

THE EMPIRE FROM WITHIN (PART FIVE)

CHAPTERS 28 and 29

Obama came down from the residence and saw Biden. Biden advised him: "What you're about to do is a presidential order; it is no longer an issue of continuing a discussion. This is not what you think. This is an order. Without them, we're locked into in Vietnam".

Obama answered: "I'm not signing on to a failure. If what I propose is not working, I'm not going to be like these other presidents and stick to it based on my ego or my politics, my political security. This is what I'm going to announce", and he distributed copies of his six-page terms sheet.

"There's going to be a 30,000-troop surge. In December of 2010, there would be an assessment to see what's working and was not. In July 2011 we're going to begin to thin out."

"In 2010 we will not be having a conversation of how to do more. There would be no repeat of what had happened that year... This is neither counterinsurgency nor nation building. The costs are prohibitive", Obama stated.

The military had gotten almost everything they were asking for.

Petraeus and Mullen ratified their support for the president. Emmanuel was concerned about the cost of the operation—more than 30 billion dollars.

Biden acknowledged that that wasn't a negotiation; it was an order by the commander in chief. It was a mission change, and if that wasn't how it was perceived, the months of work spent on this job couldn't be justified.

The president informed Eikenberry and McChrystal of his decision via a video-conference. Both agreed.

Biden was convinced that the president had hammered a stake into the heart of the expanded counterinsurgent offensive.

Petraeus said in private: "You have to recognize also that I don't think you win this war. I think you keep fighting. It's a little bit like Iraq. Iraq is a bit of a metaphor for this situation. Yes, there has been an enormous progress in Iraq. But there are still horrific attacks in Iraq and you have to stay vigilant. This is the kind of fight we are in for the rest of our lives and probably our kids' lives".

Obama gave his speech at the Eisenhower Auditorium at West Point Military Academy.

The next day, Clinton and Gates appeared before the Senate Armed Services Committee to speak about the new plan.

Many Republicans were troubled by the deadline of July 2011 when supposedly the troops would begin to transfer out of Afghanistan.

Petraeus later said that strategy progress could take many forms, that all he needed was to show that there had been advances and that would be sufficient to add time to the clock and get what they

needed.

Lute advised him that that was a dramatic misreading of the president, that Obama was opposed to the idea of long-term commitment.

CHAPTERS 30 and 31

On April 3rd, Petraeus met with Derek Harvey, his confidential intelligence adviser. Harvey drew one of the most pessimistic pictures of the war. He advised that the political and diplomatic strategy was not connected to the military strategy. "It's not going to work", he said. "We aren't going to achieve the objectives we've set out for ourselves". Harvey foresaw a complete return to the situation before September 11. Petraeus asked what were the options and Harvey thought that supporting the Karzai government was counterproductive.

He said that election results had strengthened Karzai and that he was now getting everything he wanted.

McChrystal's troops hadn't succeeded in clearing out the key areas. "The enemy is just beginning to adapt", added Harvey.

On April 16th the president meets with the National Security Council to analyze the up-dated information on Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The president began by asking about the situation in specific areas; in all of them, the troops were seen to be resisting and in none of them had responsibility been transferred to the local forces.

The pattern being established was clear. To resist, resist for years without advancing or transfers.

Nobody at the meeting dared to ask when the transfer would begin.

Donilon and Lute had prepared some questions so that the president could concentrate on the situation in Khandahar.

The president recommended that McChrystal think about how we were going to know if we were being successful and when we would know that.

The result of the meeting was the first strike for the general.

Brigadier General Lawrence Nicholson visited Jones and Lute at the White House. Nicholson was reminded of the 12-month term he had to show progress attained and to begin the transfer. When would the Marines be ready to do something more, for example, enter Khandahar, or return home and be part of those who would be returning in 2011?

Nicholson said he needed at least another 12 months, and that was for the districts that were in better shape. Lute reminded him that that hadn't been the commitment, that they still hadn't entered the suburbs of Khandahar, the place where the Taliban were to establish themselves. What was important was Khandahar.

Nicholson said that maybe they could get there in 24 months if they eliminated the problem of the poppy fields since that was what was feeding the insurgency.

Lute wondered how they were going to achieve that. Despite the fact that a plague had wiped out 33 percent of the crops, the outlook for a reduced funding for the insurgents was remote. In spite of the Afghan conspiracy theories, the CIA had not yet developed an insect that would attack the poppy.

McChrystal was reporting some advances, but when Lute got into the figures, the reality was quite different.

CHAPTERS 32 and 33

Sixteen very rough months had gone by for Dennis Blair. He had failed in his efforts to name the chief intelligence officer in each of the capitals. The CIA had won and the feud had become public. In his opinion, the CIA was using the President's Daily Brief so that Obama could learn about their triumphs.

Blair was feeling so frustrated that on one occasion he said: "I think the CIA is fundamentally an organization that's like a really finely train not very smart, dangerous animal that needs to be controlled very closely by adults".

In May of 2010, Obama had asked Jones and others if it wasn't already time to get rid of Blair. There had been many discussions with the CIA and Blair had put on a lot of pressure for the signing of a no-spying agreement with the French, something that was opposed by Obama and the rest of the cabinet.

Obama phoned him and let him know of his decision to fire him. That he should present some personal excuse.

Blair was deeply offended. He wasn't ill, his family was fine, and he had been telling people that he would stay as DNI for four years, because part of the problem with the office was the constant turnover at the top.

On June 21, Gates informs Jones about the article printed about McChrystal in Rolling Stone magazine. McChrystal was saying that Jones was a "clown" who had been stuck in the year 1985; that Obama's strategy wanted to sell an unsellable position.

McChrystal called Biden and acknowledged that he had jeopardized the mission. He apologized to Holbrooke and presented his resignation to Gates.

Gates proposed to Obama that he criticize McChrystal in the first two paragraphs of his statement saying "I think that the general committed a significant mistake and exercised poor judgement".

Obama accepted McChrystal's resignation and proposed Petraeus for that position.

Obama met with Petraeus for 40 minutes.

On Wednesday June 23rd, the president announced the changes. He acknowledged McChrystal's long service record and said that he was saddened to lose a soldier whom he had gotten to respect and admire. He added that Petraeus "is setting an extraordinary example of service and patriotism by assuming this difficult post". And he concluded saying: "I welcome debate among my team, but I won't tolerate division"

At the interview Obama had with the author of the book, the president spoke of his ideas regarding the nature of the war and his efforts to limit and eventually end the American's combat role in Afghanistan.

He was asked about which scene he would start a book or a movie on how he had handled the Afghanistan problem and he replied that perhaps he would begin with the year 2002 when the troop increase for Iraq was being discussed. Maybe that had been the first speech on foreign policy that got lot of attention.

Obama agreed that the nature of the war was the cost, the time and the undetermined consequences, and he quoted a famous American who had said on one occasion: "War is hell". He was referring to the

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phrase uttered by the Union Civil War General, William Tecumseh Sherman, when he said: "...And once the dogs of war are unleashed, you don't know where it's going to lead".

"When I entered into office, we had two wars taking place", said Obama. I tried to clear up the chaos.

"It is very easy to imagine a situation in which in the absence of a clear strategy, we ended up staying in Afghanistan for another five years, another eight years, another ten years, and that we would do it not with clear intentions but rather just out of an inertia".

At the end of the interview, the president realized that almost the entire article was hinging on relations between civilian and military leaders, and he thought he ought to express his own opinions.

"I am probably the first president who is young enough that the Vietnam War wasn't at the core of my development". He was 13 in 1975 when the United States finally withdrew from Vietnam.

"So I grew up with none of the baggage that arouse out of the dispute of the Vietnam War. I was also had a lot of confidence, I guess, coming in that the way our system of government works civilians have to make political decisions. And the military carries them out...I also don't see it as a hawk/dove kind of thing...So a lot of the political frames through which these debates are being viewed don't really connect with me generationally. I'm neither intimidated by our military, nor am I thinking that they're somehow trying to undermine my role as commander in chief".

In this final paragraph of Obama's conversation with Woodward, the president of the United States utters enigmatic words that are revealing.

There are moments when the pressure of the military is strong, persistent and repetitive. We can perceive the image of a president who is being resisted and challenged, as it happened in ancient Rome when the empire depended practically solely on the power of the legions.

But in ancient Roman times, the planet was totally unknown in its dimensions, physical characteristics and spatial location. At that time they lacked firearms; there was no trade or global investment, military bases, naval and air forces on a planetary level, hundreds of satellites, instantaneous communications, tens of thousands of nuclear weapons along with radioelectric, electromagnetic and cybernetic weapons; mighty rivalries between powers with nuclear weapons, whose deployment, by those who have less, would be sufficient to put an end to human life; and almost seven billion people who need planet Earth's natural resources.

It is quite a dramatic picture. On the one hand, Barack Obama, a successful lawyer, highly educated and a consummate speaker, and on the other hand, highly professionalized soldiers, trained all their lives in the use of force and the arts of war, endowed with weapons that can put an end to the human beings living on this planet in just a matter of hours.

What hope for humankind can we derive from this picture?

I remember Bush's speech at West Point where, as the instrument of that country's ultra-rightwing, he stated that military officers had to be ready to attack immediately, with no advance warning, the sixty or more dark corners of the world.

In two of those dark corners, Afghanistan and Iraq, the soldiers of the United States are bogged down, after causing millions of deaths.

At the meetings of the National Security Council with Obama, the fear of difficulties that are even more serious, coming from a third country, Pakistan were being expressed.

Relations between the CIA and Bin Laden, the leader of the "Arab group", were going on right up to the

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very day of the attack on the Twin Towers in New York on September 11, 2001.

What did the Pakistani intelligence service, the ISI, inform the American CBS radio and TV broadcasting network? That on September 10, Osama Bin Laden was undergoing kidney dialysis treatment in the Rawalpindi Military Hospital in Pakistan, a place with close ties with the Pentagon...No attempt to detain the most well-known fugitive in the US was made, and so then it could be that Bin Laden would serve another better purpose.

That information was revealed in Dan Rather's superb program on January 28, 2002, four and a half months after the terrorist attack that allowed Bush to justify his antiterrorist warfare.

Knowing this facilitates our comprehension of the reason why, in the dialogues with Obama in the White House, it is stated that the most difficult problem could come from Pakistan.

The person who conversed with Obama most respectfully was General Colin Powell who belongs to the Republican Party that opposed his election as the president of the United States. It is well-known that Powell might have been the first black US president. He preferred not to run for the office. Later on, Bush appointed him Secretary of State. I know that there were people who allegedly were firmly opposed to his running. But I don't have enough facts at my disposal to make an opinion about Colin Powell's motives.

I hope that the summary of the book "Obama's Wars" has been useful to the readers of my Reflections.

Fidel Castro Ruz
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