

Will 'Londonistan' Succeed In Dismembering Pakistan?

by Ramtanu Maitra

Almost a month after the Pakistan elections on Feb. 18, President Pervez Musharraf announced that the National Assembly (NA) would convene on March 17. Ever since the elections results were announced, leaders of the political parties that were considered to be the winners in the polls—the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), and the Awami National Party (ANP)—were thrashing out their differences, to provide the basis for a firm alliance upon which they could then form the government and administer the nation. It is evident that if the alliance holds up, it will have a significant majority in the NA. But the process of reconciling differences among these three political parties, which are all committed to a democratic form of government, as opposed to the more common military-run government, turned out to be much rougher than was expected. Internal contradictions and blatant outside interference by the puppeteers in Washington and London, made the process more difficult.

The Road Ahead

As a result, despite weeks of deliberations between the PPP leader, Asif Ali Zardari, and the PML-N leader, Mian Nawaz Sharif, it is not clear who will be the next prime minister, or whether the prime minister-to-be will be there simply to keep the seat warm for someone else, who will ultimately get the position. What has become known, however, is that Makhdoom Amin Fahim, a senior PPP party member and economic advisor to the late Benazir Bhutto Zardari, who was earlier considered for the position, may not be acceptable to the alliance because of his alleged closeness to both Washington and President Musharraf. Nonetheless, it is likely that these little streams will be forded without drowning anyone.

But what lies ahead for the forthcoming administration in Islamabad is not necessarily an extremely rough road; it is also an opportunity. There is no question that the road is dangerous enough to stall even a juggernaut, if the pilot, or pilots, does not have a clear understanding of how life-threatening and nation-breaking these dangerous forces are.

The first threat that the alliance will face will be from the violent extremist forces who have apparently infiltrated every level of Pakistan's establishment, and are rampaging at will even in the major cities of Pakistan where security arrangements are considered most effective.

Denying this fact would not only endanger the lives of the

pilots, but of the nation as a whole, which means a lot of Pakistani citizens. One after another, major Pakistani establishment facilities associated with Pakistan's military have come under attack by these extremists: the assassination of Benazir Bhutto Zardari on Dec. 27; the attempt on her life on Oct 18, the day she landed in Karachi after being away from Pakistan for eight years; a series of attempts over the years on President Musharraf's life, when he was the all-powerful Chief of Armed Services as well as President; the attempt on former Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz in 2004; and the attempt on the life of the PPP leader Makhdoom Amin Fahim recently, is only part of a long list of such examples.

Threat of Disintegration

More importantly, what the new administration will have to come to grips with, is what these extremists are seeking. There is no question that they are seeking power, but for what purpose? What is in progress now—and it is in an advanced stage—is a secessionist movement which is like a snake whose head is located abroad, and what the Pakistanis see is its tail only.

The so-called Islamic jihadist movements that are identified widely as the core of extremism in Pakistan are an amorphous outfit, which can be labeled Londonistan, as some analysts have already done. This outfit is headquartered in London, but not the way a military HQ is located. Londonistan is the old vise-like grip that the British colonials had over the Muslim nations in the 20th Century. This consists of a mix of dissident Muslims who have problems in their respective countries, British intelligence, a section of the Pakistani intelligence angered by Islamabad's various actions, and the British establishment. Londonistan serves the purpose of the British establishment.

At this point, Londonistan is working to separate the North-West Frontier Province, Balochistan, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), and the Northern Areas, from Pakistan. In other words, Londonistan wants a nation west of the River Indus bordering Afghanistan and Iran. As the plan goes, this nation, born out of bloodshed of brothers and sisters, will be the eastern buffer between resource-rich Central Asia and Pakistan, preventing both China and Russia from developing a strong presence in that region.

For Islamabad, it is easy to ignore this warning. President



Pakistan is being threatened with dismemberment, by an amorphous secessionist movement referred to as "Londonistan." The separation from Pakistan of Balochistan, the North-West Frontier Province, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), and the Northern Areas, will create a buffer between resource-rich Central Asia and Pakistan, and will prevent China and Russia from developing a strong presence in that region.

Musharraf is a prime example of someone who has done so. The prime reason why it is so difficult for Islamabad to understand this development, is the role played by Washington under the banner of what it calls the war on terror. Britain is, of course, the best ally that Washington's neo-cons have, and there is also no doubt that Washington has handed over oodles of money to President Musharraf to help him stabilize the country while joining hands for the war on terror. Because of Washington's relations with London, and the support that Washington lent to the military-led government in Pakistan, despite loud and ongoing opposition from many European nations, it is difficult for Islamabad to take a look with clear eyes at the problem.

Aggressive Stupidity

But the new Islamabad administration, if it has the will for it and the nation to survive, must understand the true nature of

the Bush Administration. For instance, in 2002-03, the Bush Administration, and its various auxiliary trappings that exist in the form of academics and analysts, had declared victory in Afghanistan and sung a long hosanna about the ease with which the Special Forces brought the Afghans to their knees. The only issue that was discussed at the time vis-à-vis Afghanistan, was how to net Osama bin Laden, the greatest terrorist of them all.

Now, listen to what the same people are saying. No one talks of Osama any more. Instead they talk of the resurgence of the Taliban, and what Islamabad must do to help the United States and its European allies to get through the difficult situation. No one would like to connect the doubling of opium production during the six years after this declared victory, to what is happening in Afghanistan; no one wants to link the strengthening of the druglords and warlords to the resurgence of extremist forces; and no one wants to talk about the steep

rise of suicide bombers who, as late as 2005, had not been seen in Afghanistan.

In other words, what the Bush Administration and its advisors suffered from all along—as opposed to the more sophisticated and manipulative British—was their know-it-all, belligerent, aggressive stupidity. By listening dutifully to this aggressive stupidity, President Musharraf brought Pakistan to the brink of a precipice. It is time for Islamabad to use its mind, and tell those who are aggressively belligerent and ignorant about reality, to locate the danger, and act.

The second major threat the nation faces is the economic breakdown. The most serious aspect of this is the emerging food shortages. Already, the prices have reached a level whereby it is getting difficult for the millions of poor to secure two square meals for the family every day. Meanwhile, opium-generated cash-rich warlords from Afghanistan are picking up wheat, at an extremely high price, from Pakistani grain merchants.

Marginalized Poor

Meanwhile, exports and the soaring cost of imports have widened Pakistan's trade gap to dangerous proportions, according to the trade figures recently released by the Federal Bureau of Statistics. Exports are stagnating because Pakistan still remains dependent on the textile and clothing sectors, which have not grown in the last two years.

Import costs are soaring because of escalating international oil and food prices. The international prices of food items have doubled in the last one year, while freight costs have also increased sharply because of rising fuel prices. By the end of the current year, the trade deficit is expected to reach a record level of \$15 billion, the report says. Given this situation, and that production of wheat, rice, and sugarcane grew by a yearly average of 1.23, 0.59 and 1.87% respectively during the seven years from 1999-2000 to 2006-2007, the survival of the incoming government will depend upon its understanding of the exigency of the situation, and its ability to rejuvenate the agricultural sector as its prime economic task.

In addition, as one Pakistani economist pointed out recently in a news article in *The Dawn*, the new government should undertake and promote massive investment in the rural areas, with prudent incentives to attract private and private-public partnerships in infrastructure and agricultural industries, which will produce exportable surpluses of quality. This should be done even at the cost of over-shooting the budget, because a fiscal deficit resulting from expenditure on productive areas does not cause any harm to the economy.

If the new government undertakes these two tasks as its priorities, the nation has a chance to survive. On the other hand, there will be pressure from various people, not only from abroad, but also from within, with the prime objective of letting the incoming government exhaust itself by battling the ghosts and shadows.

Get Rid of the Sideshow

One such ghost and shadow is President Musharraf. Having been led by the aggressive stupidity ruling Washington for at least six years, and thus allowing Londonistan to get a firm grip on the areas within Pakistan, Musharraf is now history. Once he took off his uniform, he lost everything. He is now more like Samson shorn.

But, there was a time when Musharraf had power, and he was considered by Washington as the only one that mattered. During this period, he did many things wrong; and what is happening in the country today can be directly attributed to his being duped because of his lack of understanding of the situation. Already, the leaders and the power centers in the about-to-be-formed government in Islamabad are restlessly preparing to seek revenge for what happened during Musharraf's watch. While the anger is justified, the act of seeking revenge is not—simply because the new government does not have the luxury of time to prioritize such secondary and tertiary issues.

Moreover, consider this for a moment: Despite his shortcomings and evil-doings, Musharraf kept his commitment of holding a relatively transparent election and granted the top political leaders, who led the winning political parties and who will be at the helm of power soon, a reprieve from their own alleged criminal acts during their previous tenures. Musharraf has also accepted the electoral verdict which went wholly against him.

Another issue like this, that is being played with by senior political leaders, is the plan to reinstate the judges of the Supreme Court who were unlawfully sacked by President Musharraf. This can be easily done by working out legislation in the National Assembly with the help of the majority that the alliance now enjoys. On the other hand, it would be utterly irresponsible and downright dangerous to use the issue to get people out on the streets, agitating against the President, and weakening the government, at a time when the country is under direct threat.

What the new administration must understand, and understand quickly, is that time is now against them. *The Dawn* reported the arrival of military experts from the United States in order to provide counter-insurgency training to the Pakistani military. This is happening despite the fact that Pakistan has rejected repeated U.S. requests to embed American military personnel with its troops in the tribal areas. The report said that "less than a hundred" U.S. military experts have started arriving to train the military's Frontier Corps. Another report, quoting a former Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) chief, said that almost 750 American private warriors from the Blackwater company are waiting in the wings to enter the FATA to take on the extremists. If foreign troops are allowed to function on Pakistan's soil, undermining the nation's sovereignty, there is no doubt that it would give Londonistan a significant leg up, and it is likely that all the cities of Pakistan would come under attack from the extremists, bringing the new government to a standstill.