

Obama Follows British Afghan Policy Straight Toward a New War

by Ramtanu Maitra

May 5—President Obama’s plan to withdraw the majority of U.S. troops from Afghanistan may lead to another war in the region. The most dangerous signal suggesting that such an outcome is indeed on the horizon was the reported May 1 border clash between the armies of Pakistan and Afghanistan that killed soldiers on both sides. Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai’s strident declaration that the more than a century-old British-drawn Durand Line, which separates Pakistan from Afghanistan, was never accepted by the Afghans, and the news that the Pakistani military is “rebuilding” checkposts in certain border areas, makes the brew even headier.

But, Obama and his “advisors,” shackled to British “knowledge” about how to handle the Afghans, and his dependence on the Saudis and Qataris to “end the Afghanistan war,” may even scuttle the vaunted plan of the Obama Administration to bring the majority of the “boys and girls” home in 2014. President Karzai, who knows the python that has a mortal grip on the U.S./NATO troops, said on May 4 that he has decided to allow the U.S. military to keep bases in Afghanistan, after a bilateral security agreement is signed with Afghan authorities that sets certain conditions for the U.S. presence. Karzai had confirmed in 2011 that the Obama Administration had demanded the establishment of permanent U.S. military bases across the country. This could be a bit of relief for Obama.

Bad News, Like Monsoon Rains

On the other hand, bad news is pouring out of Afghanistan in buckets. Obama and his grim-looking advisors do not have a clue how to deal with the problems and keep the withdrawal schedule intact.

On April 27, the Taliban announced their Spring offensive, with new attacks as the weather warms up, making both travel and fighting easier. The statement was issued toward the end of a month that already had

been the deadliest of the year. Since then, worse incidents have happened. On May 3, the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said that seven of its soldiers and two other NATO troops were killed by an Afghan Army soldier in the far west of the country, in the Bala Boluk district of Farah. Twenty-one U.S. military personnel have been killed in the past week, either at the hands of the Taliban or in air crashes.

Xinhua reported on May 3 that Afghan and ISAF troops had found and defused nine improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in the eastern provinces the day before. In addition, according to a statement released by the National Directorate of Security (NDS), Afghan intelligence forces foiled a Taliban attack, during a military operation in Kabul city. The statement added that the militants were looking to carry out missile attacks in the city from the Khak-e-Jabar area, but the attack was foiled in cooperation with local residents. NDS officials later added that Afghan security forces had seized around thirty 75-mm artillery rounds and twenty 82-mm artillery rounds during the operation.

Another piece of bad news is the spurt in opium production in Afghanistan this year. A United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report, the “Afghanistan Opium Risk Assessment 2013,” issued on April 28, said that Afghanistan was moving toward record levels of opium production this year, despite eradication efforts by the international community and Afghan government. “The assessment suggests that poppy cultivation is not only expected to expand in areas where it already existed in 2012 ... but also in new areas or in areas where poppy cultivation was stopped,” the survey said.

Russia keeps close watch on Afghan opium production, as the Afghanistan-produced opium/heroin supports various Wahhabi-operated secessionist movements inside Russia, and in its vicinity in Central Asia,

and is destroying a significant section of these nations' youth and workforce. At the 56th session of the UN's Commission on Narcotic Drugs in Vienna on March 11, the head of Russia's Federal Drug Control Service, Viktor Ivanov, pointed out that "Afghan heroin has killed more than 1 million people worldwide since 'Operation Enduring Freedom' began, and over a trillion dollars has been invested into transnational organized crime from drug sales." "Metaphorically speaking," he explained, "instead of destroying the machine-gun nest, they [the West—ed.] suggest catching bullets flying from the machine-gun. We suggest eradicating the narcotic plants altogether. As long as there are opium poppy fields, there will be trafficking."

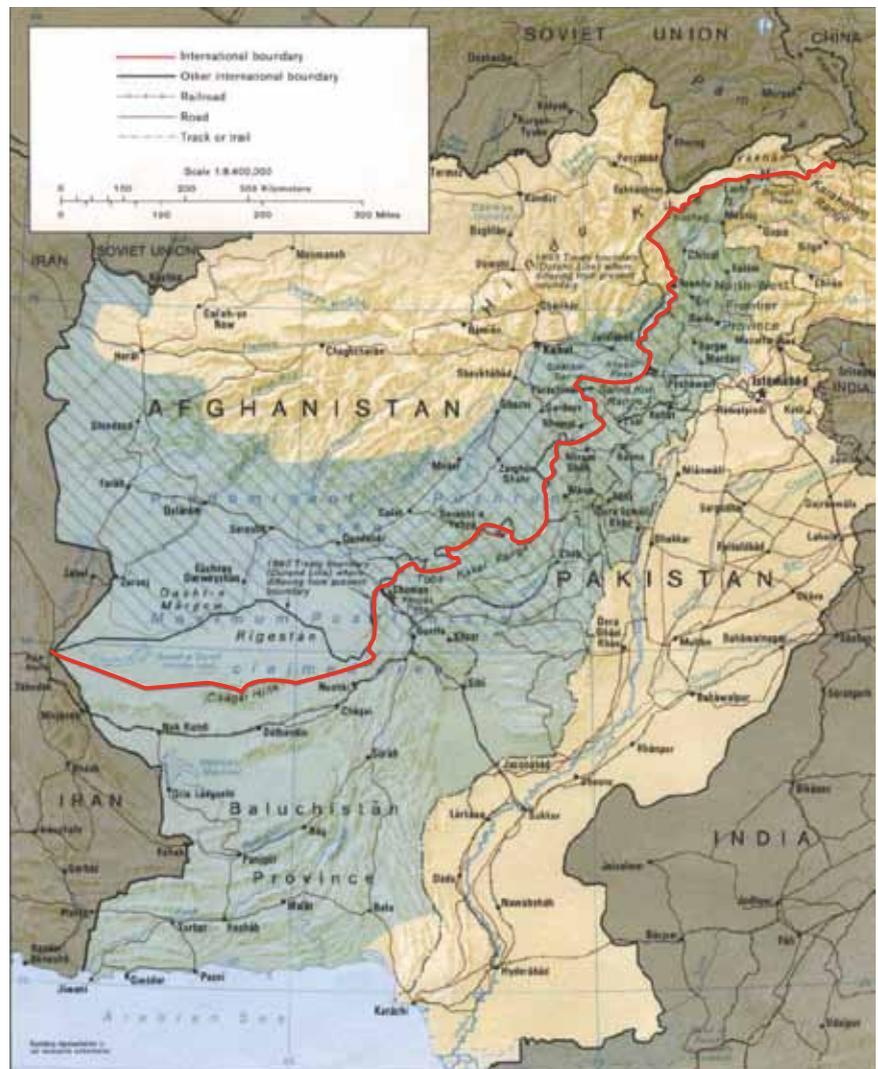
Pakistan, Afghanistan Armies Clash

However, the most dangerous development along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border involves military clashes between the two armies. On May 1, Pakistani and Afghan troops exchanged fire after Afghanistan opposed the Pakistani construction of a military gate at Gursal, which Afghan officials claim is inside Afghanistan's Goshta District, in eastern Nangarhar province.

The firefight resulted in the death of an Afghan border police officer and injury of two Pakistani soldiers, according to Pakistani officials. Kabul claims seven Pakistani soldiers died. "This is not the first time that the heavy fire was initiated from the Afghan side, causing heavy injury and damage to the Pakistani structures," the Pakistani Foreign Ministry statement said. That is true, but these are difficult times and the fire-fights have different contexts.

In the following days, while Islamabad remained busy with its May 11 general elections and dime-a-dozen internal incidents of violence, President Karzai unleashed a barrage of verbal attacks on Pakistan, and

FIGURE 1
The Durand Line and the Pakistan-Afghanistan Border



said that Afghanistan "has never accepted" and "will never recognize" the Durand Line. For the last few weeks, the streets of Nangarhar province's capital, Jalalabad, have been lined with demonstrators chanting anti-Pakistan slogans and demanding military action by the Afghan government. Karzai has directed his Foreign, Interior, and Defense ministries to ask for clarification from the U.S.-led coalition, for "assisting and supporting Pakistan to build these installations," according to a statement from the President's office.

Abdul Karim Khurram, the President's chief of staff, revealed on April 29 that Karzai had sent a letter to President Obama, seeking his help in retaking nearly a dozen border posts which the Afghan President's

office believes Pakistani forces have unjustly occupied in the past decade. Khurram said that Karzai, who sent the letter on April 15, accused the ISAF of handing over military posts it had built along the border to Pakistani forces

Karzai pointed out that those behind such attacks seek to force Afghanistan to recognize the Durand Line, that those who attack Afghanistan “from the other side of the Durand Line” are against Afghanistan’s progress and prosperity, and want to see the country “weak” and “disintegrated.” The Durand Line is the 1893 British-mandated border between the two countries. It is recognized by Pakistan, but not by Afghanistan. Afghanistan maintains that activity by either side along the Durand Line must be approved by both countries.

Karzai also directly addressed the Afghan Taliban, who do not consider Karzai to be a legitimate leader, saying “I want to repeatedly remind the Taliban to drop their weapons against Afghanistan’s people and turn their shoulder and aim at where the hostility is coming from.” Speaking at a press conference on May 4, Karzai urged the militants to “stand with” Muhammad Qasim, the Afghan border policeman killed in the border clash earlier in the week. “On the one side, Afghanistan is responsible for defending its soil, but from the other side, Afghanistan is under attack from the side that uses the name of the Taliban,” Karzai said. Provincial Governor Gul Agha Shirzai said Pakistan should stop interfering in Afghanistan, otherwise, it will face serious reactions. There is no need for the United States’ tanks and artilleries. We defend the country ourselves and Pakistan cannot do anything.”

On the same day, hundreds of people in central Uruzgan province, the birth province of the Afghan Taliban Emir Mullah Omar, staged an anti-Pakistani protest. Nearly 800 people chanted “down with ISI [Pakistani intelligence service], down with Pakistan, long live Afghanistan, and long live Afghan forces.” The demonstrators asked the government to take a clear stance, the head of the provincial council, Amanullah Hotaki, told *Pajhwok Afghan News*. “If we take a look at history, Pakistan has been trying to create problems for Afghanistan, but Afghans have never let it realize its nefarious designs,” he added.

Also on May 4, northern Afghanistan’s Kunar provincial Governor Sayed Fazlullah Wahidi told *TOLO News* that the Pakistani military has started building up checkposts in the eastern part of the province. “We have

decided and ordered our military forces to stop them and push them back to their areas,” Wahidi said.

Afghan Interior Minister Mojtaba Patang went even a step further, when he warned that Pakistan will face military reaction “if it tries to rebuild military installations in border areas.” Saying that Afghanistan owns modern equipment for defending these areas, Patang said that until foreign hands stop working in Afghanistan, the country will never achieve lasting stability.

British-Run Plan

Having engaged more than 100,000 U.S. troops and spent hundreds of billions of dollars on its “War on Terror” in Afghanistan, the United States has handed over the Afghan policy prior to troop withdrawal to Britain. Britain’s empire-servers have long been influencing Washington to bring Taliban back to power, to “facilitate safe withdrawal” of U.S. troops from Afghanistan and make credible Obama’s promise to the American people. In early February, British Prime Minister David Cameron hosted Karzai and Pakistan’s President Asif Ali Zardari, at Chequers, his sprawling country estate northwest of London. Cameron’s objective was to get an agreement from Pakistan and Afghanistan for the Taliban takeover, prior to the U.S. and NATO troop withdrawal.

While Zardari, who is a puppet on a string, has little to say about this and agreed, Karzai vehemently opposes the Taliban takeover. President Obama and his inner coterie, however, have swallowed hook, line, and sinker the Empire’s formulation. On the ground, both Zardari and Obama are working with the Saudis and Qataris. The Saudis, who fund the Taliban and all the Wahhabi-indoctrinated terrorist groups in Central Asian nations and Russia, see nothing but rosy prospects in a Taliban takeover of Afghanistan.

Qatar is purportedly meant to serve as a neutral space, where the concerned parties can come to at least an ad hoc agreement. In many parts of the world, however, tiny Qatar’s intentions are met with suspicion. Qatari officials operated alongside Libyan rebels during the overthrow of Muammar Qaddafi; have been active in arming insurgent groups in Syria; and have been assisting the jihadis following the short-lived Islamist takeover of northern Mali.

Although no robed Qatari official appeared alongside the “pro-peace” troika of Karzai, Zardari, and Cameron at Chequers, the small emirate is no stranger



British Prime Minister's Office

Buddies at Chequers, left to right, Afghan President Hamid Karzai, British Prime Minister David Cameron, Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari, Feb. 4, 2013. Don't believe all the smiles—each has his own agenda, but the British expect to come out on top.

to hosting rogue Islamists of varying stripes. In the 1990s, al-Qaeda's Khalid Sheikh Mohammed was out of the reach of American authorities while he quietly worked as an engineer at Qatar's Ministry of Electricity and Water. On the small, sparsely populated peninsula jutting out from Saudi Arabia into the Persian Gulf, it is highly unlikely that Mohammed or other known al-Qaeda operatives operated without the knowledge and cooperation of government authorities such as Qatar's then-Minister of Islamic Affairs, Sheik Abdullah bin Khalid al-Thani, on whose farm Mohammed is thought to have lived before fleeing to Pakistan in advance of a U.S. dragnet. Al-Thani, currently Interior Minister, would not likely object to the Taliban operating openly in the emirate.¹

Is Karzai a Thorn in the Side of the Obama-Empire Plan?

During U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel's recent maiden visit to Afghanistan in his new capacity, President Karzai issued a statement that said: "America says the Taliban is not my enemy and we do not have war with the Taliban, but in the name of the Taliban, they are abusing people in Afghanistan on a daily basis." This straight talk from Karzai indicates his strong opposition to the British-Saudi-Obama

1. Derek Henry Flood, "Balkanization of Afghanistan beckons," *Asia Times*, Feb. 20 2012.

Administration endgame, which would bring the Taliban back to power in Kabul.

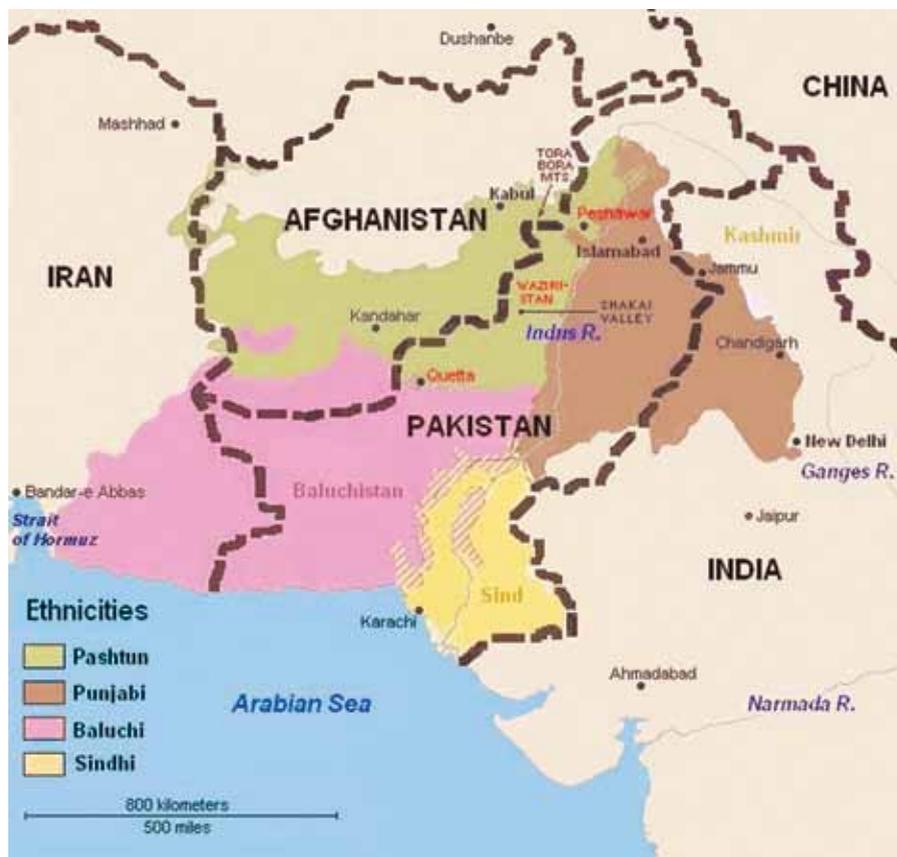
Speaking to the *Tehran Times* of April 22, South Alabama University professor Nader Entessar said: "The Afghan people will be the biggest losers if the Taliban come back to power... President Karzai does not favor the inclusion of the Taliban in a future Afghan government because he reasons that the Taliban will overwhelm his base of power and will ultimately monopolize power at the expense of other political forces in the country. But we

have to remember that what President Karzai wants may not be important, because his power-base is limited and his administration is at the mercy of his U.S. supporters. So, Karzai does not have much bargaining power."

On the other hand, Karzai enjoys wholehearted support of both Russia and India in his opposition to allowing the Taliban coming to power. China's support will be lukewarm, since Beijing enjoys a strategic relationship with Pakistan and has future plans that involve using Pakistan's territory to bring in Persian Gulf oil and gas to western China. At the same time, China is aware and uneasy about the fact that the Taliban, as before, will encourage the Saudi-British-backed Uyghur militants who are seeking a separate state, East Turkestan, within China, operating inside China from their bases on Afghan soil.

Karzai also knows Pakistan's other vital weakness. The Pakistani military, dominated by the Punjabis, is hated in the border areas, straddling the illusive Durand Line, by the residents of Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)—an area where only Pushtuns live. The Pushtuns could remain within Pakistan as long they are left alone, but they will reject violently any attempt to subjugate them by the Punjabi military. The U.S.-led "Operation Enduring Freedom" and former Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf's attempt to militarily subdue the Pushtuns in the FATA, sparked confrontation between the FATA Pushtuns

FIGURE 2



ident Obama will play his deck of loaded cards, handed to him by the Empire.

Here is a word of caution to Obama and his advisors: There is no doubt that the Empire-servers have “brainwashed” the United States into pushing through the idea of the Taliban as a political player in Afghanistan. A growing number of Pushtun tribes, or clans within tribes, have turned against the Taliban (who are seen as a bunch of gangsters, drug-runners, and hired guns, pretending to be Islamic heroes). In part, this is out of revulsion against the drugs and chaos they bring, but these tribal leaders have also watched the rest of the country grow wealthy while the Taliban keep many Pushtuns in poverty (by chasing away aid operations or any new business that might interfere with drug production and smuggling). They believe that it’s time for a change. But many Taliban and their allies have gotten used to that affluence

and the Pakistani military. There is every reason to believe that this will play out, however violent that conflict turns out to be.

The Pakistani military will also have to worry about Balochistan. Unlike the Pushtuns of FATA, who have grown virulently anti-Pakistan only in recent years, most of the Baloch tribes have faced the Pakistani military’s wrath over decades. What is troublesome for the uniformed men in Pakistan is that the area known as Balochistan borders Afghanistan and Iran. Pakistan has earlier allowed British-U.S. operations to destabilize Iran, using the Baloch tribes.

On the other hand, the Pakistani military, which seeks control over Afghanistan in order to deepen its “strategic depth” to counter the Indian military, finds the Empire-Saudi plan to its benefit. More importantly, the military brass is aware of the FATA Pushtuns’ hostility toward them. If the Taliban fails to gain control of Kabul, it is likely, if not certain, that the Pushtuns of Afghanistan and Pakistan will take on Pakistan’s might. One wonders which way then Pres-

and are willing to fight any change. They have powerful government officials on their payroll and are not shy about using them.²

This itself is a major threat. Add to that, the ensuing military conflict between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and the mix that one sees is a dangerous development in an area sandwiched between Iran and unstable Central Asia. Maybe that precise British-Saudi plan is what President Obama finds attractive.

But the British plans, however evil and tricky, do not work all the time. “For some, it has brought back memories of the 1842 retreat of the British army from Kabul that went horribly wrong with the annihilation of the entire force down to the last man, woman and child except for a surgeon who survived to tell the tale of Gandamak massacre.”³

But this time, the victims won’t only be the British.

2. “The Long Hot Summer,” *Strategy Page*, April 20, 2013.

3. Sanjeev Miglani, “From the ground in Afghanistan, uncertain future,” Reuters, April 23, 2013.