

British targeting Pakistan's Bhutto to further destabilize Eurasia

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Although Pakistani security forces succeeded in quelling a violent uprising in the poppy-growing Malakand and Bajaur tribal areas of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), bordering Kunar province of Afghanistan, the level of violence and the firepower of the militants suggest that Islamabad is now a target of concerted forces from within and without.

The militance of the Pushtoo-speaking tribesmen, who still practice the feudal laws of the British colonial era and have shown little respect or enthusiasm for Pakistan as a nation, took a violent turn in early November when a group of tribesmen, under an Islamic front called Tanzeem Nifaz-e-Shariat-i-Mohammedi (TNSM), seized dozens of government functionaries, captured the airport of Saidu Sharif (and held it for more than a week), and killed a member of the provincial legislative assembly belonging to the ruling Pakistan People's Party. The demand of the militants was to allow the tribesmen to practice *Shariah* or Islamic law in their district. As the violence spread far and wide, it became evident that Islamic law is now being demanded in a large section of the province. Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto agreed to meet the demand, but the tribesmen, expressing no faith in the government in Islamabad, continued the violence, forcing the security personnel to use armored personnel carriers and assault rifles, and to engage in regular warfare. During this period, the tribesmen also ignored their own leader's agreement to make peace with Islamabad and blocked several roads, including the strategically vital Karakoram highway, connecting China and Pakistan. This act, in essence a provocation of China, sent a sharp message to Beijing.

Sophisticated arms

The arms seized from the tribesmen suggest that the uprising was not unplanned. There was evidence that the tribesmen were using such weapons as rocket-launchers and anti-aircraft guns, which were given to the Afghan Mujahideen during the days when the Afghans were fighting the Soviet invaders. More detailed information indicates that the TNSM is provided arms and financed through locally produced heroin, by the Afghan leader Maulvi Nabi Mohammad, who is now aligned with the ruling clique in Kabul, under the leadership of President Burhanuddin Rabbani and his defense minister, Ahmed Shah Massoud.

The issue of the imposition of Islamic law in the Malakand and Bajaur agencies is as complicated as the imposition of Islamic law anywhere in Pakistan. Pakistan is a Sunni-dominated Islamic nation. However, the Sunnis are divided along many lines, the more prominent of which in Pakistan are the factions of the Deobandi Maslak and Barelvi Maslak, both products of Islamic schools of thought based in the subcontinent. In the form that it exists in Pakistan, Islamic law or *Shariah* does not satisfy all. It is even more difficult to figure out what form of the Islamic law the TNSM wants imposed in the territory under its influence. Since most of the tribesmen in this area are Barelvis, while the majority of Pakistanis belong to the Deobandi Maslak, the imposition of Islamic law is a time bomb which Islamabad can do without. Besides, the Shias in the NWFP and in the Pakistani-held part of Kashmir have little or no allegiance to the *Shariah* as it exists in Pakistan, and make no bones about it. In retaliation, in Punjab, a group of assassins, under the name of Sipah-e-Sahiba, have remained active over the years, ostensibly defending the interests of the Deobandi Maslak. Under the complex situation created by the foolhardy politicians and empty-headed army dictators of yesteryear, the NWFP situation surely contains the potential for causing the disintegration of Pakistan. There is little doubt that many in Afghanistan or India would welcome such a development, little knowing what the implications would be for the region.

However, the more interesting question is why the NWFP situation has been given the rudge at this point in time. Pakistan Prime Minister Bhutto, whose allegiance to Washington is no secret (Bhutto is even urging the Muslim nations to recognize Israel if the Israeli peace talks with Syria bear fruit), is facing increasing resistance from within. Former Prime Minister Mian Nawaz Sharif, the Punjabi strongman, is ready to seize every opportunity to embarrass the Bhutto government and help it to come crashing down. The role of the opposition in the National Assembly, not unprecedented by any means, is an indication that Sharif will not stop at anything that comes in the way of pulling down Bhutto.

One news article in the *Times of India* of Bombay, penned by veteran Pakistani journalist M.B. Naqvi, suggests that the increasing violence and disturbances, which not only engulf the NWFP but also continue to fester in Sindh, indicate that a military takeover is not unlikely. Another news story re-

ports that former Chief of the Armed Services and former President Zia ul-Haq protégé, Gen. Aslam Beg, who had joined a political party supporting Bhutto's government, has now disassociated himself from that political grouping and expressed dismay over the ham-handed use of the military by Bhutto's government in the tribal agencies. General Beg, well linked to the Islamic movement, is perhaps responding to the sentiments of the Islamic world on the issue, but it is not unlikely that Beg, who is usually in the know on things, is positioning himself for near-term developments.

Geopoliticians on the prowl

However, what is seldom mentioned is the fact that Bhutto's alliance with Washington in the post-Cold War days has not been liked in London. There is growing evidence that London has become the most important haven for radical Islamists. Political renegades, wearing Islamic garb, from Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kashmir, and other Islamic and non-Islamic countries, are serving the interests of Britain, and using the capabilities of British intelligence by virtue of being based in London.

Two news items that appeared recently might give some clue as to why British geopoliticians are concerned about the Bhutto-Washington alliance.

There is no question that the uprising in the Malakand and Bajaur agencies by the independent and fierce Pushtoon tribesmen has little to do with Islam, despite the flowery rhetoric on behalf of Islam by various renegade leaders belonging to innumerable Afghan sub-tribes. It has to do with power and money. The area is the cornucopia of narcotic drugs. Poppy is growing aplenty, and Afghan opium is getting refined in sophisticated labs located all over the region. There is also no question that a large section of the Pakistani elite has got their hands into this dirty till, and that story is too well known by now.

But what is surprising is what Reuters reported recently and the *Sunday Times* of London reproduced faithfully. "British diplomats are buying millions of pounds worth of heroin from illegal factories in Pakistan in a bid to trap top drug dealers," the report states. What is evident from the report is that a British Foreign Office spokesman confirmed that heroin had been stored at the British High Commission in Islamabad. He said, "It is necessary to protect the chain of evidence."

What exactly the British are protecting is not too difficult to guess, besides bringing home some bacon during these lean days in Britain. There is ample reason to believe that, like the Pakistani military Inter-Service Intelligence and the notorious Iran-Contra crowd under Oliver North in the United States, the British are most likely taking up the funding of tribesmen and rebels using the drug money. China has done this for years and it is possibly now the new project of London.

The reason why Britain is busy pushing tribesmen, and even the Mohajir leader Altaf Hussain, who is now based in London, to defy Islamabad and demand control over areas

where government officials will be seized if they ever set foot, can be found in the broader picture that is developing with the emergence of China from behind the Bamboo Curtain and the possibility of linking up the developed land mass of Europe with the yet-to-be-developed land mass of Asia through the legendary Silk Route. The freeing of the Central Asian republics from the yoke of the Soviet Union has created a new potential in which Britain has little role to play. Connecting Europe and China, and flanked by India and the growing economies of Southeast Asia, the Silk Route can be developed into a massive growth area through the Eurasian railroads and other infrastructural developments.

The *International Herald Tribune* recently reported that Pakistan is moving exactly in that direction to help make the Eurasian railroad a success. The paper said that Pakistan is discussing building a railroad through western Afghanistan to open Central Asian trade to the Indian Ocean. This will supplant the Ashkabad-Meshed railroad, which is already under construction, linking Iran with Turkmenistan. The report said that Pakistan is also contemplating upgrading the existing highway through western Afghanistan.

The Pakistani moves, however, can be thwarted in a number of ways, and from the look of things, British intelligence is working overtime to make that happen. The first, of course, is the removal of Bhutto through a military takeover or through the intervention of the British Commonwealth to intercede between the two bitter foes, Bhutto and Mian Nawaz Sharif. The same method has been tried in Bangladesh where Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina Wazed, the two top political leaders, are at loggerheads over the way the next general elections are going to be held. It is not unlikely that the Commonwealth Office will soon make an offer to mediate between Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif to resolve the unresolvable, or something of that order. The process, of course, will create a circus in which people will be taken in and polarized one way or the other.

Unleashing 'Islam'

Secondly, the British plan is to drive the fear of Islamism into the hearts of the vulnerable. For instance, the *Tribune* report said that Uzbek President Islam Karimov is reluctant to open direct links with Pakistan and other Islamic nations. Already, Tajiks have expressed their concern over Islamism in no uncertain terms. The uprising in Malakand and Bajaur would serve the purpose of driving the fear deeper.

At the same time, Britain is well aware of the Chinese uneasiness over the growth of Islamism at its western doorstep. Xinjiang is inhabited by the Uyghur Muslims, who have a tenuous relationship with the Han Chinese. Beijing is afraid that this delicate relationship will be exploited by the Islamists, and China has made this evident to Pakistan and others. The seizure of the Karakoram highway, which links China with Pakistan, may be a tactical ploy, but it would only further China's worries.