

Pakistan Needs A 'New Deal'

by Ramtanu Maitra

Early this month, it became evident that, unable to cope with the internal and external pressures, Islamabad was ready to impose a state of emergency in Pakistan. What exactly the gameplan of President Pervez Musharraf and his close associates was behind this decision, was not clear; nonetheless, a full-court press from Washington, led by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, kept the decision-making process in Pakistan in suspension. Meanwhile, nothing changed; if anything, the situation has worsened.

On Aug. 14, the hallowed independence day, local residents (commonly called tribals) in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Agency (FATA)—a landmass as large as the state of Texas inhabited by 3 million-plus and bordering the war-ravaged Afghanistan—celebrated the day raising black flags. Within certain sections of FATA, tribals are attacking Pakistani soldiers and there are sections in this tribal landmass where the Pakistani soldiers would not even dare to enter. In other words, this part of Pakistan, to say the least, does not see eye-to-eye with the Pakistani establishment and its inhabitants have begun to express loudly their intent to become independent from the state.

The threat of the disintegration of Pakistan is thus no idle one, and needs urgently to be addressed. In this article, we provide the beginnings of a positive approach, including some of the crucial economic parameters of a "New Deal."

A Festering Wound

Under the circumstances, if anyone believes that things would sort themselves out on their own, it could be a grave and dangerous mistake. It would be a mistake because neither the United States nor NATO, which together have placed 50,000 troops in Afghanistan to tame the Taliban and the foreign mercenaries of al-Qaeda, based in Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan, show the ability to achieve a military victory. They do not have a clue as to what the political solution would be, whereby Afghanistan, and the Pakistan-Afghanistan border area, could even nominally resemble a stable region.

This view of the author is not based on hypotheticals, but on the record of the invaders since that fateful Winter of 2001. Since 2001, Afghanistan's opium and heroin production has multiplied to a point that it is now almost double what the previous bumper crop was in 1999. And, one must note that heroin is not simply a "product": It fetches huge sums of money

through an underground network infested with assassins and international bankers.

Secondly, the U.S.-backed Karzai Administration in Kabul draws its succor from the Afghan warlords, who, in the 1990s, had slaughtered the Afghans by the thousands in order to get a grip on the vacant throne of Kabul. Thirdly, when U.S. Special Forces, with the help of the non-Pushtun Northern Alliance, ousted the Taliban, many Pushtuns welcomed the new "rulers" despite the fact that the Pushtuns in general have little regard for the Northern Alliance leaders, who are dominated by Tajik and Uzbek warlords. Now, after six years of "success stories" pouring out through the Western media, only a handful of Pushtuns, out of the 13 million that inhabit Afghanistan, come forward actively to lend a helping hand to the foreign troops.

Meanwhile, the violence has increased all over southern and eastern Afghanistan, enveloping Pakistan's FATA. Right now, hundreds of U.S. and Afghan troops are battling al-Qaeda and non-Afghan mercenaries in areas bordering Pakistan. In these areas, the border is not defined, and many Pakistani citizens believe that the foreign troops are lodged very much inside Pakistan; it is also suspected that Islamabad is aware of this secret invasion. To add to the suspicion, on Aug. 15, U.S. military spokeswoman Capt. Vanessa Bowman told Agence France Presse that an air and ground assault in the mountainous Tora Bora region, which abuts the border with Pakistan, was launched the previous day against carefully targeted positions. Osama bin Laden was last spotted by the Americans in the Tora Bora Mountains in the Winter of 2001.

Bringing More Pressure on Pakistan

Many Pakistani citizens are deeply disturbed by the American Establishment's scant regard for the sanctity of Pakistani territories. It is evident that both U.S. and NATO planes are, indiscriminately and often, violating Pakistan's airspace. If it were any consolation for anyone in Pakistan, U.S. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack told the newshounds in Washington on Aug. 15, that Washington will not hesitate to hit "high-value" al-Qaeda targets inside another country, but will do so in such a way that it does no harm to America's relations with that state. To say the least, it would help the Pakistanis if they knew what McCormack refers to as that "way."

"If there is actionable intelligence on high-value targets, wherever they may be, we are going to do everything that we can to act on that information," McCormack told a briefing in Washington.

But that is not all the pressure that Washington is exerting on Pakistan at this point in time. On Aug. 14, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia, Richard Boucher, was in Islamabad. Reports indicate that in his meeting with General Musharraf on Aug. 15, he reiterated U.S. concern for democracy and free and fair elections in Pakistan.

According to Pakistani media reports, Boucher said that



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To develop as a powerful agro-industrial nation, Pakistan will have to focus on extending an effective credit system, water, power, modern forms of mass transportation, education, and health care, to make the "New Deal" successful. Here, workers are harvesting a carp culture pond near Lahore.

the United States would continue to support Pakistan's move towards more democracy, which was essential for peace and progress in Pakistan. Boucher also called for ensuring transparency in the next polls and hoped that Musharraf would fulfill his promise to organize free elections at the end of this year or early next.

Boucher was pointedly reminded by Pakistan's Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri, that such a relationship between the two nations should be based on mutual trust and confidence. He expressed concern over recent U.S. legislation, the implementation of the 9/11 Commission Recommendations Act of 2007, which links security assistance to Pakistan with progress in the fight against terrorism.

It is likely that Boucher, who is way down on the totem pole of U.S. power politics, was in Islamabad to inform the uniformed Pakistani President that the heavyweights in Washington are ready to take him on. It has been reported since, that U.S. Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte, one step below the top rung of the State Department ladder, will be visiting Islamabad from Sept. 10-12, in a sign of the anxiety felt in Washington over the uncertain political situation in Pakistan. Pakistan's news daily, *The Dawn*, also said the visit is related to the fact that the Bush Administration is no longer sure how long the current power-holders in Islamabad will remain in a position to call the shots.

The expression of indignation over how Pakistan is governed seems no longer to be a Washington monopoly. Now that NATO has been brought in to "solve" the Afghan crisis, the European Union has things to say on matters related to Pakistan's internal matters. Disturbed by the "military dictatorship" that prevails in Pakistan, the democratic European Commission (EC) Ambassador to Pakistan J De Kok told a select group of reporters in Islamabad on Aug. 15 that the EC

reserved the right to express concern if President Musharraf adopted unconstitutional methods to extend his rule. It is clear that the EC does not want to be left behind in the battle to restore and secure democracy in Pakistan.

U.S. Policy to Pakistan: A Kiss of Death

It is evident to all those who have followed the course of action under the Bush Administration, not only in Afghanistan, but also in Iraq and the entire Middle East, that any new proposal, any new setting up of the chessboard by Washington under the circumstances, could very well turn out to be a "kiss of death." But what to do, is the question that most haunts those in Pakistan.

In a *New York Times* op-ed Aug. 15, Mohsin Hamid, a young Pakistani author writing on the occasion of Pakistan's 60th anniversary, expressed his deep worries. He wrote that, as in 1971, the year of the country's second partition, "Pakistan is once again turning its knife on itself.... Insurgencies

simmer in the regions bordering Afghanistan, and suicide bombers have begun to kill fellow Pakistanis with increasing frequency."

He concluded saying: "A 60th birthday brings with it the obligation to shed some illusions. Pakistanis must realize that we have been our own worst enemies. My wish for our national anniversary is this: that we finally take the knife we have turned too often upon ourselves and place it firmly in its sheath."

In another article, in the *Dawn* on Aug. 16, former Pakistani Ambassador to Iran, Javid Husain, situated the present crisis in Pakistan on the limitations of friendship between Pakistan and the United States. His argument is based on Washington's relentless pressure on Pakistan to serve U.S. interests. Husain, too, however, calls for restoring democracy, because "only a genuine democratic government will have the political strength and the moral courage to engage the extremists in the country and tackle them appropriately."

Husain wrote: "The need of the hour is the restoration of the Constitution as it stood on October 12, 1999, and the holding of free and fair elections with the participation of all the political parties and leaders, whether in the country or exiled abroad. The armed forces must desist from involvement in politics in accordance with their constitutional obligations."

There is no question that both Mohsin Hamid and Ambassador Husain have only the interests of Pakistan in mind, and are looking for ways to turn the tide in a situation which is threatening to hurl their nation into an even more unstable state. To restore democracy in Pakistan is essential, not only because it would weaken the so-called Islamic fundamentalists, but it would encourage participation of a broader spectrum of people in the affairs of state at this crucial hour. The

problem with most military-led governments, as with Pakistan, is that under military rule, the political process is dwarfed, and focus is deliberately drawn to the nitty-gritty security issues that the military rulers emphasize.

Why Democracy?

To begin with, many in Pakistan who speak on behalf of Islam are quickly identified in the Western countries as “Islamic fundamentalists.” Such allegations are blatantly false. What some of these individuals articulate, is that Pakistan, a nation in which almost 99% of the people are Muslims, must reflect a policy that represents some of the basic tenets of Islam—mutually agreed upon by the population. On the other hand, the Pakistani military, extending an unlimited friendship with the United States, has put in place policies which are primarily to the advantage of the United States. This is why Pakistan needs a New Deal now.

Islamabad must realize that while the United States may have a positive attitude toward Pakistan, that attitude had always been, and will always be, subsumed under the slogan: “What is good for the United States is good for Pakistan.” The fact remains, that in difficult times, this slogan turns out to be false. Those who followed the close cooperation between the United States and Pakistan in the 1980s, that brought in criminals and volunteers from all over the Muslim world, who were trained with modern arms to help drive the now-defunct Red Army out of Afghanistan in 1989, will also remember that the United States paid no attention to Afghanistan’s stability once the homebound Russian tanks passed through the Salang Tunnel. The hardcore mercenaries were developed in the 1980s to give the Soviets a black eye. Where was Washington when the same mercenaries slaughtered hundreds of thousands of Afghans and destabilized Pakistan in what is termed as Afghanistan’s Civil War?

The New Deal

At the same time, a New Deal need not mean the breakup of relations with the United States; but rather, it must be based on viewing Pakistan’s 160 million people as one group, not divided by Shi’as, or Sunnis, or Barelvis, or Deobandis, or Punjabis, or Sindhis, or Pushtuns, or Baluchis, or Islamic fundamentalists, or secularists, or bearded ones, or shaved ones, or pro-military, or pro-democracy, but as citizens of one nation.

Mere words, however, will not meet the objective and bring about the required unity. Pakistan, because of its land-mass and populations, is an agro-industrial nation. An adequate development of agriculture and industry are the dynamos that would make the country a powerhouse.

In order to develop as a powerful agro-industrial nation, Pakistan will have to focus on extending an effective credit system, water, power, modern forms of mass transportation, education, and health care. These are the basic ABCs that

need to be mastered to make the New Deal successful.

Pakistan is a water-short nation, and therefore, its people depend largely on annual rainfall—a somewhat uncertain phenomenon—for their food security and livelihoods. On the other hand, Pakistan has developed nuclear-power-generation capability and has a coastline and a huge stock of inland brackish water. Pakistan must develop tiny nuclear power plants and scatter them around for desalination of water. These plants should be sealed and buried at the end of their 30-40-year lifespan.

Pakistan also suffers from a huge power crisis. As of now, the emphasis is on hydropower, which has its limitations, because of the uncertainties of annual precipitation. On the other hand, larger nuclear power plants, larger than those used for desalination, but not too large since these would expose other inadequacies in the infrastructure, should be built in clusters for power generation throughout the country. All the other energy sources that Pakistan has will complement the nuclear-power-generation program, but will not be the primary source of power.

Building a transportation network that provides mobility, at a reasonable cost, to a large number of people, will not only open up new areas of development, but will also make all of the people part of the same land. Pakistan’s transportation network must link up on the West with the Central Asian nations, which have no access to the sea; and to India in the East. Attempts should also be made to connect with western China by roads and rails.

Finally, a few words on Pakistan’s industries: The industrial sector remains a relatively small part of the total economy. Its large-scale manufacturing sector remains in the grip of the most acute and protracted crisis in the country’s history, one analyst points out. But, the backbone to any successful large-scale manufacturing sector is the presence of a vast modern and highly productive small and medium-scale industrial sector, which will be the key to employment, skill-generation, and industrial growth.

More importantly, as Pakistani analyst S.M. Naseem pointed out, the bane of Pakistan’s manufacturing sector is the lack of diversification, epitomized by its heavy dependence on cotton and textiles. This is largely due to the continued influence of large cotton growers and textile mill owners’ role in the politics and decision-making of the country. The acquisition of mastery over a broad range of products, rather than concentrating on a few products which it has become accustomed to exporting, seems to be the proper strategy for long-term growth.

Naseem said most instances of “productive diversification” are the result of concerted government action and of private-public collaboration. He cited the Taiwanese example, where the government has provided infrastructure, including a genetics laboratory, quarantine site, and power and transportation facilities, in addition to providing subsidized credit for greenhouses to produce orchids.