A photograph of Barack Obama on the left and a man in a green and purple striped shawl on the right, sitting and talking in a room with a white sofa and wooden chairs. The text is overlaid on the image.

Afghanistan

**America's Strategic
shift from war to peace**

Hizb ut Tahrir

Wilayah Afghanistan

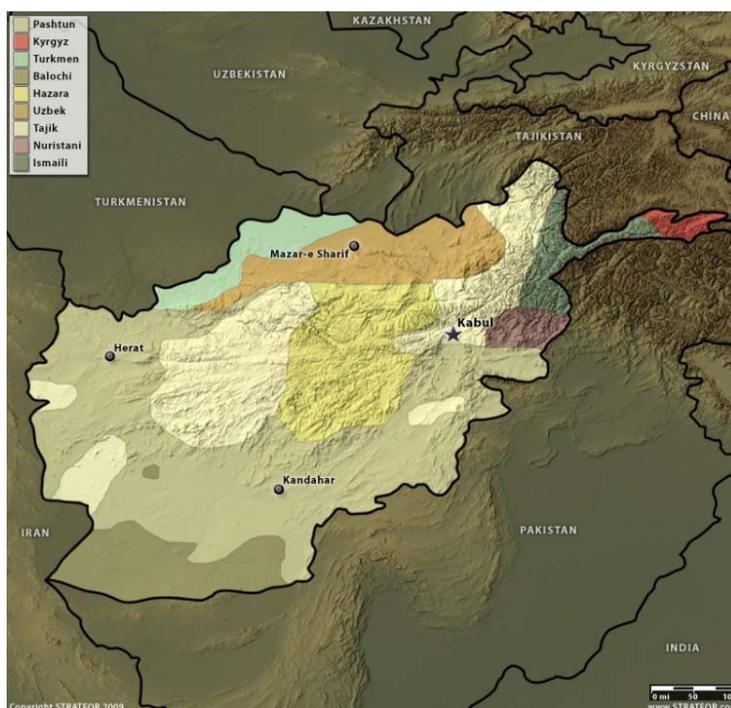
“The US has had the ultimate aim of preventing the emergence of any major power in Eurasia. The paradox however is as follows – the goals of these interventions was never to achieve something – whatever the political rhetoric might have said – but to prevent something. The United States wanted to prevent stability in areas where another power might emerge. Its goal was not to stabilize but to destabilize, and this explains how the United States responded to the Islamic earthquake. It wanted to prevent a large, powerful Islamic state from emerging. Rhetoric aside the United States has no overriding interest in peace in Eurasia. The United States also has no interest in winning the war outright.....the purpose of these conflicts is simply to block a power or destabilize the region, not to impose order.”

The next 100 years, a forecast for the 21st Century, 2009

Introduction

Sitting in the heart of Asia at the crossroads of strategically important countries Afghanistan plays an important role in both regional and Eurasian politics. The geography and geopolitical significance of Afghanistan means it is open to exploitation by many different powers in order to protect their interests. Afghanistan has always been occupied by powerful nations wishing to secure these interests.

With a land mass of approximately 652,230 square kilometres, ranking it 41st amongst the largest countries of the world, Afghanistan shares 5,529 kilometres of borders with its neighbours. Afghanistan has a population of 31 million and a poorly equipped army of some 1800,000 personnel. Afghanistan has always had a



tense relationship with its neighbours such as Iran and Pakistan. This is mainly due to the political issues and the interests its neighbours wish to secure.

Pakistan lying to the east of Afghanistan shares a 2500 Kilometre long border with Afghanistan. Pakistan has a much larger land mass of 796,100 square kilometres, and a population of 176.7 million. It has 617,000 active servicemen in the army and 515,000 reserve army personnel, coupled with nuclear capabilities.

America attacked and occupied Afghanistan 12 years ago in the name of combating so called ‘international terrorism’ by invoking Article 5 of the NATO charter and Article 51 of the United Nations charter in the wake of the 9/11 attacks.

George W Bush placed the objective of fighting al-Qaeda and the Taliban at the core of his strategy in Afghanistan. However, after two terms of Republican rule, the Democrats took office and altered the styles and means of the US strategy in Afghanistan and Iraq. Following this, the American propaganda machine began shifting from war mongering rhetoric to talks of a peace process in Afghanistan. This was despite the fact that at the beginning of his term in office, Barack Obama insisted on sending more troops to Afghanistan.

This shift in strategy meant that US interests could materialise in Afghanistan ensuring the continuation of US influence and propagation of secular culture and democratic values in this country. There is no doubt that the strategic pact between the USA and Afghanistan signed by President Barack Obama and President Karzai in Kabul on 2nd May 2012 and was endorsed by Afghan Parliament on 26th May 2013, is for these very objectives. The key points from the agreement were:

1. Both sides pledged to strengthen long-term strategic cooperation in areas that are of importance for both sides. These include accelerating the peace and reconciliation process, and the strengthening of state institutions.

2. Both parties pledged to support democratic values and uphold such values as a fundamental aspect of their long-term partnership.
3. Afghanistan reaffirms its strong commitment to inclusive and pluralistic democratic governance.
4. Both sides reiterated that the presence and operations of US forces in Afghanistan since 2001 have been aimed at defeating al-Qaeda and its affiliates.
5. It is important that after the signing of this strategic pact, negotiations should begin immediately to pave the way for the signing of a security agreement to settle the issue of the status of American forces in Afghanistan.
6. The current military operations will continue until a bilateral security agreement is concluded.
7. The United States shall designate Afghanistan as a “major Non-NATO Ally.”
8. America pledged to support Afghanistan by training its military and providing equipment for Afghan forces after 2014.
9. The United States shall seek funds to support the training, equipping, advising and sustaining of the Afghan national security forces.
10. Afghanistan pledged to give America access to, and the right to use Afghan facilities until 2014. After this date, this issue will be governed by the bilateral security agreement that will be signed between the two countries.
11. Both sides agreed to enhance information and intelligence sharing.

The content of this strategic pact shows that the US strategy is designed with the objective of staying in Afghanistan on a long term basis. This is similar to the US occupation of the Philippines in 1901 until 1946, although it came under the control of the Japanese for a short period from 1941 to 1945. The US then signed agreements with the Philippines and established bases there. These military bases still exist in the Philippines.

The recent strategic agreement signed between Afghanistan and America is aimed at securing bases for the US in Afghanistan in return for making commitments to Afghanistan’s security and stability. The agreement also requires judicial immunity for American soldiers against prosecution in Afghanistan. These two issues have not yet materialised, although America is trying to put them into action. America is looking for options and pretexts to achieve these two objectives. On 9th May 2013, Hamid Karzai announced, “*America intends to establish nine bases in Afghanistan*”. He also said, “*We agree to give the US these bases*” and that, “*serious negotiations are being conducted on these issues with Americans.*”(AFP, 9-5-2013). The issue of judicial immunity to US forces stationed in these bases is part of their negotiations.

The bilateral security agreement - suggested in the strategic pact - has not been signed thus far. This bilateral security agreement when signed may restrict or guarantee the actions of US forces in Afghanistan. American forces will obtain judicial and diplomatic immunity in Afghanistan. In Iraq, about 16,000 personnel related to the US embassy enjoy diplomatic immunity. American officials and America’s agent Noori al-Maliki failed to make a legitimate excuse for giving judicial

immunity to the rest of the American military personnel by unavailingly trying to market these forces as trainers for the Iraqi army.

1. However, the question remains as to whether peace – as expected by the people of Afghanistan- is in the US agenda at all?
2. Does the West (Europe and USA) want complete and lasting peace in Afghanistan?
3. What exactly does “change in strategy from war to peace” mean?

This report will seek answers to these questions.

Hizb-ut Tahrir Wilayah Afghanistan

01-September, 2013

War and Peace, American perspective, public perception

When the US policy-making establishment uses the terms “war” and “peace”, they imply a different meaning from the way ordinary people understand them. When the United States speaks about war, this does not mean that it intends to go to war against other major powers. This is because it may lead to the destabilisation of the current World Order in which the USA reigns supreme as the dominant power. The US does not engage in a war that may lead to a decline of its global supremacy. Due to his over-confidence in the US’s military strength, George W. Bush waged war on Afghanistan and Iraq, ignoring its allies and bypassing the United Nations. This unilateral military campaign of the Bush administration led to failures in achieving stated US military goals, thereby undermining US credibility as a global military power.

Furthermore, when US politicians talk about “peace”, what they mean is preventing war in areas where some sort of compromise is necessary to secure US interests. Therefore, the US strategy regarding peace does not mean putting an end to the war in Afghanistan and Iraq. America will continue these wars by other means and styles. America will let the Afghan and Iraqi armies conduct and carry out this war, leading them from behind the scenes. It is for this reason that the US has been providing training to these forces, bringing with them two advisors placed in top positions. An indication of this is the fact that the US is insistent on strengthening relations with the two countries. It seems that the US wants to end the direct military engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan - but in reality, it will continue its wars against the people of these two countries by employing the armies of these two countries as proxies so that people are subjugated by US colonialism.

Persistence on diplomacy does not mean that the USA will not resort to war. In US foreign policy and diplomacy, war and peace are two very interrelated, intertwined concepts. Earnest J. Wilson III, the Dean of Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California who also served on the senior staff of the US National Security Council, said in an article: “*The influence of the DoD (Department of Defence) on US foreign policy-making is way greater than the foreign policy establishment itself*”. He says that while the DoD has a budget upward of \$260 billion, the State Department had requested a budget of about \$10 billion for 2008.² In the same year, US military spending was \$607 billion.³ In 2012, US defence budget increased to around \$695.7 billion. This means the USA is the biggest military spender in the world.

War is the basis of American foreign policy. It conducts its foreign policy in the guise of pre-emptive attacks, War on Terror rhetoric, and securing US interests. It also conducts its military based foreign policy under the pretext of supporting its allies, supporting a member of United Nations, ensuring the implementation of international laws, or implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions and sometimes, in the name of protecting human rights. America knows that if it were to remain the only dominant power in world politics and if the world were to submit to its supremacy, it must instil fear in other great powers so that they do not dare compete with it and challenge its leadership. This requires heavy investment in military power. Had it not been for this US military power, its interests, economic progress, and financial gains would not have been secured; its unity and integrity would not have been ensured. If the USA does not wage wars, civil war would start within and destroy its unity, making it hard for the state to impose its authority. Thus, diplomacy is employed to serve these objectives. Hence, heavy investments and big budgets allocated for US military spending and war efforts are aimed at implementing the US foreign policy. Fewer budgets for the State Department for diplomatic affairs could be traced back to these backgrounds. Therefore, US foreign policy is offensive and war-oriented. Moreover, the US spends ten times more on its military than on its diplomatic activities. The reason for this gross disparity in expenditure is because the foreign affairs of the US are based on war. The US believes that its diplomatic achievements are the result of its military might and war-oriented efforts which compel others to accepting its diplomatic, political and non-political programs.

Competing or reinforcing? Comparing Bush and Obama's strategies

The decade since September 11 has seen two competing US foreign policy visions, both different in their style however in essence are the same. George W. Bush's response to the attack shaped his foreign policy, in which he declared his so-called *War on Terror*. Barack Obama tapped into the American public's disillusionment over Iraq and Afghanistan and US foreign policy more generally by rejecting the core principles of Bush's world-view. Opposing Bush's foreign policy, Obama said that the US needed partners to achieve its goals and protect its interests. Moreover, those partners, he believed, could only be won over through diplomatic engagement, not intimidation. Optimistic about the capacity of American power, Bush declared his global war with a view to reshape the world order. He, therefore, declared his offensive foreign policy attacking Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. However, the Iraq war produced something Bush never had anticipated: a protracted and bloody occupation that demonstrated the limits of American power. Criticism of US foreign policy soared, both at home and abroad.

Barak Obama in a way owed his political success to George W. Bush, as Bush's strategy led to revealing the limits of the American power in Iraq and Afghanistan and it also failed to produce the supplementary benefits that Bush had anticipated. During his presidential debate, Obama argued that he had opposed Bush's strategy from the start. His criticisms flowed from a rejection of Bush's view of how the world worked. Where Bush implicitly denied the claim that globalisation was remaking world politics, Obama accepted it as a given. A globalised world had created a multitude of threads that crossed national borders. Democrats first raised the concept of globalisation during the Clinton administration. The Obama administration will not give up on this concept because of the gains it has brought to the United States. America coined the issue of international terrorism to justify its war against Islam, Muslims and occupation of their lands. Under the pretext of non-proliferation, the monopoly of atomic weapons has been limited to those countries that already possessed them. Climate Change and the issue of environmental protection is another pretext the USA is using to secure its economic and political interests. This has become evident in conferences that have been held in the context of climate change and environmental protection. However, American power, though vast, was insufficient to meet these challenges. In Obama's words "*America cannot meet the threats of this century alone*".⁴

Obama argued that the United States could secure the partners it needed only if other countries agreed with the direction USA was heading towards, and the way it was pursuing its goals.

Barack Obama argued that "*with the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, Bush is giving terrorists what they really want...extended US occupation at heavy costs with undetermined consequences*".⁵ Barack Obama summed up his foreign policy in a few points; US troops' withdrawal from Iraq in 16 months of occupying his office, engaging world powers in US missions abroad, replacing war with diplomacy in US foreign policy. Although Obama emphasized the importance of working with friend and foes alike, he insisted that he would act militarily where it made sense. Besides vowing to send more troops to Afghanistan, he insisted during his presidential campaign in August 2007 that he would use drone strikes and Special Forces operations to attack inside Pakistan. He said: "*if we have credible intelligence about high-value terrorist targets, and President Musharraf does not act, we will*".⁶

The Obama administration made no reduction in the military budget and military preparation, rather his administration made a double fold increase. It also did not stop the war on terror, but changed the tactics to achieve US desired goals with minimum cost and less trouble. It increased drone attacks, extending operations to other countries. Obama employed forces of other countries under its influence such as the army of Pakistan to fight the Taliban and African armies to fight Muslims in Somalia. This made it easy for the Obama administration to focus on other strategic priorities

such as the Pacific Ocean region. America suffered heavy losses in Iraq, and it seemed that it was losing the battle to the resistance. This harmed the US international standing greatly. Nevertheless, no country in the world could take its leading position. The US managed to maintain its leadership and gain strategic objectives in Iraq and in the region. USA imposed its desired constitution, strategic and security agreements on Iraq. It controls the affairs in Iraq and the region, and wishes to apply the same strategies and agenda in Afghanistan to ensure its presence in this country.

The Democrats had adopted diplomatic engagement as a foreign policy style during the Bill Clinton administration. The objective has been for the Democrats to strengthen their hold on US affairs internally, improve US image internationally, minimize opposition of other great powers to US policies abroad and remove the fatigue caused on the US military and economy by direct wars and the financial economic crisis. This policy was not implemented because other powers challenged the US, rather rival countries to the United States are happy with this US strategy of engagement. However, this engagement is aimed at implementing US plans and achieving US objectives with the help of these powers. Engagement with other countries does not translate into participation in planning and policy-making on international issues. Rather the US makes plans, issues directives and establishes relations with other countries to ask them to implement these policies. This is the goal of US engagement with other countries. In fact, it is a way of deceiving those countries that walk the path of America in implementing US strategies. The US calls on major powers and small countries alike to engage with it in managing world affairs, asking them to implement the policies and strategies it devises. These countries are under the delusion of being US partners when in reality they are only executors of US strategies.

Shift in US strategy from war to peace and the regional implications

Since Barak Obama took office, US foreign policy has been set in maintaining regional and international realities to achieve its goals. However, this does not mean that Obama has been soft in implementing US policies, particularly in the Muslim world. For instance, Bush launched drone attacks on four Muslim countries - Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and Yemen, while Obama extended these operations to six countries including Somalia and Libya.

At the beginning, the USA did not trust countries of the region to assign them important tasks. There had been an over-confidence in American capabilities, thereby giving countries of the region an impression that it was their duty to serve US interests, or at least not stand in America's way by favouring its opponents. Opposition to US occupation increased in Iraq and in 2007 and 2008, the resistance reached its peak. In the case of Afghanistan, Taliban were defeated at the beginning, but it was not long before they returned giving resistance in Afghanistan. It was under these circumstances when Obama came to presidency and declared that the USA was going to engage countries of the region in Afghan affairs. The interests of these countries in Afghanistan and in the region have direct effects on US strategy in Afghanistan. Paradoxically, engaging these countries in Afghan affairs leads to conflict of interests of these countries, creating new challenges for America. The attack on Indian workers in Afghanistan on the 26th February 2010 is a manifestation of this conflict of interests between India and Pakistan. It was in this context that the USA increased pressure on India and Pakistan to start dialogue, because India-Pakistan rivalry directly affects the war that the US has started on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Although American policy on India and Pakistan is independent of its policy on Afghanistan, it pressurises Pakistan to give in to India so that India can increase its influence in Afghanistan and make greater gains. The USA helped India to enter into the Afghan theatre with the aim of bringing India closer to itself.

America sees the Afghan theatre in the context of its rivalry with China and Russia. America encouraged both countries to participate in the Afghan cake. The contracts of Ainak Copper Mine and extraction of oil in the north of Afghanistan are small examples of this policy. Similarly,

Russian companies participate in reconstruction projects particularly in energy and the water sector officially (through diplomatic channels) and unofficially (directly). This soft stand on China and Russia, encouraging them to sign such contracts to secure some interests has earned their cooperation with USA. It has led them to believe that American occupation of Afghanistan is not directed against them. Thus, they make no attempt to oppose US interests. Obtaining co-operation of regional countries in Afghanistan will help achieve US goals and objectives without huge human or financial commitments. This strategy also gives the impression that America is not despotic in running the world affairs, an impression which helps minimize opposition to US strategy in Afghanistan.

Connecting the South and Central Asia program is gradually gaining momentum, and Turkmenistan on the Caspian Sea region is becoming an active player in recent days.

The extension of Trans-Afghan gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Pakistan and India (funded by ADB), extending a 1300MW power line from Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan to Pakistan via Afghanistan (the project is called CASA-1000) partially funded by the World Bank, the program to extend a railway line between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan, Central Asia Regional Cooperation program (CAREC) and several other programs are underway to reshape the region into co-operation by interrelating and diffusing their interests under the US patronage.

Under the guise of these programs, America wants to extend its control over the natural resources in Central Asia. In this strategy, Afghanistan stands strategically as the most important region from where America will implement its plans. The objective is not merely co-operation and progress in the region. The whole program is aimed at securing US interests in this region, particularly extending its control over Turkmenistan which is what matters the most for America. Turkmenistan is one of the biggest exporters of natural gas to Russia. The US not only wants to control Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, but rather wants to take the entire Central Asian region out of the influence of Russia and bring it under its control. This would be a determining factor in US-Russian rivalry, because if Russia loses control over this region, it would be a fatal blow for it as Central Asia, the Caucasus and Eastern Europe are spheres of Russian influence outside its territory.

In light of this, the US strategy of “peace” in Afghanistan has obvious regional dimensions that are aimed at minimizing negative interference of countries to American strategy and optimizing its chances of success.

Conclusions

The idea of keeping the Afghanistan's political stability, durable peace and security through establishment of a strong central government seems a distant reality because of the following reasons.

1. Complicated and difficult geography of Afghanistan.
2. Tribal and intellectual differences.
3. Permissibility of borders.
4. Division of political power along ethnic and tribal lines among significant number of elements of power resulting in absolute lack of centralization of political power and political will.
5. Lack of well-equipped and sufficient number of armed forces proportion to the size and challenging geography of the country.
6. Lack of resources and transport infrastructure for mobilization of forces, and for joining economically and socio politically together, otherwise, geographically detached regions of the country.

It seems that America is unwilling to sacrifice lives of its soldiers for protection of Karzai's government any longer. What does America want in Afghanistan? US Think Tank "STRATFOR" in an article titled "Geopolitics of the United States" observed, "...since geography precludes the formation of any stable, unified or capable government in Afghanistan....The American withdrawal strategy, is a simple one. Afghanistan cannot be beaten into shape, so the United States must maintain the ability to monitor the region and engage in occasional manhunts to protect its interests. This requires maintaining a base or two, not reinventing Afghanistan in America's image as an advanced multi-ethnic democracy."⁷

The US government understands that establishing a powerful central government in Afghanistan requires investing huge sums of money and human resources. This would require connecting different regions of Afghanistan from an economic and political aspect - otherwise separated by mountain chains - by preparing roads and highways cutting through the heart and tops of these mountains and rugged terrains. A strong central government would also require establishing security forces armed with state of the art weapons, building transportation infrastructures necessary for land mobilisation and logistical support of forces in case of insurgency and security threats. Economic progress requires not only extraction of mineral and natural resources with heavy investments, but also linking regional aspects of economic interaction and transport networks to regional markets. In fact, the US can ensure its strategic interests in Afghanistan without undertaking the mission of state-building by securing a few bases in the major regions of Afghanistan and by maintaining the status quo beyond 2014. This issue is evident in the commitments that donor countries and agencies have made in Tokyo conference. These commitments are focused on human capacity development and non-infrastructure areas, instead of more important infrastructure sectors such as water, energy and transport.

Therefore:

1. The prospect of peace in Afghanistan is achievable within US parameters and objectives.
2. These objectives include securing military bases without entering into war with the Taliban. In order for US to achieve its goals without war, it is important to reach an agreement with the Taliban and accommodate them in the Afghan government. Otherwise, it is not possible to stabilize the situation.

3. The US can maintain the status-quo only by bringing all factions of the Afghan conflict in a coalition government without isolating anyone.

There is no doubt that America limited its vision of peace in Afghanistan after signing the strategic agreement with Afghanistan on the issue of its presence in the country. The US demands include permanent bases in Afghanistan, judicial immunity for US troops stationed in Afghanistan, reaching an agreement of reconciliation with the Taliban giving them share in the government and accepting them as an opposition force. The US goal with regard to the Taliban is to deceive them into entering the political process. The strategic agreement dictates a pluralist, democratic government in Afghanistan. It is for this reason that the Taliban political office was opened in Qatar on this day 17 June 2013. A Taliban representative explained the objective of their political office in Qatar in five points: improving relations with countries of the world through negotiations and discussions, supporting the political process with the aim of establishing an Islamic state in Afghanistan, meeting with other Afghan sides with consideration of circumstances, improving relations with government and non-government international institutions such as the United Nations, and issuing of political statements and releasing those statements through international media.” (Al-Jazeera 17 June 2013).

Thus, it seems that the Taliban are getting close to an agreement with the system in Afghanistan while the process is supported by the United States. The Taliban hope to participate in the political process with the current system. If this materializes and the Taliban join the political process, it will be the biggest achievement for the US strategy of securing its interests and influence in Afghanistan.

Reuters reported on 17/6/2013, quoting US officials, “*US will start peace talks with the Taliban as of next week in Doha, but implied that the desired outcome would require lengthy process.*” Furthermore, “*the US also insists that Taliban should sever relations with al-Qaida, renounce and put an end to armed activities, accept the Afghan constitution which guarantees women’s right and rights of minorities.*”

The common perception of lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan would remain a dream as it has been over the last 300 year history of Afghanistan, unless there is a radical geopolitical change in the region that can link different parts of this country comfortably to commercial and economic regions beyond its current borders.

In addition, the requirements for such a radical change is to:

1. Continue the resistance against occupation.
2. Reject participation in the government and political process
3. Insist on uprooting of the current system
4. Reject US presence
5. Make public opinion against US presence in Afghanistan and against its puppet government
6. Continue Islamic Da’wa based on the ideology of Islam to shape public opinion
7. Continue efforts to get the leadership of the nation

8. Give people the correct picture of the political situation
9. Connect the issues of Afghanistan with the issues of Pakistan for a radical change
10. This will bring about radical change and will put the US program, and its strategic and security plans on the path to failure.

Hizb-ut Tahrir Wilayah Afghanistan

01-September, 2013

Bibliography

¹ globalfirepower.com

² “Hard power, soft power, smart power”, Earnest J. Wilson, III, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol.616 (Mar., 2008), pp.110-124. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25097997>

³ Pavan Nair, “An Evaluation of India’s Defence Expenditure”. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 44, No. 51 (December 2009), pp. 40-46

⁴ James M. Lindsay, George W. Bush, Barack Obama and the future of US global leadership

⁵ Barack Obama, ‘The war we need to win’, Woodrow Wilson Center, 1 Aug. 2007,

⁶ Barack Obama, ‘The war we need to win’.

⁷ “The Geopolitics of the United States, Part II: American Identity and the Threats of Tomorrow”, Stratfor.com, Aug 25, 2011.