

Pakistan Is a Victim of Obama's Afghan War

by Ramtanu Maitra

July 17—On April 22, 2009, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton warned in her testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, that Pakistan was in danger of falling into terrorist hands: “I think that we cannot underscore enough the seriousness of the existential threat posed to the state of Pakistan by continuing advances, now within hours of Islamabad, that are being made by a loosely confederated group of terrorists and others who are seeking the overthrow of the Pakistani state, a nuclear-armed state.”

One year later, while the Obama Administration continued its mindless Afghan policy, which no one within the Administration can define, the dynamics within Pakistan have worsened further. There is evidence that Pakistan just might be caught in a whirlpool of violence which could result in an eventual breakup of the country.

To prevent such a catastrophe, most Pakistanis have come to the conclusion that what is needed is an imme-

diately withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan. Recent polls have shown that support in Pakistan for the Taliban has dropped dramatically, as violence has exploded. An opinion poll by the International Republican Institute conducted last Summer found that 80% of Pakistanis believed the country should not cooperate with America in the war on terror. Another poll, conducted by Gallup last December, shows that no more than 5% of the population in any of the country's four provinces believes that the Taliban has a positive influence on their lives, including a meager 1% in the North-West Frontier Province, bordering the troubled Afghanistan.

This became evident following a twin suicide attack on July 1, that killed 42 at Pakistan's most important Sufi shrine in the Punjab city of Lahore. The attack was organized by the militant Deobandis—a small minority in Pakistan that works hand-in-glove with the Wahhabis funded by the Saudis. The majority of Pakistanis, particularly in the provinces of Punjab and Sindh, are moderate Barelvis, imbued with a tinge of Sufi traditions. The anger among the Pakistani population against the United States and its role in Afghanistan has been increased by the killing of civilians, by drone attacks carried out by the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF), from across the border.

The killings, which have multiplied during President Obama's reign in the White House, are being construed in Pakistan as a punishment dealt to it by the United States.

Ahmed Humayun's article in the July 9 *Foreign Policy* magazine, “Pakistan's Suspicious Public,” cited Pakistan's Geo-TV interview, in which a Pakistani said: “America is killing Muslims in Afghanistan and in our tribal areas. Militants are attacking Pakistan to express anger against the government for supporting America.” One laborer in the northwest city of Peshawar, which is subjected to daily violence, pointed out that, “since America's arrival in Afghanistan, terrorism has come to Pakistan. As soon as it quits, peace will come to this region.”

Pakistani anger against the foreign troops has now spilled over to include both the military, and the civilian government. Many Pakistanis express their belief that the United States, in particular, is waging this war to create a pretext for seizing the country's nuclear weapons. And, the Pakistani establishment has taken to waging war against its own citizens, under pressure

from Washington to “satisfy” the United States that it will not allow the nuclear weapons to fall into the hands of the militants.

Pakistan has become an epicenter of terrorist activity since late 2001. At least 8,500 terrorist attacks have killed as many as 9,000 civilians and law enforcement personnel, and injured about 21,000, between the end of 2002 and April 2010, one report indicates. Casualty tolls do not capture the cumulative effects of terrorism on the body of the country, however.

Homegrown Terrorists

What makes the situation even more dangerous is that Islamabad, since the days of the late military dictator Zia ul-Haq, had set up, nurtured, and trained, a group of terrorists as a battering ram to force India to give up its “occupation” of Kashmir, the disputed state created under the aegis of the British Raj in 1947. Washington allowed the terrorists to expand their activities during the 1980s; they then were picked up by London, which wants an independent Kashmir. Washington, using the Pakistani military and intelligence to give a bloody nose to the Soviet Army, which had invaded Afghanistan in 1979, paid no attention to this development.

Following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, the terrorist forces, under the wing of the Pakistani military and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), began to grow stronger, with the intent of prying Kashmir out of the grip of “Hindu India.” While the Pakistani ISI provided them the land and training centers, the Saudis, who had close ties to Zia ul-Haq, funded them, and Britain’s MI6 “used” them to meet the British Empire’s objective: to create a country straddling India, Pakistan, and China. The terrorist groups were created by those who were eager to carry out the Saudi-promoted Wahhabi doctrine, which is to set up a worldwide Islamic caliphate. Islamabad, driven by its zeal to hurt “Hindu India.”

These terrorist groups include Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), Sipah-i-Sahaba, Jamat ud-Dawa, Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), Lashkar-i-Jhangvi (LeJ), Hizb ut-Tahrir (HuT), to name few. Of the lot, LeT, is one of the largest and most active militant organizations in South Asia and is currently based near Lahore. LeT also operates several training camps in Pakistan-administered Kashmir. Some breakaway LeT members have also been accused of carrying out attacks in Pakistan, particularly in Karachi, to oppose the policies of former

President Pervez Musharraf.

U.S. intelligence also accuses the Pakistani intelligence of helping and protecting LeT. The second most dangerous group, HuT, with its vast network throughout Asia, the Middle East, and even in the United States, is centered in Britain and Jordan. It recently set up its headquarters in Pakistan in Lahore, issuing an open statement that its aim is to overthrow the government through a “bloodless military coup,” or by violence, if necessary, and create a caliphate in Islamabad.

In the post-Soviet-occupation of Afghanistan, many of these groups, LeT and HuT in particular, became close to the Osama bin Laden-led al-Qaeda, and the terrorist group, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), operating to topple the Central Asian governments. Both al-Qaeda and IMU openly admit, as do HuT and LeT, that their objective is to establish a caliphate. It became evident at that point that the terrorist groups functioning within Pakistan have a greater objective than simply taking Kashmir from “Hindu India”; they have become the armed warriors—calling themselves jihadis—working on behalf of the British and the Saudis to perpetuate violence over a vast region, and to plunge it into a long war.

The failure of Islamabad to recognize the nature of this animal became exposed after the United States and NATO unleashed their mindless war in Afghanistan. The foreign forces, operating within Afghanistan since 2001, drove the terrorists, such as the Arab-dominated al-Qaeda and the Uzbek-dominated IMU, into Pakistan. Beyond India, these terrorists then targeted the United States and NATO as their principal enemies.

On the other hand, Islamabad, under former Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, welcomed the foreign invasion of Afghanistan, and acquiesced to taking on the terrorists who had infiltrated Pakistan’s tribal areas. The Pakistani Army did not have the wherewithal to eliminate the terrorists, who by then were already in the British and Saudi net.

As a result, the terrorists recruited freely from the tribal areas, giving birth to what is widely recognized as the Pakistani Taliban. But, Musharraf’s, and the Pakistani military’s, efforts to eliminate them by making incompetent forays in these areas, at the behest of Washington and Brussels, caused a great deal of bloodshed, and drew the wrath of the entire Pushtun population residing in Pakistan’s tribal areas and the

North-West Frontier Province. The common people there revitalized their ethnic identity with the Afghan Pushtuns, who were also victims of the U.S.-NATO war in Afghanistan. By allowing foreign troops to carry out drone attacks, which were started in 2007, the Pakistani government has further alienated its population. Some Pakistani officials have said on record that deployment of the drones is a violation of its sovereignty, even though they have killed high-profile al-Qaeda and Taliban figures who want to topple the Zardari government.

A Dilapidated Economy

The war that Islamabad fought most unwillingly at the behest of the foreign forces inside Pakistan, and which gave rise to intense violence inside the country over the past few years, has also brought further calamity to the weak Pakistani economy. In his meeting with President Obama's Af-Pak envoy Richard Holbrooke, in Lahore July 16, President Zardari expressed his concerns over the consequences of the U.S. war against militancy in the region, and said, "Pakistan's industrial growth and export potential have been severely restricted, first because the region was a theater of war against the rival ideology in the past." That, at best, can be described as a carefully worded understatement.

A decline in GDP growth, reductions in investment, lost exports, unemployment, and the depreciation and inflation of incomes and exchange rates, characterize the economy. The price of security-related and civil relief operations also demonstrates the magnitude of terrorism's costs: Pakistan has spent an additional \$4 billion since 2007, according to the Interior Ministry's 2010 National Crisis Management Cell reports, or 2.4% of the average GDP, on fighting terrorism. Pakistan's economy edged up just 1.8%, and things aren't looking any rosier this year.

The government has also spent \$600 million during this fiscal year to help the more than 3 million people displaced by terrorism and counter-terrorism operations. Pakistan faces a permanent crisis in the social and economic welfare of the population, due to the diversion of development spending into the security budget, capital flight, and brain drain, and due to the trade diversion it has suffered since 2001, according to the 2010 report. Total energy consumption declined 5.2% in 2009 from 2008, and energy consumption in the industrial sector fell by 11.7%, as a result of the energy crisis,

according to the report.

The power situation in Pakistan is now horrendous, giving rise to open violence, exacerbated by the suffering caused by the intense Summer heat. The country has production capacity of about 16,500 megawatts of electricity, but faces a shortfall of between 4,000-5,000 megawatts. Outdated grids, lack of investment in existing plants, and rampant electricity theft, mean that some companies experience line losses of 30-40%, analysts say. Lengthy power outages, known as load-shedding, can last six to eight hours a day in cities, while power cuts can be much more frequent in rural areas.

As a result of the economic downturn, Pakistan is now firmly under the International Monetary Fund's grip. In talks with the IMF in Washington in April, Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani said that his government was trying to broaden Pakistan's tax base and keep the budget deficit "close to" 5.1% of gross domestic product, according to a statement from his office. Pakistan turned to the IMF for an emergency package of \$7.6 billion in November 2008 to avert a balance-of-payments crisis and shore up reserves. The loan was increased to \$11.3 billion in July 2009; and the central bank received the fifth tranche of \$1.2 billion in May. But, as always, the IMF loan came with "conditionalities" meant to further distort the economy with privatization. The IMF is now urging the government to remove all subsidies on electricity, which will lead to higher prices for consumers. Authorities have already raised electricity charges significantly.

The Impending Danger

The understanding, or at least the recognition, of where this threat really comes from is wholly lacking in Washington. The impending danger that worries Pakistan's establishment, of which its military is the most powerful segment, is that the breakup of Pakistan could follow a U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. Further presence of U.S. troops in Afghanistan, on the other hand, could make the breakup inevitable.

To further the prospect of balkanizing the region, British operatives, such as Jason Burke, in his article in the Feb. 15, 2009 London *Observer*, are pushing for the creation of a "Pashtunistan" out of the areas occupied by some 40 million Pashtuns in southwestern Afghanistan and central Pakistan.