

War Makes Fissures In Many Countries

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Despite repeated statements by President George Bush's administration that the war in Afghanistan is not an attack against Islam, it is causing sharply increasing tensions within many Islamic—and other—nations. As the war moved into its second week, demonstrations continued to grow from East Asia into the Asian subcontinent, and throughout the Middle East. Two Asian nations—Indonesia and Malaysia—now publicly oppose the U.S. war.

Oct. 12 was the first Friday after the U.S. aerial war had begun. Following Friday prayers, demonstrations broke out across the Islamic world, with violence and casualties. Seven people died in Bangladesh, when a bus plowed through a protest march, and 50 were injured. Fifteen were injured and 12 arrested, when Indian police fired water cannons of marchers in Hyderabad. Tens of thousands shouted support for Osama bin Laden, in New Delhi. A march to the U.S. Embassy, planned by a group of 50,000, was banned by the government.

A critical situation is developing between Pakistan and India, since deadly terrorist violence in Indian Kashmir has *increased* since the United States and Pakistan began “cracking down on Taliban terrorism”! Secretary of State Colin Powell's statements on Kashmir, while visiting Pakistan on Oct. 18, have made the situation worse. A significant escalation of India-Pakistan tension has resulted, shattering the ten-month-old Kashmir cease-fire and causing troop alerts in both countries.

At the same time, the escalation in anti-U.S. demonstrations throughout Pakistan itself, led the government of President Gen. Pervez Musharraf to take extreme measures, including mass arrests. On Oct. 14, authorities took more than 250 activists from the Jamiat Ulema Islam (JUI) into preventive custody, because they planned to demonstrate at the Jacobabad airport—where U.S. planes, helicopters, and troops are reported to have landed. One demonstrator was killed by police, who cordoned off the entire city of Jacobabad. In Nowshehra, authorities apprehended four local leaders of the JUI, to prevent a rally. In Karachi, a Pakistani soldier was killed in clashes with protesters; seven were wounded, and more than 70 detained.

International wires reported that Oct. 13 was the fifth day in a row of Indonesian demonstrations at the U.S. Embassy, burning the flag. In Malaysia, 3,000 demonstrators en route to the U.S. Embassy were hit with water cannons, and 10,000

occupied a major communications artery. Nigeria saw bloodier clashes, after a demonstration against the war in the city of Kano turned violent, and ethnic conflict among tribal groups reportedly exacerbated tensions. There were 18 confirmed deaths, and other reports spoke of hundreds of casualties.

There were also demonstrations in Turkey, and protests in Europe, growing in size and significance. As reported on Oct. 14, in London, there were 20,000 demonstrators; in Berlin 25,000; Stuttgart, 10,000; and many thousands in cities in Switzerland, Sweden, and Italy: In Bern, there were 4,000; Göteborg, 2,500; Malmö, 1,000; and so on. Serious tensions are developing over the war in the governing coalitions of both France and Germany, and between the two countries.

The largest European demonstration was in Italy, where the annual Perugia-to-Assisi “St. Francis” march drew 200,000 this year, due to the ferment against the Afghan war. Demonstrators included Catholic organizations and leaders of all the opposition political parties.

Splits In Arab World

In addition to mass protests, critical fissures are being created by the war, in the political structures of many Arab states, among them, close allies to the United States. As reported by a Russian Mideast specialist, “What is particularly important, is the extremely, extremely nervous situation in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait,” where “there is a growing sentiment of anti-Americanism, anti-dynasty, and anti-monarchy.”

At the same time, British Prime Minister Tony Blair was not allowed to visit Saudi Arabia, for fear his presence would spark further tensions. It was reported on Oct. 16, in the German daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, that a split was growing, between the Saudi royal family and the radical clergy, including the leading imams. Sheikh Saud al Sharim, imam of the great mosque of Mecca, called for his brothers in Afghanistan to be spared, whereas the imam from the capital city Riyadh, issued a call for jihad against the infidels. Just days earlier, Saudi Arabia's Interior Minister, Prince Nayef bin Abdul Aziz, publicly complained about the U.S. air strikes, saying he wished the United States had “succeeded in forcing the terrorists to leave Afghanistan without resorting to the bombardment.”

In neighboring Kuwait, similar, unprecedented tensions are emerging. As the Russian area specialist reported, “The oil minister—who is also a member of the ruling al-Sabah family—just gave an interview to the newspaper *As-Sharq al-Awsat*, which is widely read in the Arab world, in which he attacks the [Kuwaiti] leadership. And this happens, while the Emir is in the hospital, after a stroke. What is unfolding, is a power struggle, and the situation in both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait is extremely difficult, and dangerous.”

Who in Washington has thought through the consequences, of possible drastic changes in leadership in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait?