

PAKISTAN IMPLODES

The Serpent Eggs Are Hatched, And London's Snakes Are Out

by Ramtanu Maitra

Oct. 9—Pakistan is now firmly caught in a vortex of violence. There is no indication whatsoever that the Pakistani authorities have either the capability, or the intent, to get to the root cause of this catastrophic development, to put a stop to the growing violence. What is evident, however, is that Pakistan is becoming increasingly unstable, with large parts virtually ungovernable. If this trend continues, not just India and Afghanistan, but the surrounding region will soon be subjected to the disastrous effects of this instability.

There are many reasons why Pakistan's instability has reached this state, but most important, is Islamabad's unwillingness to get out of the colonial mindset, learned from the rulers of the British Raj, and move quickly to integrate the nation. In Pakistan, the ethnic and provincial identities have been kept intact, if not sharpened, during the 60-plus years of its existence, and Islamabad has kept vast areas, the bulk of its geographical territory, underdeveloped and virtually untouched. Behind Islamabad's policy is the old British imperial strategy of maintaining ethnic and sub-ethnic identities, thereby facilitating the rule of a few over the rest.

It appears now that the serpent's eggs have been hatched, and London's snakes are spilling all over Pakistan to poison the land. Despite these visible developments, Pakistan's powers-that-be, the Punjabi-dominated military, and the weak democratic forces, have long since opted for a policy of blaming others, and doing nothing. It is "Hamlet-like" paralysis, where those who have to act have convinced themselves that

no action is the best action. The result of this paralysis has become obvious for all to see.

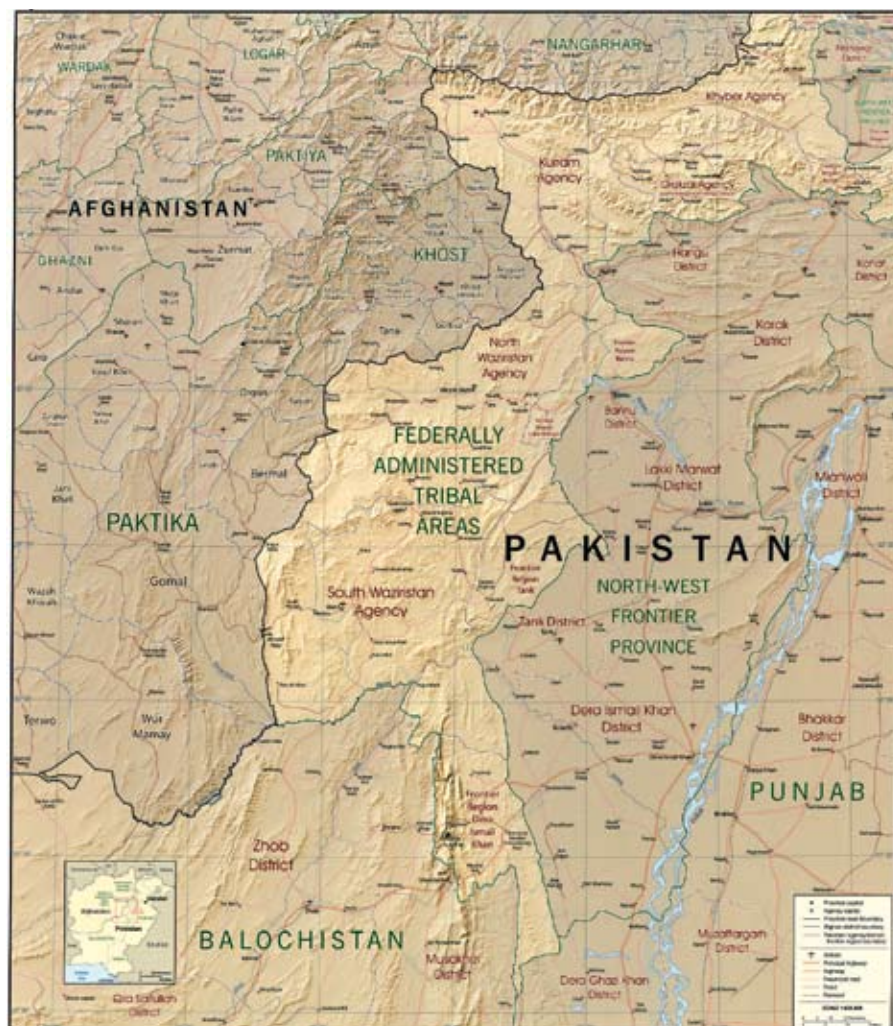
As with the recent floods in Pakistan, which were caused by unusually heavy monsoon rains over a very short period of time, and where the authorities had adopted the self-consoling illusion that such a catastrophe would never occur, in the same way, they believe the violence taking place in Pakistan today is "just the way things are."

The presence of U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan has further facilitated the process of disintegration, and it has now reached a point where even the departure of the foreign troops from Afghanistan, may not bring down the level of violence inside Pakistan. Terrorists, organized by Islamabad in the 1980s and 1990s to "bleed India" in the disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir, have not only consolidated their foothold within Pakistan, but have formed strong ties with foreign instigators, such as Britain and Saudi Arabia (see last week's *EIR*).

Endless Violence

On Sept. 30, a NATO airship crossed into Pakistan's airspace in the Upper Kurram region near Pakistan's western borders with Afghanistan and killed three Pakistani soldiers. In protest, Pakistan stopped the huge line of supplies that snakes its way daily from the southern Pakistani port of Karachi through the legendary Khyber Pass, into the Bagram Air Base near Kabul. As a result, this now stationary convoy of trucks has come

FIGURE 1

Afghanistan-Pakistan Central Border Area

Pakistan is engulfed in violence along the border areas with Afghanistan, which have become embroiled in the U.S.-NATO war.

under attack from the “insurgents.”

At the time of this writing, at least 150 oil tankers have been burnt up. A number of the tankers were snaking their way to the open southern route that enters Afghanistan through the Pakistani border town of Chaman. It is unlikely that anyone, besides a few insiders, would know how much of this supply is taken off by the insurgents on a routine basis. Neither the Americans, who depend heavily on keeping the supply line to feed the war in Afghanistan, nor the Pakistanis, who collect a goodly sum for keeping the supply line “undisturbed,” are inclined to divulge this inside information.

While the “Taliban” and other “insurgents” have been accused of this misdeed, it is anyone’s guess who

did the burning and looting. The fact remains that this long convoy, which brings in 70% of the supplies needed by the 150,000 U.S. and NATO troops stationed in Afghanistan, is contracted out to the Pakistanis and Afghans. It is impossible to evaluate how many of these “contractors” are working for the insurgents. It is likely that the supply line has been allowed to function throughout the nine years since 2001, when Afghanistan was invaded by the Americans, because many of these “contractors” were paying a “due share” to the insurgents, strengthening their firepower against the U.S. and NATO troops.

Pakistan’s (or Britain’s?) Frontiers

The area through which the huge convoy brings in supplies for the U.S. and NATO troops, passes through the troubled western frontier areas of Pakistan/Afghanistan, known as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province, and Balochistan. While all three areas are in turmoil, the FATA is now a hotbed of Wahhabi-influenced jihadi movements and old tribal rivalries. It is divided into seven districts, called agencies: Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, Kurram, North Waziristan, and South Waziristan.

FATA is thinly populated (3 million, in contrast to the total of 170 million in Pakistan) and has a very rough terrain. The FATA and Afghanistan are separated by the non-demarcated Durand Line, literally, a “line in the sand,” drawn arbitrarily by the British Raj in 1893, but never accepted by Kabul.

The Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (formerly the North West Frontier Province, NWFP), along with Balochistan, was brought under British control in 1880, after the second Afghan War (1878-80), when parts of its territory was wrested from Afghanistan, bringing the British-controlled territories within 50 miles of Kabul. The

administrative system that prevails today in the FATA, is almost identical to that which originated under the British Raj. The FATA is officially under the directive of the Pakistani President, who has empowered the governor of neighboring Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa as his representative. The governor, in turn, appoints an “agent” for each agency of the FATA.

These agents are senior administrators in their regions, and are governed by rules established by a British Act of Parliament in 1901. This set of rules is called the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR). The FCR was enforced by the British Raj in the Pushtun-inhabited tribal areas in Northwest British India, as it was called then. The laws were devised especially to counter the fierce opposition of the Pushtuns to British rule; their main objective was to protect the interests of the British Empire. Although, formally, that British Empire is history, Islamabad has done its very best to keep its laws intact in the FATA.

As a result of keeping the FATA undeveloped, as if the British Empire still ruled there, the FATA, during the nine years of war in Afghanistan, went “under the de facto joint control of al-Qaeda and Taliban militants, except for the tribal agency of South Waziristan, which was recently retaken from the Mahsud Taliban network by the Pakistani army,” to quote Farhat Taj of the Jamestown Foundation. The concentration of terrorists within the FATA was helped by the Pakistani military’s ground action in South Waziristan and some other tribal agencies, and the increasingly bloody drone attacks by the U.S. and NATO.

Islamabad’s involvement in these drone attacks, although often denied by the Pakistani authorities, and condemned as a violation of its sovereignty, is now clear. There were many reports that the drone strikes on the FATA are carried out from air bases within Pakistan. U.S. officials say the strikes are carried out under an informal agreement with Islamabad that allows Pakistani leaders to criticize them in public, but Pakistan denies the existence of any such agreement. This denial of reality, which is allowing the killing of many innocent Pakistanis by foreigners, has hardened the belief of many in the tribal area that Islamabad does not really consider them to be citizens.

Living in Fear in Balochistan

But it is not only the FATA: All areas west of the River Indus are in flames, not only because of the Pakistani support lent to the needless war in Afghanistan, and

its direct violent impact on the people living in the border areas, but also the historic neglect of these people.

Take the case of Balochistan: Inhabited mostly by Baloch tribes and some Pushtuns, it has been in flames for years. During the Cold War, Islamabad blamed the Soviet Union for supporting the Baloch communists seeking separation. Now, Pakistan blames India for fanning the flames in Balochistan. Since these accusations cannot be verified, nor can New Delhi’s denials be wholly accepted as truth, the fact remains that Balochistan has been treated by Islamabad since its inception as a colonial part of Islamabad’s newly acquired “empire.”

It is shocking to note that, on at least two occasions, under two different rulers in Islamabad, Balochistan was subjected to air strikes. In fact, Baloch dissidence has always been met with guns by Islamabad. In 1954, Islamabad merged the four provinces of West Pakistan—Balochistan, NWFP, Punjab, and Sindh—into “One Unit.” One Unit was formed without adequate dialogue and, as a result, an anti-One Unit movement emerged in Balochistan. To overcome this opposition, the Pakistani Army was deployed, and the Khan of Kalat was arrested, but not before the Baloch oppositionists to the One Unit had engaged the Pakistani Army in pitched battles.

In 1973, following his visit to Iran, then-Pakistani President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto dismissed the elected provincial government of Balochistan. The pretext was that a cache of 350 Soviet submachine guns and 100,000 rounds of ammunition had supposedly been discovered in the Iraqi attaché’s house, and were destined for Balochistan, according to Ray Fulcher in his Nov. 30, 2006 article, “Balochistan’s History of Insurgency.”

The ensuing protest against the dismissal of the duly elected government brought in another wave of the Pakistani Army—78,000 men, to be precise—supported by Iranian Cobra helicopters. The troops were resisted by some 50,000 Baloch. The conflict took the lives of 3,300 Pakistani troops, 5,300 Baloch, and thousands of civilians. That 1973 invasion created deep divisions between the Baloch people and Islamabad, and made the Baloch vulnerable to London’s machinations.

However, Islamabad’s British colonial-like policy towards Balochistan did not end in 1973. As the Baloch internal security situation deteriorated following the 2001 U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, Islamabad, under President Pervez Musharraf, became uneasy. Between December 2005 and June 2006, more than 900 Baloch

were killed, about 140,000 were displaced, 450 political activists (mainly from the Baloch National Party) disappeared, and 4,000 activists were arrested, some reports indicate.

Killers in Karachi

The convoy that brings supplies to the foreign soldiers in Afghanistan starts its daily journey, from Karachi in Sindh province, which, like India's Mumbai, is Pakistan's principal port and main commercial center. And, yet, Islamabad has allowed it to be taken over, not by the local mafia, a phenomenon that keeps Mumbai highly vulnerable, but by groups of killers who were earlier organized by Islamabad for "political" reasons.

The "political" reasons emerged in the late 1970s, when Gen. Zia ul-Haq—the Pakistani military dictator and darling of Washington in its campaign to deliver a defeat to the Soviet Army in the 1980s—having hanged the Sindhi political leader of the mass-based Pakistan People's Party (PPP) in 1979, set about to capture control of Karachi. He created a goon squad, co-opted the opponents of the PPP in Karachi, the Mohajir Qaum Movement (MQM, now known as Muttahida Qaum Movement), armed them, and pitched them against the PPP.

Later, when the Soviets moved into Afghanistan and the Washington-London-Islamabad-organized freedom fighters (mujahideen) took up opium production to "balance their budgets," hundreds of thousands of Pushtuns moved into Karachi. Drug and crime became their trademark, right under the nose of Islamabad. If they were not encouraged, they were not taken down either. Islamabad saw the benefit of keeping the city divided, in the same way that the British found "strategic" advantage in keeping people divided in order to facilitate their rule.

Now that billions of dollars worth of goods are moving from Karachi to the Khyber Pass and the Chaman entry point, these killer squads have become very active. There is money in it—a lot of it. As a result, Karachi is fast becoming an inferno. Political personnel, drug-runners, gun-runners—many of these nefarious characters wearing garb of Islamic jihadis—are making hay. It is not difficult to find the British paw-prints all over the place. For instance, the leader of the Zia-created MQM is now leading the party from London, as a British subject, ostensibly under the protection of the British SIS.

Karachi is now also the center of targetted assassination. By early August, the city had the distinction of

claiming 300 target assassination victims. By now, the number could be as high as 400. But, that is not taking into consideration the so-called religious killings. This city has more than 14 million people of various Islamic beliefs, and routinely, the Saudi-controlled and Islamabad-tolerated Wahhabis (Sunni extremists) are blowing up Sufi and Shi'a mosques.

A case in point, is the tragedy that occurred on Oct. 7, when suicide bombings at the Abdullah Shah Ghazi shrine killed at least eight people and wounded 65 others at the crowded site. The attack happened at the busiest time of the week, when thousands of people typically visit the site to pray, distribute food to the poor, and toss rose petals on the grave of the saint. The first explosion took place as the suspected bomber was going through a metal detector leading up to the shrine, according to Babar Khattak, the senior police official in Sindh province. The Oct. 7 explosions echoed a twin suicide bombing at a well-known Sufi shrine in the eastern city of Lahore, that left 40 people dead earlier this year.

What followed is typical of many such incidents in Karachi before. The attack was blamed on the Wahhabi goons, and the people took to the street in protest to burn down whatever they could lay their hands on. Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari blamed the attacks on "those who want to impose an extremist mindset and lifestyle upon our country," but said the government would not be deterred.

What is the problem that Pakistan faces today? It could be summed up in two statements issued recently from London, by the former military dictator Gen. Pervez Musharraf, who has been in self-imposed exile in London since 2008. London, of course, controls most, if not all, of the violence that occurs in Pakistan. Musharraf, in an interview with *Der Spiegel* on Oct. 6, said that militant groups "were indeed formed. The government turned a blind eye because they wanted India to discuss Kashmir."

The next day, he described his political detractors as "cowards," and added, "I would say, failure of governance is the greatest threat today."

What Musharraf seems to forget, is that he, himself, did next to nothing, during his nine years in power, to integrate the economically deprived and underdeveloped provinces with Punjab, the powerhouse of Pakistan. Nor did he do anything to curb the violence caused by decades of continuation of British policies of divide and rule.