

Is Washington Setting the Stage For a Breakup of Pakistan?

by Ramtanu Maitra

In Washington, where the looming failures in Iraq and Afghanistan have created both fear and a state of absolute denial, there is more talk now than ever before of striking Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Agencies (FATA), bordering the dangerous southeastern Afghanistan, in order to "stabilize" Afghanistan and reduce the terrorist threat to America. Demands to strike Pakistan are being made not only by the "blessed-by-unreality" Bush Administration spokesmen, but also by those who masquerade as anti-war-thinking people.

Should such military action be taken, the United States would have fallen once more into the British geopolitical trap, which will further the process of permanent war, and a clash of civilizations which is now spreading outward from South-west Asia.

The lure of "victory" and "success," and the fear that the terrorists are strong enough to attack the United States once again, have driven these individuals to embrace a policy which may lead to the breakup of Pakistan, a strong all-weather ally of the United States for decades.

In fact, Pakistan is extremely important, since it has 160 million people located in an area where three large nations—India, China, and Russia—are emerging as powerful nations, keen to exert their political, economic, and military influence over resource-rich Central Asia. In addition, Pakistan is one of the few Muslim nations that still supports the United States in international forums. But, business is business. To these reckless "patriots," the victory in Afghanistan is essential to take on Iran—a member of the "Axis of Evil," and a country now in the cross-hairs of the Bush Administration's gunners.

Weakened Musharraf

The demand for the United States going it alone, if President Musharraf does not comply, and attack the FATA, began after Musharraf was led to carry out a disastrous raid on the Lal Masjid (July 10-11), located in Pakistan's capital, Islamabad. The raid not only killed 300-plus people inside the Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) complex, but also weakened the President, significantly isolating him from the population.

In addition, U.S. Homeland Security's July 2007 report stated: "We judge the U.S. Homeland will face a persistent and evolving terrorist threat over the next three years. The main threat comes from Islamic terrorist groups and cells, especially al-Qaeda, driven by their undiminished intent to at-

tack the Homeland and a continued effort by these terrorist groups to adapt and improve their capabilities.... We assess the group has protected or regenerated key elements of its Homeland attack capability, including: a safe haven in the Pakistan Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), operational lieutenants, and its top leadership...."

The report drew immediate endorsement from President Bush, and on July 22, on Fox News TV, Homeland Security Advisor Fran Townsend told Chris Wallace: "I will say to you there are no options off the table. The President's committed to the most effective action that we can possibly take in the FATA to deny them the safe haven." In order to justify such "effective action," she also reminded the audience that "the federally administered tribal area is an area of Pakistan that's never seen the writ of the Pakistani government. It's never extended that far."

Howling for Blood

A day later, at the White House briefing, spokesman Tony Snow, after hemming and hawing, said: "Again, we still maintain our position. We retain the option of acting on actionable intelligence. But we also retain the option of working with our allies to do the same."

Not to be left behind and dubbed as "unpatriotic," the Democrats joined the fray. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, a Democrat, backed Townsend, saying that the United States should use military force to destroy al-Qaeda safe havens—wherever they are, the *Boston Globe* reported. "We have the intelligence report, which says al-Qaeda during this administration is stronger than ever. I don't think we should take anything off the table. Wherever we find these evil people we should go get them," Reid said.

Former Rep. Lee Hamilton, a Democrat, who also served as vice chairman of the 9/11 Commission, addressing the Homeland Security report, told CNN that the Iraq War had distracted the United States, adding: "I think we have to find ways and means, perhaps it's the use of covert actions, perhaps it's the use of special operations, perhaps it's the pursuit of the Taliban when they're in Afghanistan, to let us go after them as they move back into Pakistan. Whatever it is, I do not find acceptable a sanctuary for al-Qaeda in Pakistan. We have to be able to go after them."

The latest threat at the time of this writing, was issued by



may have multiple negative effects. It not only would weaken the United States military further, endangering the supply lines to the 50,000 troops now operating in Afghanistan, but also could force NATO member nations to face demands from home for a total withdrawal from the country.

There is little doubt that Pakistan's 27,200 square kilometer tribal belt, home to 3.3 million Pushtun tribesmen, has become a safe haven for al-Qaeda, Taliban, and other Afghan resistance groups. As one analyst pointed out, it has become a hotbed of anti-American activity, thanks mostly to the U.S.-led occupation of Afghanistan, which drove many militants across the border into Pakistan. Next to the tribal area, live another 20-plus million Pushtuns belonging to Pakistan's North West Frontier Province. In addition, Pakistan's largest city, and the only major port, Karachi, harbors another 5 million or so Pushtuns. Across the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, about 13 million Pushtuns live as Afghans.

FATA: A Deathtrap?

It has also been reported that since July 3—the first day of the Lal Masjid siege—suicide bombers have killed more than 200 people, mostly tribal policemen and soldiers. A Libyan commander, Abu Yahia al-Libi, who escaped a

U.S. military prison in 2005, said in a video statement urging Pakistanis to overthrow Musharraf, "Destroy the fortification of his weak army and the nest of his filthy intelligence agency and the core of his infidel rule."

In addition, according to well-informed sources in the North West Frontier Province, the Mir Ali area of North Waziristan in the FATA is under the effective control of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) headed by Qari Tahir Yaldeshev. Small groups of Chechens and Uighurs are also present in the area, one analyst pointed out.

The IMU, with the help of Chechen instructors, has set up training camps in the area for training the recruits of the Neo-Taliban, the jihadi terrorist organizations of Pakistan, and individual jihadis from abroad—particularly from the Pakistani diaspora.

The *Dawn* of Karachi stated on July 29: "The problem now is that the situation in Miramshah has worsened to an unusual extent. In a letter to the government, that sounded more like a lamentation, a political agent stated that the khasadars [tribal police] had abandoned their duty without seeking his permission. All those appointed for 599 posts of the levies force had renounced their responsibilities and officers of the line departments had left their offices at the mercy of watchmen. Little wonder then that a line department office and a

Democratic Presidential candidate Sen. Barack Obama, who, on Aug. 1, while speaking at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, said the United States must be willing to strike al-Qaeda targets in Pakistan with or without the approval of the Pakistani government. "If we have actionable intelligence about high-value terrorist targets, and President Musharraf won't act, we will," Obama said.

Notwithstanding the naiveté of these individuals about the terrain, the nature of the enemy, and their own military acumen, these individuals in positions of power and authority in the United States are promoting something much more volatile than they realize.

To begin with: Is there any guarantee that such an action would result in success—even a temporary success? In a recent discussion with *EIR* (see below), former Pakistani Chief of Armed Services (COAS), Gen. Mirza Aslam Beg (ret.) said: "Everyone knows they [Americans and NATO] cannot win [against the extremists] and will lose the way the U.S. lost in Iraq. Two years ago, when they [Pakistani troops at the behest of the Americans] used force in Waziristan, they lost 670. Accepting defeat, they called for a ceasefire, negotiations started; a peace agreement was signed with the tribesmen."

Embracing defeat, which General Beg considers a foregone conclusion, and invading the tribal areas of Pakistan,

checkpoint are blown up every day. Junior tribal officers and moharrirs [clerks] have not reported for work and tribal elders remain too scared to meet the political administration for fear of reprisal attacks from militants.”

All this news points to what General Beg rightly considers to be an unwinnable situation for the foreign invaders. But the greatest danger, of course, is the threat of triggering an all-out civil war in Pakistan, caused by a foreign invasion of the tribal area. It will be taken for granted by the Pakistanis that the American and NATO troops were able to move inside Pakistan only because Islamabad did not oppose such an invasion, thus effectively unleashing foreign troops against Pakistani citizens.

One major element of such an argument could be to unleash a war not only against the foreign troops but those within the Pakistani establishment who “allowed” those troops to invade their “homeland.” In fact, many Pakistani citizens of FATA consider the invasion of Afghanistan by the U.S.-led troops, in collaboration with the Tajik-Uzbek-Hazara-led Northern Alliance in 2001, to have been an invasion of their “homeland.”

The animosity that has developed between the Pakistani military, which wanted to curb the tribal zeal against the invading U.S. and NATO troops, and the tribal district, could unleash a civil war if Islamabad allows the foreign troops to move into the tribal area to cull anyone who opposes their presence. The danger under such circumstances is that a section of Pakistan’s population—Pushtuns, most likely—would demand separation from Pakistan while seeking to join hands with the Pushtuns on the other side of the Durand Line that separates Pakistan from Afghanistan.

Line in the Sand

One of the chief reasons that such danger is real, is the non-acceptance of the Durand Line by the citizens of Afghanistan. The Durand Line, often referred to as a “line drawn in the sand” because of its virtual non-existence in creating a border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, was devised by the British Raj in 1893, to strengthen the status of Afghanistan as a buffer between British India and the expanding Russian empire, which the British geopoliticians believed was desirous of reaching the warm waters of the Indian Ocean. The demarcation was to remain in force for 100 years. It was not renewed by the deadline, which was 1993.

No legislative body in Afghanistan ever ratified the Durand Line agreement, which was signed by the British with the person of King Abdul Rahman Khan in 1893, and therefore, as far as its legality is concerned, it remains a defunct historical document. But the British-drawn imaginary line, wittingly or unwittingly, had created a controversy. Whenever the Pushtuns feel oppressed, they claim that the line that separated the Pushtunland divided not only the land, but separated families, fathers from sons and brothers from brothers.

Thus, a U.S. attack could well lead the Pushtuns in both

Afghanistan and Pakistan to join hands to form a Pushtunland—often identified as Pakhtoonistan. The Pakhtoonistan issue strained relations between the two neighbors in the 1950s and 1960s, although it faded after Islamists gained influence in the border areas in the 1970s. As a result, skirmishes between the Pakistani military and the irredentist Pushtuns have taken place from time to time, although they never reached a state of civil war. It is this sensitivity of the issue that had forced Islamabad to give a great deal of autonomy to the FATA tribal lands and keep the Pakistani military out of the tribal landmass.

Following the expiration of the Durand Line in 1993, efforts were made to work out a fresh demarcation of the international boundary. Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the United States formed a tripartite commission to resolve border disputes between America’s two allies. The commission held a series of meetings, but to no avail. The United States, which reluctantly participated in a dispute created by the British more than a century ago, made clear that the best it can do would be to help the two countries reposition small border posts here and there, but that they were not there to rewrite history.

Reports indicate that Kabul has officially asked the United States to use its influence on Pakistan to force it to redraw the Durand Line. Islamabad, however, has already rejected this demand, saying the line is a settled issue, which it has no desire to reopen.

It is not clear what the demands of the respective parties were, but what is certain is that the issue is volatile, and the friendship of both parties with the United States, does not soften the blow. As late as February 2006, while offering condolences inside Pakistan over the death of Khan Abdul Wali Khan, a venerable Pakistani Pushtun, Afghan President Hamid Karzai, a handmaiden of Washington, told the press that the Durand Line is “a line of hatred.” He said, on that occasion, that he does not accept this line as it has raised a wall between the “two brothers.”

What the well-wishers of the Pakistani nation in Washington should note is that an Islamic alliance ruling Pakistan’s North West Frontier Province has proposed changing the region’s name to “Afghania,” Malik Zafar Azam, the province’s law minister, told Reuters on Aug. 1. He said: “Constitutionally there is no bar on us to rename the province on our own but we want to resolve this issue in an amicable manner.”

The province government’s request to the Federal government in Islamabad is likely to rekindle an old debate over the name of the region dominated by ethnic Pushtuns, who live on both sides of the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Islamabad, however, would consider such demands as a deliberate attempt to combine the Pushtuns as an ethnic community with the purpose of denying the unity of Pakistan.

An invasion of the Pushtun-dominated tribal land inside Pakistan will weaken Islamabad’s hands further and could tip the scale in support of a Pushtun-led breakup of Pakistan.

Musharraf Can't Wage War on His People

Gen. Mirza Aslam Beg (ret.), former Chief of Staff of the Pakistani Army, currently director of the FRIENDS thinktank, gave this interview to Muriel Mirak-Weissbach on July 23.



EIR: General Beg, I would like your views on the overall situation in Pakistan, which has become extremely turbulent. President Musharraf has been dealt a political blow with the Supreme Court's decision to reverse his ouster of Chief Justice Chaudry, while pressure from the U.S. is escalating, to demand that Musharraf move militarily against what they say is al-Qaeda, or let the U.S. troops go in.

Beg: Well, some good things have happened in Pakistan, even despite the gloomy picture. First, the judiciary is independent, which it had never been before. So the course of justice will be okay. Secondly, the supremacy of the Constitution and the rule of law have been established. Number three: The judiciary, which had supported a military takeover, can never do that again. And finally, there are new power-bases emerging in Pakistan, which have brought about changes, and are related to the middle class. These are the Bar and the Bench, and the media. As a result of this movement, the status quo, based upon a group of politicians in collaboration with the military and judiciary, who held power for decades, has been changed.

As for the negative things that have happened, first of all was the bloodbath at Lal Masjid [the Red Mosque]. This has created a new scenario in Pakistan. Either by design, or by deceit, the Army has been pitted against those who oppose Musharraf and his "enlightened moderation." Musharraf calls on the nation to fight extremism, but the people will not do it.

His second defeat was the Supreme Court's judgment on July 20. Musharraf is on weak legs politically. His options are limited; he cannot use force to break through, in the political field, and also in Waziristan and the Bajuar area, where the military are fighting. They know they will be defeated. The government is trying to negotiate with the tribals, despite the pressure from the U.S. to join hands and strike the extremists.

Musharraf knows that would be suicidal and a tragedy for the armed forces of Pakistan.

There were 2,600 girls and women in that mosque, but only 1,200 have been accounted for, not the rest. They were brutally killed. This is a sinister design in Pakistan, because all the students in the madrasas, boys and girls, come from the poorest of the poor. Many of them are orphans of the earthquakes in the north, many are children of the tribesmen from Waziristan, from the frontier region. There are hundreds of madrasas, which take in children and give them food and housing, run by the charities of the community. They were ruthlessly, brutally killed, and none of the many organizations fighting here for human rights has raised a hue and cry. These are the poor, being killed and exploited.

This is where Chaudry stands. In the short period of one and a half years, Chaudry dealt with 30,000 pending cases, and mainly the poor benefitted. That's why they hit at him. But the people won. This is the revolution in Pakistan, a peaceful revolution, which has taken a new shape here, as a result of the movement I mentioned earlier, of the Bar and Bench, and media. The political forces, secular or not, have no role to play.

EIR: How do you respond to the concrete pressures being put on Musharraf, to go after al-Qaeda or let foreign troops come in?

Beg: The Americans and NATO want Pakistan to do something that they failed to do themselves. They lost the war in Iraq, and lost the war in Afghanistan, and they will retreat. They expect Musharraf to deliver at a point when he is at his weakest, with few options left. His Attorney General resigned, there is division in his party, resentment in the Army. If the Americans (or Europeans) and NATO expect something to happen from this side, it will not happen. If they take action themselves, that will hasten the demise of General Musharraf....

Everyone knows they cannot win [against the extremists] militarily and will lose, the way the U.S. lost in Iraq. Two years ago, when they used force in Waziristan, they lost 670. Accepting defeat, they called for a cease-fire, negotiations started, a peace agreement was signed with the tribesmen. Now this has been broken after troops were sent in, in violation of the agreement. Over the last seven days, they have lost 130 Pakistani troops. The fighting is going on and negotiations are going on too. NATO and the Americans want our troops drawn into quicksand there. This is the tussle between Pakistan, and NATO and the U.S....

EIR: What do you think the government will do?

Beg: Under popular pressure, it will not wage war there. If the armed forces were defeated, there would be nobody left [to defend the nation].