

# ‘Anti-Terror Coalition’ Needs A New And Different Strategy

by Jonathan Tennenbaum

Developments of late October have shown, not only that the United States-led intervention in Afghanistan is a military and humanitarian disaster, but that the much-trumpeted “worldwide anti-terror alliance” itself is rapidly disintegrating. With respect to Afghanistan in particular, supposed “total agreement” has given way to a more and more open conflict of intentions between the United States, Britain, and Pakistan on the one side; and Russia, India, and other Asian countries on the other; while at the same time the situation in Pakistan itself threatens to spin out of control. On a deeper level, the “anti-terror alliance” was built on sand in the first place, since all sides are aware that no real proof of Osama bin Laden’s alleged authorship of the Sept. 11 attacks has been supplied, and they also suspect that the attacks could not have been carried out without the complicity of highly placed “rogue” networks within leading U.S. institutions themselves.

Thus, behind the scenes there is wide recognition in Russia and elsewhere, that the military operation in Afghanistan has little or nothing to do with fighting terrorism, but represents rather the playing out of a scenario long promoted by the Anglo-American networks represented by Zbigniew Brzezinski, Richard Perle, and Paul Wolfowitz. This is the “Clash of Civilizations” Eurasian war, to prevent the consolidation of an alliance for development among the nations of Eurasia.

## Built-In Splinter Lines

Whatever the Bush Administration may think it is doing, it is this intention that is driving the Afghanistan debacle and the growing drum-beat for expanding this to attacks against other Islamic nations—Iraq, Syria, Sudan, and even Iran. Such attacks, notably being demanded by the British and U.S. backers of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in Israel, would plunge the world into a unstoppable chain-reaction of religious war. The force of this “clash of civilizations” momentum is shown further by the fact that a Saudi government official has spoken publicly of the United States and Saudi Arabia having to “consult their own separate interests;” and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has been giving blunt interviews characterizing the whole British and American approach to “terrorism” as threatening precisely the moderate Islamic governments which have been fighting it for years.

Evidence of the multiple, growing tensions and splits behind the facade of the “anti-terror coalition” has surfaced most visibly, in connection with the role of Pakistan, the conduct of the operation against the Taliban, and the composition of a future government in Afghanistan. At the simplest level, the Bush Administration is supporting—under the banner of fighting and eventually replacing the present Taliban regime—an array of forces which not only played a leading role in setting up and supporting the Taliban regime from the beginning up to the present day, but are themselves deeply involved in international drug and weapons trade, and terrorism! At the same time, the United States is building a de facto military alliance with the former Soviet Republic, Uzbekistan, which in the long run is absolutely unacceptable to Russia, just as the U.S. Pakistan-based strategy is creating an unacceptable situation for India.

On the other side, Russia and its partners are strengthening their long-standing support for forces around exiled Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani and Gen. Mohammed Fakhim in the Northern Alliance, as a counterbalance to the U.S.-Pakistani-Uzbek thrust to control the region. More broadly, however, Russian President Vladimir Putin is working in partnership with China, India, Iran, and other nations, to contain the threat of a general destabilization of Central Asia and Eurasia as a whole, calculating that the Bush Administration’s present policy course will fail and open up the possibility of an alternative.

That alternative, to replace the Brzezinskian axioms of geopolitics by real cooperation around the development of Eurasia, was put forward as an offer to the United States by Putin himself in his celebrated speech to the German parliament on Sept. 25. The offer still stands.

In several public statements, the Foreign Policy Committee Chairman of the State Duma Dmitri Rogozin, and Gen. Leonid Ivashov, head of the Russian Defense Ministry’s international relations department until earlier this year, spoke of “fundamental disagreements” between Russia and the United States. The significance of these, and a wave of similar statements and articles in the Russian press, becomes clear, when we look at the intense diplomatic activity of Russian President Putin just before, during, and after the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC) summit in Shanghai in late October.

## Russia Against Central Asia Geopolitics

On Oct. 17, before leaving for that summit Putin held an extensive meeting with the top leadership of the Russian military and security services. According to reliable reports, the generals briefed Putin on the situation developing in Central Asia, and in particular, the U.S. deployment into Uzbekistan, warning about a “significant threat to Russian interests in the region.”

Putin immediately deployed the head of the Russian General Staff, Gen. Anatoli Kvashnin, to Dushanbe, for urgent consultations with the military and civilian leaders of Tajikistan, the Northern Alliance, and the Russian military, security, and intelligence forces stationed there. A central topic, reportedly, was a massive increase in Russian military and other support to the forces of the Tajik-supported General Fakhim of the Northern Alliance.

Not long thereafter, however, it became known that the Uzbekistan government was refusing to permit Russian trains with arms and other supplies to the Northern Alliance, to cross Uzbekistan territory on the way to Northern Alliance supply bases in Tajikistan. Since there is no other rail access for Russia to its close ally Tajikistan, this amounts to a very direct strategic challenge to Moscow. One should remember, that the 201st Division of the Russian Army is currently stationed in Tajikistan, mainly on the Tajik-Afghan border.

Meanwhile, at the APEC meeting, Putin met with Chinese President Jiang Zemin, in what Chinese sources characterized as an “extremely important discussion,” some of whose key content has been kept secret. After the meeting, Putin’s spokesman Aleksei Gromov declared that Jiang and Putin had, among other things, discussed the activation of the Shanghai Coordination Organization (SCO), consisting of the Central Asian nations, Russia, and China. In addition, “the two leaders want an end to the military phase [of the U.S. intervention] and a move to a political settlement as soon as possible.” Furthermore they “agreed to help form the kind of regime in Afghanistan which would guarantee the peaceful development of the country, create no threat to neighboring states, and not support international terrorists”—an implicit reference to Pakistan’s long-term support of the Taliban, as well as terrorist groups in Kashmir and elsewhere.

On the way back from APEC, Putin made a highly unusual stopover in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, for top-level meetings running throughout the night and involving a very significant part of the Russian leadership as well as the leaders of Tajikistan and the Northern Alliance. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov, General Staff head Kvashnin, Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, Federal Security Service Chief Nikolai Patrushev, and Emergency Minister Rushailo were all present.

In this context, Putin conducted a “summit meeting” with Tajikistan President Imomali Rakhmanov and Rabbani, the President of the “Islamic State of Afghanistan” which was overthrown by the Taliban in 1996, but is still recognized by the UN as the legitimate government. Putin emerged

from this meeting to declare to a press conference, that Russia was giving its complete political and military support to Rabbani, and that there could be no role for the Taliban in a coming new government of Afghanistan. When a journalist brought up the fact, that the United States was supporting the idea of including so-called “moderate Taliban elements” in such a government, and asked about his reaction, Putin responded sharply: “You should ask the American leaders this question.”

## The Pakistan Debacle

The difficulty of using Pakistan as a key “ally” against the Taliban, was highlighted by an Oct. 23 article in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*. The Swiss financial daily revealed, that on the weekend of Oct. 21-22, as the United States was carrying out aerial bombardments and other operations aimed at destroying the Taliban’s military forces and government, Jalaluddin Haqqini, the Commander of the Taliban Army, was received in Islamabad by the Pakistani government. Pakistan still maintains full diplomatic relations with the Taliban regime! Haqqini was effusively praised by the Pakistani Foreign Ministry spokesman as a “hero,” who had contributed to the “final downfall of the Soviet Union and liberation of Central Asia” from Soviet domination in the 1980s.

Pakistan’s reliability took yet another beating when a former Afghan mujahideen commander and a favorite of some in the CIA, Abdul Haq, was captured and executed inside Afghanistan on Oct. 26. Haq went in ostensibly to woo some of the small tribal warlords near his hometown, offering them money. Washington believes that Pakistani intelligence had informed the Taliban about his entry into Afghanistan.

Demands are growing within Pakistan, as elsewhere in the world, to stop the bombing of Afghanistan. Thousands of Pakistani tribesmen took control of the Karakorum Highway, closing it to China-Pakistan traffic for five days. The blockade was lifted after President Musharraf intervened personally.

But 2,000 armed students continue to occupy the northern Pakistan airstrip of Chilas. Although not of great strategic significance, Chilas’ capture shows what to expect in coming days. The Washington-Islamabad alliance is tenuous, and the continued bombing is making it very fragile. President Musharraf and Finance Minister Shaukat Aziz, both good friends of the United States, have made public statements that the bombing must stop before the Muslim holy month of Ramadan begins on Nov. 17. If Washington does not follow this advice, it is likely the United States will have to deal with two enemies—the Taliban, and Pakistan.

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