To this figure should be added the carbon dioxide emissions from aircraft that IPCC estimates cause about 3.5 percent of global warming, and which could increase to 15 percent by 2050.

Deforestation around the world accounts for 20 to 25 percent of all carbon emissions entering the atmosphere. It is reported that 20 million hectares of rainforest are cut down every year all around the world, which is equivalent to the size of England, Wales, and Scotland. The rate of deforestation in the Amazon region of Brazil and in Indonesia’s forested areas accounts for the maximum deforestation. While these forested regions are being considered as world heritage and must be preserved to prevent global warming, it would
Global warming has an adverse effect on life on the planet in a variety of ways. The international conservation group World Wildlife Federation (WWF) has said that 40 percent of reefs in the coral triangle have already been lost. The area of the triangle is shared between Indonesia and five other South Asian nations and is thought to contain 75 percent of the world’s coral species. This coral reef triangle is the marine equivalent of the Amazon rain forest of Brazil in biodiversity. The WWF has painted a very bleak picture for its future and has predicted that it will be totally dead or become a marine desert by the end of the century. If it goes, the entire ecosystem goes with it, which will have serious consequences for our ability to tackle climate change, says Professor Hoegh Gudberg, the Director of the Global Change Institute and the University of Queensland, Australia. He also stated that pollution and the inappropriate use of coastal areas are responsible for destroying the productivity of the ocean. It is the system that traps CO₂; 40 percent of CO₂ goes into the ocean and if that is interrupted, the climate change problems on planet Earth will become even greater. Its desertification will affect the marine life very adversely and this in turn will affect the livelihood of over 100 million people who are dependent on fishing for their food in these countries. This will result in the breaking down of communities and their economies would be destroyed. Indonesia hosted the World Ocean Conference in May 2009 and the delegates were of the opinion that oceans had been neglected so far in global discussions on climate change. They demanded that ocean warming should also be included in the UN climate change talks to be held at the end of 2009 in Copenhagen. Unfortunately this aspect was not deliberated during the Copenhagen Climate Summit.

Medical researchers have concluded that global warming will also affect human health, leading to greater sickness and death. Temperature rise may become more frequent, leading to longer heat waves, and the rise in temperature coupled with rainfall is likely to create conditions
The World Health Organization (WHO) believes that the rise in temperature since 1970 has had an adverse effect on health all around the world. According to their report, climate change has been responsible for about 150,000 extra deaths every year, which is likely to double by 2030.23

The above are a few examples to illustrate the seriousness of the problem that is all-pervasive, vast in magnitude, and touching every aspect of modern living. Thus it would be evident that it is a very complex problem that requires an urgent world solution. The various calamities of the recent past like Hurricane Katrina, large forest fires in the United States and Australia, floods, and the devastating tsunami of December 2004 in South and Southeast Asia are the result of man’s interference and meddling with nature.

The answer to all the problems lies in finding cleaner and more diverse sources of energy to fuel the growth of industry and all other forms of human activity that consume power. This would involve fuel-efficient cars which can run on oil, biofuel, and also electricity; renewable sources of energy from solar and wind power; clean coal-fired furnaces for electricity generation; and a host of other means to ensure that climate change and global warming remain within laid-down limits.

The world has become conscious of the seriousness of the problem and much study and extensive research is being carried out to find a solution to all these problems. In a recent study, environmental scientists in Africa have come up with a novel solution to utilize banana waste (peels) as biofuel. Banana peels mixed with sawdust were made into fuel cakes to be used for cooking at home instead of firewood, thus saving on a great deal of deforestation.24 There is a need to promote such innovative ideas. It is also heartening to see that the younger generation of people are more conscious of the dangers of global warming; this is revealed from the results of a recent Washington Post/ABC News poll which indicated that three-quarters of Americans think the federal government should regulate the release of GHGs into the atmosphere from power plants, cars, and factories.25

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC or FCCC), produced an international environmental treaty at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), informally known as the Earth Summit,26 held at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from June 3 to 14, 1992 to achieve “stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at the
level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with climate system.” The Kyoto Protocol is a protocol to the UNFCCC and establishes legally binding commitments for reduction of various greenhouse gases produced by industrialized nations as well as general commitments for all member countries. This protocol was initially adopted on December 11, 1997 in Kyoto, Japan, and became effective February 16, 2005. Under the Kyoto Protocol industrialized nations agreed to reduce their collective GHG emissions by 5.2 percent. The national limitations ranged from eight percent reductions for the European Union, seven percent for the United States, six percent for Japan and zero percent for Russia, while permitting an increase of eight percent for Australia and ten percent for Iceland.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change set common, but differentiated, responsibilities on countries based on their historical and global emissions of GHGs and per capita emissions at that point in time. The per capita emissions of the developing world being relatively low, countries like India, China, and the other developing countries were not included in the numerical limitations of the Kyoto Protocol, since they were not the main contributors to GHG emissions in the past. However, even though excluded from the restrictions, the developing world needs to reduce emissions, particularly in the case of China and India, because of their fast-growing industrialization. In fact China has outpaced the United States in the maximum emissions of GHG and is presently the number one emitter, even though its per capita emissions remain relatively low. In absolute terms the top ten emitters of GHG are China, the United States, India, Russia, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom, Australia, South Africa and South Korea. The United States, although a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol, has not ratified the treaty since it has reservations with regard to the exemption of China and India from any limitations and reduction of GHG on the grounds of their very low per capita emissions even though they have become the number one and number four maximum emitters of GHGs in the world.

**Change in United States Perspective**

There has been a significant shift in the U.S. stance on climate change from the time President Obama took office. This was discernible within the first week when he made climate change a national priority. On January 26, 2009 President Obama signed two presidential memorandums, the first regarding reducing dependence on foreign oil and the second directing the Environmental Protection Agency to
reconsider California’s petition to set more stringent limits on GHG from motor vehicles than those set by the federal government. His aim was to put the United States in a leadership position to work with other nations of the world. On the same day, his administration also announced the appointment of Todd Stern as the nation’s special envoy for climate change. Announcing his appointment, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said, “We are sending an unequivocal message that the United States will be energetic, focused, strategic and serious about addressing global climate change and the corollary issue of clean energy.”

True to this undertaking President Obama took many meaningful steps in this direction. At the UN Summit on Climate Change he said, “We understand the gravity of the climate threat. We are determined to act. And we will meet our responsibility to future generations….The failure to address the problem could create an irreversible catastrophe…and the time is running out.” He reiterated this commitment during his first State of the Union address on January 27, 2010 emphasizing that his administration was determined to create more clean energy jobs, building new-generation, safe, and clean nuclear power plants, and opening new offshore oil and gas exploration, and also the necessity to pass a comprehensive energy and climate bill, with incentives for creating clean energy.

As per the Copenhagen Accord, countries were required to send figures by the end of January 2010 on how much they would curb GHG emissions. The United States submitted its reduction target to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Secretariat, committing itself to cut emissions by 17 percent by 2020. President Obama followed this up by issuing an executive order for domestic agencies, setting a target for 35 federal government agencies to reduce emissions by 28 percent by 2020. All these actions were taken in a very short span of time, which indicated the earnestness with which this goal was being pursued.

As was stated earlier, the Copenhagen Accord, which was on the verge of collapse, was revived because of the intervention of President Obama who organized a conference of the important players consisting of China, India, Brazil, and South Africa. The Accord was reached based on the proposal tabled by the U.S.-led group of five nations mentioned above. Even though there were reservations from the developing countries of Latin America and Africa, a nonbinding accord was reached which was described by President Obama as “the foundation for international action in the years to come.” China said, “It is not a destination, but the beginning.” It was agreed that
Germany would host the next climate change conference by the middle of 2010, followed by a conference in Mexico at the end of 2010 where the final outcome would be sealed. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon welcomed the agreement as an “essential beginning,” however he said that it must be made legally binding by next year, that is by the end of 2010.

Among other things, the Accord also promised aid of $30 billion to developing nations over next three years and $100 billion a year by 2020 to cope with the impact of climate change. It also recognized the need to limit global temperature rise to not more than two degree Celsius above preindustrial levels.

Since all nations have become more aware of the dangers of climate change they need to get over their differences and work in the spirit of cooperation to stem this catastrophe from becoming a reality. The United States and Europe must lead the way to contain climate change and switch over the global economy from a high-carbon to a low-carbon energy base. The world as a whole must endeavor to switch over to a “Green Economy” in the long run. To achieve this goal necessary research must be carried out to find alternative fuels and renewable sources of energy, and to attain fuel efficiency to ensure energy economy. Greater emphasis should be laid on wind and solar energy. While nuclear energy too is “clean,” no solution has been found so far for the safe disposal of nuclear waste. China, India, and Indonesia must also reduce their carbon emissions by switching to clean energy sources.

In the end what matters is that global warming must be arrested post haste, and should not be allowed to go beyond the accepted limits. This is an achievable aim and must be realized. All the nations of the world need to work jointly to achieve this goal. There would be a requirement for a pragmatic change in the lifestyles of people all around the world, and in particular in the developed countries. There is a need for involvement by all humanity starting with industry, NGOs, government agencies, and, above all, by all the citizens. There should be awareness and engagement of people in this effort and this must start right at the school level itself where a new course on “going green” and “conserving the bounties of nature” must be included in the curriculum so that it becomes a habit with everyone from a young age.
Strengthening the United Nations

The United Nations (UN) came into being in 1945 at the end of World War II with the aim of ensuring pacific resolution to disputes between nations, to prevent disputes from escalating into war, to persuade opposing parties to use the negotiating table rather than the force of arms, and to help restore peace when conflict breaks out. The memory of the horrendous consequences of the Second World War were fresh when the UN Charter was drawn up, hence the preamble to the UN Charter was a fitting document whose opening paragraph read:

WE THE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS DETERMINED to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.³

President Obama also emphasized this aspect during his speech to the UN General Assembly on September 22, 2009 when he quoted President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the chief architect of the United Nations, “The structure of world peace cannot be the work of one man, or one party, or one nation….It cannot be a peace of large nations—or of small nations. It must be a peace which rests on cooperative effort of the whole world.”² The main purpose of the United Nations is to maintain peace and security around the world. Each member nation must play its part, working with and through the United Nations, to promote its ideals and to strengthen it further.
Since its inception, the United Nations has lived up to its Charter and fulfilled its mandate to a great extent; in the first six decades of its existence the UN, with the help of its different organizations, has carried out a very useful service to mankind and advanced freedom and human rights around the world. It has also made a tremendous impact on the lives of millions in poorer parts of the world by providing shelter, basic education, and critical health care and disease control.

The UN has participated in numerous peacekeeping operations right from the time of its creation, a role it continues to play even today. It has not only helped in preventing and resolving disputes and in peacekeeping between warring parties, but has also met many other challenges of global magnitude confronting the world. These include alleviating hunger and poverty; providing assistance in pandemics like HIV/AIDS and various other forms of diseases; resolving social, economic, and political injustices, and political exclusion on matters of cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity; resolving human rights abuses and the failure of nation-states to provide security and livelihood to its people; and providing succor at the time of natural calamities like cyclones, earthquakes, floods, droughts, and famines.

The United Nations member nations, conscious of their obligations and in their collective wisdom, drafted the Millennium Development Goals in September 2000. There are eight goals of pressing development challenges that have been identified to be implemented by 2015. These include eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality and empowering women, ensuring environmental sustainability, combating HIV/AIDS, controlling malaria and other diseases, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, and creating a global partnership for development. All these challenges need global cooperation, with a central coordinating, controlling, and monitoring organization; the United Nations, obviously, is best suited to fulfill this role. It is also obvious that the UN requires the support of all the member nations to fulfill these tasks.

The security paradigm has altered very significantly since the end of the Cold War, and more so after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which has unleashed a new type of war, namely “terrorism and the fourth generation warfare” in which nonstate actors have created mayhem all around the world by their brutal and inhuman acts. In many cases their home government is unable to rein them in and at times it may even be complicit with them. Under such conditions of turmoil and insecurity the role and active involvement of the United Nations has
become all the more important. This is because the United Nations enjoys a modicum of confidence of the member states, and also because no other nation or group of nations can meet the myriad challenges confronting the world. However, the stature of the UN is fast diminishing due to various reasons, particularly because in the recent past many nations have violated its statutes for their personal gains.

The “war on terror” launched by the United States, both in Afghanistan and Iraq, subsequent to the 9/11 attacks, has clearly illustrated that no nation can fight terrorism by itself; terrorism is afflicting many nations across the globe in varying degrees of magnitude and intensity. Terrorist organizations and groups have their tentacles all over the world, and are interlinked in many ways, and combating them requires a joint effort by all nations. Besides combating the terrorists in the countries concerned, it has been made amply clear by the events in Iraq and Afghanistan that it is even more important (along with combat operations) to rehabilitate the country into a normal and functioning state (preferably a functioning democracy), with the establishment of effective governance, rule of law, provision of basic amenities, jobs and means of livelihood, and various other dimensions which go into ensuring normalcy in the governance of a country. Everyone knows how difficult it is proving to be both in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Besides the scourge of terrorism, there are many other challenges that are confronting the world, the most important among them being “global warming and climate change,” as discussed in the previous chapter. In addition there is the question of nuclear proliferation which may eventually even lead to terrorists getting hold of nuclear material, even a small quantity of which will have catastrophic consequences for the entire world, and thus needs to be prevented. The question of lateral expansion and acquisition of nuclear weapons by states other than the original five, namely, the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, and China, plus the two new entrants, India and Pakistan, has to be resolved. In the latter category of lateral expansion are states that are known to possess nuclear weapons, that is, North Korea and Israel or those that are on the threshold of development, that is, Iran. Israel, it is believed, already possesses nuclear weapons, even though it does not acknowledge it.

Despite the important role of the United Nations in international affairs, during the past decade the standing of the United Nations suffered greatly due to the actions of the United States, the founder and the chief architect of its conception and creation. The main
cause for the strained relations was the invasion of Iraq, which did not receive support from the UN Security Council, as had been the wish and desire of the Bush administration. Fearing a veto from France and disapproval from Germany, who were derisively called “Old Europe” by the then United States Defense Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, the United States invaded Iraq without the mandate of the Security Council. The other actions of the United States, after the 9/11 attacks, in sidelining the United Nations and declaring it an irrelevant organization, calling it “a toothless high-powered debating society,” damaged relations and brought them to their lowest ebb during the Bush administration. The torture of prisoners of war and other human rights abuses not only harmed the United States but also weakened the United Nations protocols and conventions, and international law.

All these actions of the United States emboldened other nations to also treat the various statutes of the United Nations with the same disdain. This is apparent from the actions of Israel, which has not honored the various resolutions passed by the Security Council, and has also used weapons (munitions with white phosphorous) banned by the United Nations, during its invasion of Gaza in December 2008. North Korea and Iran do not adhere to their treaty obligations, and Sudan has no compunction in treating the UN with total disregard. These are only a few prominent examples among many more such cases. It is essential to carry out a detailed analysis of this disdain and disregard for the world body by almost any and every member state on one pretext or another when it disagrees with the resolutions passed by the UN. It may also be because the smaller and weaker nations feel that when the stronger nations can flout the UN mandate with impunity, can get resolutions passed that are favorable to them, or use the veto when certain resolutions do not suit them, why shouldn’t they also exploit the weaknesses of the organization?

It is essential for all the nations of the world to respect their own collective voice, which is expressed on their behalf by the United Nations. It is also a fact that in this endeavor, the United States has to provide the necessary lead, to meet other problem areas and challenges confronting the world. For the United Nations to recover from its difficulties and to regain its prestige, the U.S. leadership is indispensable in effecting the change. The United States being the most preeminent power of present times has the moral responsibility to set the ethical standards of following international law, in letter and in spirit, so as to act as a beacon for others to follow.
Strengthening the United Nations

The United Nations was founded to bring all the nations on the same platform, which is enshrined in its preamble: “recognition of the inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.” The United Nations reflects the universal moral conscience and is all-embracing and inclusive as a world forum to effectively deal with the myriad and gigantic problems besetting the world today. The United States must therefore reconcile its differences with the United Nations and strengthen it so as to enable this world body to fulfill its mandate efficiently and effectively.

The United Nations was established at the end of World War II, with the cooperation of the victorious nations, with the United States in the lead, along with other nations, then numbering 51. The membership today has grown to 192 countries. The world has changed tremendously over these 64 years. The security paradigm too has changed and shifted from inter-state disputes to intra-state disputes, with the fight against terrorism taking center stage. The economic conditions of various nations have also changed considerably and new economies have emerged as economic power centers in their own right, which entitles them to have a greater say in international affairs.

There is much greater interdependence and interconnectedness not only between nations but also between events around the world. In today’s world, a threat to one is a threat to all; it is not confined to armed threat alone or threat from terrorists, but also the threat of the spread of disease, the latest example of which is the swine flu, caused by H1N1 virus, which originated in Mexico in March 2009, remained undetected till April 25, and within two to three days spread to all parts of the world. The Washington Post reported, “Teenagers in New Zealand, honeymooners in Scotland, high-schoolers in New York and tourists in Israel all are sick from the same bug caught just days ago on trips to Mexico. Their illnesses are the latest example of how diseases, from influenza to tuberculosis to cholera, are spreading ever more quickly in an increasingly globalized world. But so, too, are the tools necessary to combat outbreaks of diseases: expertise, medicine, money and information.” Similar was the earlier case of the spread of avian flu in 2006–2007, and the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003. Following the SARS outbreak, U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention, based in Atlanta, opened six centers around the world in Nairobi, Egypt, Thailand, Kazakhstan, China, and Guatemala. Medical professionals work with the local officials in these centers.
to detect disease outbreaks in the region and coordinate their responses.\textsuperscript{15}

In the changed international scenario of “instant communications, instant threat from everything, instant depression and instant recovery,” call it the “Era of Instant Culture”\textsuperscript{16} if you will, there is a need to retool the United Nations, to make it more efficient and more responsive to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century and present-day needs. Also like any other organization that, over a period of its existence, develops a certain malignant growth, the United Nations, too, unfortunately has been afflicted with this malaise. The “oil for food” scandal,\textsuperscript{17} human rights abuses,\textsuperscript{18} sex scandals,\textsuperscript{19} and alleged selling of weapons by UN peacekeepers,\textsuperscript{20} are just a few among many such cases where the UN has defaulted and has come under a cloud. There are other problems pertaining to corruption, bureaucratic delays, and red tape as well. All these ills must be rectified at the earliest.

In his address to the General Assembly in September 2003, former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan warned member states that the United Nations had reached a fork in the road. It could rise to the challenge of meeting new threats or it could risk erosion in the face of mounting discord between states and unilateral action by them.\textsuperscript{21} He created the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change to generate new ideas about the kinds of policies and institutions required for the UN to be effective in the twenty-first century.

The High Level Panel consisted of 16 members from among veteran diplomats and politicians and was chaired by the former prime minister of Thailand, Anand Panyarachun, and was given the mandate to examine the following important issues:

1. Assess current global threats and provide an analysis of future challenges to international peace and security including connections between them.
2. Identify clearly the contribution that collective action can make in addressing these challenges and assess existing approaches, instruments and mechanisms.
3. Recommend the changes necessary to ensure effective collective action, including but not limited to reviewing the principal organs of the United Nations.\textsuperscript{22}

The panel submitted its report in December 2004 and put forward 101 important recommendations for reform of the United Nations.\textsuperscript{23} The main recommendations pertained to establishing a peace-building commission to monitor potential trouble spots, to offer help
and advice, and to give warning, and to use armed intervention where necessary. The panel also recommended the defining of threats to international security to include poverty, pandemics like HIV/AIDS and environmental disasters, and not just threats from weapons of mass destruction, wars, and failed states.

There is an urgent necessity to carry out reforms within the United Nations system, which should be reflective of present-day geopolitical realities and also take into consideration the economic strength of emerging developing states like India and Brazil. The first and foremost reform should be carried out pertaining to the structure of the Security Council. The UN Security Council, as it is comprised today, was constituted at the time of the creation of the UN to give the Permanent Five (P5: the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China) the power of veto, which was in keeping with the balance of power that existed after the end of World War II. However, new powers have emerged like Japan, Germany, India, and Brazil, the so called “G4.”24 In addition an African country needs to be included in the Security Council, to add to the current permanent five countries, so as to give the Security Council a balanced structure and balanced representation from all parts of the world. Also the P5 in the past have tried to use the UN platform to advance their own interests at the cost of other nations and not in keeping with global requirements.

There has been a tendency to underplay the role of the General Assembly,25 not giving it due cognizance in the scheme of things, which erodes the UN’s representative charter. This drawback also needs to be rectified and factored in, in the reform process. Also the much needed reform process itself should not be used to advance the cause of any one nation or group of nations. It is reported that the size and charter of various organizations, which are on the anvil for reform or inclusion, are being dictated to and manipulated to suit the interests of the P5.26 This must be avoided. The UN cannot be used to serve the interests of the strong, ignoring the needs of the poorer nations.

There are a plethora of other reforms which must be instituted to make the UN a vehicle for addressing the problems confronting the world in an efficient and meaningful manner, which must include improving human resources and management practices, a proper strategy for utilization of information and communication technology, improving development mandates and budgets, and all the other reforms suggested by the High Level Panel. Five years have passed since the High Level Panel submitted its recommendations and it is
time that these are discussed among the member states and implemented expeditiously.

A strong, robust, and all-inclusive United Nations is the requirement of the day, to meet the challenges that have been discussed above. United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon has rightly said, “Every day we are reminded of the need for a strengthened United Nations, as we face a growing array of new challenges, including humanitarian crises, human rights violations, armed conflicts and important health and environmental concerns. Seldom has the United Nations been called upon to do so much for so many. I am determined to breathe new life and inject renewed confidence into a strengthened United Nations firmly anchored in the twenty-first century, and which is effective, efficient, coherent and accountable.”

Right from the onset of the Obama presidency there has been a paradigm shift in the U.S. policy toward and relationship with the United Nations. When President Obama met with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon on March 10, 2009, he expressed his hope saying, “I think the United Nations can be an extraordinarily constructive, important partner in bringing about peace and stability to people around the world.” He has followed this policy ever since; he addressed the United Nations Summit on Climate Change on September 22, 2009, followed by his address to the Sixty-fourth General Assembly Session the next day, and thereafter he presided over the UN Security Council meeting on September 23, 2009.

During the course of his speech to the General Assembly, besides reiterating the steps he had taken to bring about peace in the world, he emphasized the necessity for all nations to work together since at no other time in history was it more essential than at present when “the interests of nations and people are shared.” He said, “In this hall, we come from many places, but we share a common future. No longer do we have the luxury of indulging our difference to the exclusion of the work that we must do together….We must embrace a new era of engagement based on mutual respect, and our work must begin now.”

Likewise his theme was similar when he presided over the Security Council meeting on September 23, 2009. A resolution was adopted calling on states with nuclear weapons to continue disarming, to ratify the ban on testing, and to agree to a treaty stopping production of fissile material. In return the nonweapons states should accept stronger safeguards, designed to stop the spread of nuclear weapons. President Obama was in fact the first U.S. president to chair a council session; also, it was the first time that the Security Council had met
to focus on the elimination of nuclear weapons. President Obama described the resolution as “historic,” saying it “enshrines our shared commitment to a goal of a world without nuclear weapons.”

The time is ripe to carry out the necessary reforms so that the United Nations once again regains its lost status and becomes the collective voice of all mankind and also the hub for confronting and resolving the challenges and all the problems currently being faced by humanity. The United States, more than any other country, must strengthen this organization since it has the necessary clout and economic power that can make a difference at the international level. All the member countries, rich and poor, strong and weak, must respect the verdict of the United Nations. To ensure that the credentials of the United Nations as an impartial judge are reestablished, there should be no hint of favoritism or victimization of any individual, group, or nation. While carrying out reforms and restructuring of the United Nations, built-in mechanisms and safeguards need to be incorporated to eradicate all the ills that have been prominent in the recent past.
It is quite apparent that the major challenges that are being faced today are global in nature; while some are interconnected, they are also very diverse. Some require a regional solution like the Arab-Israeli dispute, while others require a global response in varying degrees, for example, dealing with climate change and fighting terrorism. However, one thing is predominant in all these, and that is that the active involvement of the United States is of paramount importance for their resolution, for the United States, besides being the sole superpower of the present age, is also deeply and intimately connected with all these challenges and problems in one way or another. To resolve these issues the weight of U.S. diplomacy is not only essential but is also required for a sustained solution.

The first and foremost challenge is the eradication of terrorism. While this requires a joint effort by all the nations, getting them on board is very difficult, even though a majority of the countries around the world are afflicted with this malaise. There are many reasons for this state of affairs and there are no easy solutions or simple answers. The differing ideologies of nations and their understanding of what constitutes terrorism makes the problem more complex. The endeavor must be to narrow this perception gap by creating greater understanding between nations through conciliation and avoidance of confrontation. It requires great statesmanship on the part of leaders to reach a common ground. It will also require compromises and a lot of “give and take” to come to an understanding and to take effective remedial measures.

There are no problems that cannot be resolved; nations that have been enemies for centuries are friends today; the example of Europe is quite evident. For the sake of peace and harmony, nations and peoples will have to shed the baggage of prejudices that have marred their relations, and that continue to be a source of constant friction and threat to each other’s security. If nations do not resolve their differences in a peaceful manner it will be catastrophic for the world. The
lethality of modern weapons, particularly weapons of mass destruction, poses a cataclysmic threat to human existence; it is in everybody’s interest to save the world from the ravages of an existential war facing humanity.

The response to the 9/11 attacks by the United States, instead of eliminating the terrorist threat, has created more terrorists all around the world, resulting in conditions of greater instability in some regions. While this is the reality, what is now required is to find a solution. The time for talking is over; now is the time for taking concrete steps to find a pragmatic solution to the myriad problems which have been spawned due to past faulty policies.

The greatest mistake made in the war on terror was the senseless invasion of Iraq which has brought not only immense suffering to the people of Iraq but has also been the cause of U.S. prestige being brought to its lowest ebb; at the same time, it has exposed the limits of its military power. Ross Douthat, writing in the op-ed column of the *New York Times*, described the Iraq war as “the war we’d like to forget.” It may be more appropriate to say, “The invasion of Iraq will be remembered as a war that should never have been waged.” Even though the active involvement of the United States in the operational context in Iraq ended in June 2009, the security situation has deteriorated considerably. What is of importance and raises a question mark is whether Iraq will remain a stable country after the complete withdrawal of American troops scheduled for December 2011. The strategic consequences of this war and the likely geopolitical environment that may emerge in the region are also difficult to predict.

The demographic realities of Iraq and the compulsions of democracy would always ensure rule by the Shia community, which forms the majority. On the other hand, the Sunnis ruled Iraq starting from the period of the Abbasid Dynasty, which was established in 750 A.D. and lasted until the overthrow of Saddam Hussein; they are therefore not reconciled to rule by the Shia majority. Unfortunately, instead of narrowing their differences, the United States highlighted and played on them during its occupation, thereby creating a long-term problem of reconciliation that is affecting proper governance and establishment of the rule of law. Sectarian violence is on the increase and the Iraqi government will have to deal with it firmly and in a just manner irrespective of the community. The Kurds, too, were given a degree of autonomy by the United States; this was the case even when Saddam Hussein was in power, by way of imposing and ensuring the “no fly zone,” which wrested effective control of this region from Saddam Hussein’s government; thus the Kurds are resentful of sharing their
resources, particularly oil, which is located in their region. All these factors complicate matters considerably.

Reconciliation among the three communities is imperative if Iraq is to achieve a semblance of stability. To achieve this goal, a comprehensive plan for equitable sharing of power must be worked out among the three main parties, so that no one feels left out from governance and the share of oil wealth. A strong central government with representatives of all the three communities would ensure proper governance and maintenance of law and order, as would equitable distribution of revenue to all the three regions. This is an achievable goal and the indications so far, despite the hiccups, portend well for the future. The international community and Iraq’s neighbours should be coopted to provide assistance until the country achieves stabilization and becomes an effective member of the comity of nations. Iraq must not be allowed to relapse into a hotbed and a safe haven for terrorist activities.

The most pressing and dangerous problem facing the world is the spread of extremist ideology being propagated by the Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Yemen, too, is fast turning into a base for the spread of Al Qaeda ideology. The cult of Mujahedeen was reared, promoted, trained, equipped, and financed by the United States and Pakistan to fight the Soviet Union in Afghanistan from the time of its invasion in 1979. While the United States achieved its aim, after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan the extremist ideology gained further impetus and momentum, propelled by the Taliban who were created by Pakistan with the assistance of the United States to fill the void. The Taliban also became very intolerant and imposed their obscurantist views and draconian form of justice on the population. This was overseen by the Pakistani government, which utilized the newfound opportunity to strengthen its hold on Afghanistan, since it provided the much-desired strategic depth to Pakistan vis-à-vis India. The United States made a strategic blunder by washing its hands of Afghanistan altogether after the Soviet withdrawal; this costly mistake resulted in the rise of Osama bin Laden who spread his tentacles all around the world, the consequences of which were the 9/11 terrorist attacks. His extremist ideology will continue to plague the world until all nations and different peoples rise above their narrow political or sectarian agendas and defeat this ideology in a concerted manner.

The response of the United States to the 9/11 attacks was impulsive rather than well considered. No attempt was made to wean away the Taliban from Al Qaeda, even though there were indications that
suggested that Mullah Omar, the Taliban leader, was amenable to a deal whereby Osama Bin Laden could have been handed over to a third country. The American leadership displayed extreme “imperial hubris” and arrogance of military power by resorting to the invasion of Afghanistan, instead of exploring other means to defeat the Al Qaeda cult and philosophy. Even in the execution of military operations, the United States did not fulfill its strategic aim of defeating Al Qaeda and destroying it from its roots. When an ideal opportunity presented itself, with Mullah Omar and Osama bin Laden reportedly holed up in the Tora Bora mountain range, the focus and center of gravity shifted to Iraq, which provided time and space to the Taliban and Al Qaeda to regroup, rejuvenate, and reestablish their hold not only in Afghanistan but also across the border, in Pakistan (FATA and Waziristan).

Pakistan was conscious of its strategic aims and played the game very deftly by pleasing the United States in its war on terror, and at the same time not going after the Taliban wholeheartedly, thereby allowing them necessary space to continue their activities. However, Pakistan’s gains were for a short term only, because the Taliban spread their skewed ideology and strengthened their hold on other areas in Pakistan, particularly in the FATA region and the North West Frontier Province. Both the United States and Pakistan are now paying the price for their faulty reading of Taliban philosophy.

How to solve the Afghan riddle and get out of the quagmire is the question. While the Afghan problem has gained world attention due to the spate of terrorist attacks, particularly in Pakistan, and the Pakistan army has successfully fought the Taliban in the Swat Valley and continues its operations against them in Waziristan, the return and rehabilitation of displaced persons with adequate compensation must be ensured. The problem of bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan is not intractable as some theoreticians and doomsayers have predicted, quoting the past experience of various empires like the British and the Soviets, who faced defeat there. What is required to remove this mindset is to have pragmatic and intelligent policy formulations for Afghanistan, taking the needs and aspirations of the people in mind and also avoiding the pitfalls of the past. No patchwork solution will work; the solution lies in adopting a holistic approach wherein the prime thrust should be toward development and security. Providing security to the people is of crucial importance, together with concentration on development of the area and provision of job opportunities. The military alone cannot achieve this goal; a greater role must be assigned to other agencies, which must include all the
resources of the nation, including coopting enlightened clerics where necessary, since the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan are greatly influenced by religious leaders. It must be remembered that religion forms a very major part of Muslim society, particularly among rural folk.

The development should aim at providing basic amenities like water, electricity, proper roads, schools, and hospitals under the umbrella of overall security. Together with this, proper education of the masses, particularly the young, must be undertaken on a gigantic scale, and this must include the teaching of the proper tenets of Islam, to emphasize its message of peace and brotherhood of mankind, because of the importance of religion in the daily lives of the Afghan people. Also, some of the misguided elements who have taken recourse to militancy and are being labeled as Taliban, may actually have been caught in the vortex of militancy due to purely personal reasons, like having grievances against government officials who ill-treated them and against whom they want to settle scores, or taking revenge as a result of family or tribal feuds, and so on. Such individuals or groups who are not hard-core militants must be identified and brought over to the government cause. All these actions require patience and sustained effort to achieve the goal of security, peace, and development.

Timelines cannot be set and also should not be attempted. Focus must be on the ultimate goal and that is to eradicate the radical elements and extremist philosophy from the mainstream Afghan population. All these are achievable goals and must be pursued with vigor. The Afghans themselves should feel that they are the main architects of their own resurgence as a modern state and their aspirations must be fully factored in in all the schemes for their progress and development. The international community, with the United Nations in the lead role, should contribute to the stabilization of Afghanistan by providing assistance toward security and political, economic, and social development.

The most important issue that needs resolving is the Arab-Israeli dispute, which has defied solution for the past six decades. The Arabs, and, in fact, people in the entire Muslim world, are convinced that this is due to the one-sided support of Israel by the United States. President Obama appears to be sincere in finding a just and amicable solution, and its successful resolution will assist in improving U.S. relations with the Muslim world. The Arab peace plan could form the basis of a peaceful settlement and creation of an independent Palestinian state. It must, however, be ensured that Hamas is also involved in all peace
formulations, for without their participation, it will not hold. All the parties to the dispute will have to make compromises to come to a mutually agreed-upon settlement. The United States will have to put extra pressure on all the parties and particularly on Israel to freeze the settlements in the West Bank; Israel gave guarantees to this effect in the past peace accords with the Palestinians, therefore it is not asking too much from them. The resumption of direct talks between the Israeli and Palestinian leaders should be encouraged, and an all-out effort must be made to settle this long-standing and seemingly intractable problem for the benefit of the people of the region.

President Obama’s overtures to the Muslim world have received a very warm welcome in all Muslim quarters; the Muslims see in him a man of promise who is interested in bringing about peace and harmony between the two people. Particularly, his visit to Egypt and his speech at Cairo University on June 4, 2009 has been hailed as a masterstroke in demonstrating his sincerity and earnestness to better relations. He very rightly emphasized centuries of coexistence and cooperation between the Muslim world and the West that enriched the world, and at the same time he was candid enough to acknowledge that tensions did exist and that these could be removed. As he put it, “I’ve come to Cairo to seek a new beginning between the United States and the Muslims around the world, one based on mutual interest and mutual respect, and one based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive and need not be in competition. Instead they overlap and share common principles, principles of justice and progress, tolerance and the dignity of all human beings.” Now what is required is to translate these noble sentiments into action. It is not for the United States alone to act but requires the participation of all the Muslim countries as well, to work toward empowerment of their people and to eradicate all the ills afflicting their countries like illiteracy, poverty, and radicalization of a minority of their people. All concerned should act in concert to usher in a better tomorrow and a hopeful and peaceful world.

The other important issue regards Iran’s nuclear ambitions. The United States must tread cautiously and not precipitate matters. President Obama has taken some very positive and encouraging steps in this direction, by offering unconditional talks with Iran to come to an amicable settlement. Unfortunately, mistrust persists because of differences in perception and uncertainty about Iran’s stand since it constantly gives conflicting signals regarding enrichment of its LEU in third countries, as agreed upon during the Geneva talks with P5+1 countries on October 1, 2009. The International Crisis Group,
based in Brussels is of the view that, “an engagement using a pressure approach risks triggering a negative Iranian reaction.” Instead of adding leverage, “Iranians perceive [it] as a disingenuous ploy to produce a broad consensus for toughened containment measures under the expectation negotiations will fail.” What needs to be done is to find a middle course; while the West must adopt a more amenable diplomatic course, Iran for its part must take concrete steps to allay the fears of the international community regarding its nuclear ambitions, and it should enable the IAEA to carry out more intrusive inspections of its nuclear sites, which would ensure that all actions of Iran will be under close scrutiny, thus preventing it from adopting the path of nuclear weaponization.

Military action by way of surgical strikes either by the United States or by Israel must not be attempted, as its consequences will be horrendous. Admiral Michael Mullen, Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, has rightly stressed “not only the instability that would result from Iran acquiring nuclear weapons but also the instability that would result from an attack on Iran.” Wars of words must be avoided; confidence-building and diplomacy must be given greater impetus to come to a peaceful settlement. The question of Israel being in possession of an unspecified number of nuclear weapons (which it denies), and North Korea’s second nuclear test in May 2009 and their possession of nuclear weapons complicates matters. However, the need is for diplomacy to take full course along with back-channel talks with the leaders that matter, such as Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader who is the chief architect of Iran’s policies. Patience and perseverance should remain the watchwords.

Relations between the United States and Russia had been on a downslope, particularly after Vladimir Putin became President in 2000. With the change of leadership in both these countries, it is possible to forge a better understanding between the two which will be beneficial not only for them, but will also resolve many other challenges. Even though Russia is no longer a superpower, it has clout and military muscle and considerable influence in this region, particularly with respect to Iran with which it has very cordial relations; it even constructed Iran’s nuclear plant at Bushehr.

There are two vexing issues that strained the U.S.-Russia relationship: the plan to deploy a missile defense shield in Poland and the Czech Republic, and NATO membership of Ukraine and Georgia. The BMD issue has been very deftly handled by President Obama. Russia seems to be satisfied by the new U.S. plan to base the BMD on U.S. navy ships deployed in the Mediterranean Sea, and Patriot
defensive missile shields in four countries of the Middle East, namely Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Bahrain, to protect U.S. allies in the region against Iranian missiles.\textsuperscript{11}

The question of expansion of NATO into Ukraine and Georgia needs to be resolved amicably, for Russia can be of considerable assistance in influencing Iran to stop its nuclear quest. Russia is also an important partner in addressing common global security challenges confronting the world. Therefore, it would be in the interest of world peace for these two powers to have good relations with each other. President Obama is following the right course to “reset” the strained relations, which was quite evident from his Moscow Summit meeting with President Dmitry Medvedev in July 2009 and other meetings he has had with him during the course of his first year of presidency.

Climate change is a very important subject that needs to be addressed by all the nations of the world. The United States and other developed nations of Europe have been the main cause for the emission of greenhouse gases in the past, which has resulted in the rise in temperatures all around the world. The clearest indication is the melting of the Arctic ice shelf, which will result in a rise in the sea level, and other ecological imbalances. Their cumulative effect would be disastrous to life, not only of humans, but also of animals and plants. Some of the developing countries have now overtaken even the advanced countries in the emission of GHG. For example, China is the number one emitter of GHG, and India is in fourth place. While their plea that their per capita emissions are still far below that of the West is valid, it does not stand to reason why they cannot use more energy efficient means for reducing GHG. As a case in point, China utilizes coal-fired energy generation (using outdated technology) which emits 80 percent of its GHG. It could easily use better and more efficient technology to reduce its GHG substantially. The Copenhagen Accord of December 2009 should be made binding, and should form the basis for bringing in more stringent regulatory measures to limit the effects of global warming.

The United Nations is an important world organization which is capable of addressing the global problems in an efficient and dispassionate manner, provided the member states and particularly the veto-wielding powers act in the interest of the world, and not look only to their narrow self-interests, which in many cases create greater problems for world peace. The United Nations is also in need of urgent reforms as the world has changed considerably since the UN came into existence over six decades ago. A high-level blue ribbon panel recommended reforms, which must be instituted to restructure the
United Nations, catering to the needs of the present-day world, and making it capable of meeting the emerging challenges in the future.

There has been a quantum change in the strategic thinking of the United States since President Obama took office. During the first year of his presidency, some very momentous decisions were taken by him and many policy changes were put into effect. These actions were recognized the world over, and as a fitting tribute to all his endeavors to create a new climate in international politics, and his vision for a peaceful world particularly a world without nuclear weapons, the Nobel Prize Committee awarded him the Nobel Peace Prize for 2009, which he accepted and received at the Oslo City Hall on December 10, 2009. In his acceptance speech he poignantly acknowledged that even though “oppression will always be with us still we can strive for justice; and even though there will be wars, yet we must strive for peace.”

The message for all nations, which stands out clearly, is that they must work together in harmony in the spirit of cooperation and conciliation, and should resolve their differences in an amicable and peaceful manner through dialogue for “peace and security to prevail.” While greater responsibility rests with the powerful nations, the other nations too must contribute toward the aim of ushering in a peaceful world.
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final settlement was considered vital. The White House negotiations also ended unsuccessfully.

31. A U.S.-backed peace proposal was put forward in 2002 as the “Road Map” which set benchmarks both for Israelis and Palestinians so that they could work over three years toward creation of a Palestinian state. The Palestinians and Israelis accepted the basic outlines of the plan when it was introduced formally by President Bush in June 2003.

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10  **Strengthening the United Nations**

1. The *Preamble to the UN Charter*: "WE THE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS DETERMINED to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom, AND FOR THESE ENDS to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and to ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest, and to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples, HAVE RESOLVED TO COMBINE OUR EFFORTS TO ACCOMPLISH THESE AIMS. Accordingly, our respective Governments, through representatives assembled in the city of San Francisco, who have exhibited their full powers found to be in good and due form, have agreed to the present Charter of the United Nations and do hereby establish an international organization to be known as the United Nations." [*Charter of the United Nations*, http://www.un.org/documents/charter/index.shtml.


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