

Pakistan: U.S. Drone Strikes Are Strengthening the Jihadis

by Ramtanu Maitra

May 7—U.S. drones fired two missiles at a house in the Darai Nishtar locality of Shawal in North Waziristan, Pakistan, May 5, killing 10 people, and injuring 27 others. News reports indicate the death toll may rise, as many of the injured are reported to be in critical condition. Nearly 93 people have been killed in U.S. strikes in Pakistan since the beginning of 2012. Islamabad had summoned a U.S. diplomat to lodge a formal protest, when a drone-fired missile strike killed four people on April 30.

This incessant killing of Pakistani citizens, the majority of whom now consider the United States to be their number one enemy, has already begun to strengthen the jihadis in Pakistan. Since the beginning of the U.S./NATO occupation of Afghanistan in 2001, hundreds of thousands of jihadis have emerged in Pakistan. President Obama's newfangled policy to beat Pakistan into submission by endless killings through remote-controlled drone-fired missiles is not only mass-producing jihadis; it is also weakening both Islamabad, the center of Pakistan's weak democratic government, and Rawalpindi, the seat of Pakistan's all-powerful army.

The end of this story is not difficult to envisage, but it will not only be dangerous for Pakistan, but also for China, India, and Central Asia, if not Russia as well. Since the Obama Administration, has made it evident that it is not willing to have peaceful coexistence with China and Russia, in particular, it is altogether likely that Washington, following the bloody colonial footsteps of the British Empire, is ready to use the London-spawned jihadis to unsettle both China and Central Asia. In that scheme of things, to Washington, Pakistan is perhaps a mere pawn that can be sacrificed for the greater end.

Condemning the latest U.S. drone strike, Pakistani Foreign Office spokesman Moazzam Ahmed Khan said such violations of international law were not only counterproductive, but are also a violation of Pakistan's sovereignty, which cannot be compromised. "It is our considered view that the strategic disadvantages of such

attacks far outweigh their tactical advantages, and are, therefore, totally counterproductive," the Foreign Ministry said.

The Undeclared War Against Pakistan

Violation of Pakistan's sovereignty and extra-judicial killings by the Obama Administration's drone strikes were among the main reasons why the April 27-28 high-level talks between the United States and Pakistan broke down, yielding nothing. Washington is desperate to open the supply route to Afghanistan through Pakistan that has been used to bring in 75% of the supplies for some 150,000 foreign troops engaged in warfare in Afghanistan (**Figure 1**). And yet, two days after the talks failed, a U.S. drone-fired missile killed four people in North Waziristan, indicating an undeclared state of war against Pakistan.

On May 2, the chairman of Pakistan's Parliamentary Committee on National Security (PCNS), Sen. Raza Rabbani, made clear to fellow Senators that the drone strikes, despite what some senior U.S. officials maintain, were a violation of Pakistan's sovereignty, and must stop.

"The US is giving lip service to respecting sovereignty of Pakistan. They have failed to honor the voice of our parliamentary resolution which was passed unanimously. This [resolution] is the will of our people, as the Parliament represents the people of Pakistan. . . . We have made abundantly clear that Pakistan considers drone attacks a violation of our sovereignty. . . . Drone attacks are not only a violation of our sovereignty, but also a violation of the charter of the United Nations (UN). The US should read the UN report on drones. If they have red lines, the US will also have to respect our red lines," Raza Rabbani said.

Following the April 30 drone attack, White House counterterrorism advisor John Brennan, defending the Administration's campaign of drone missile attacks, told ABC's "This Week": "Unfortunately, in war, there

FIGURE 1

NATO Supply Lines Crossing Through Pakistani Territory



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are casualties, including among the civilian population. . . . We’ve done everything possible in Afghanistan and other areas to reduce any risk to that civilian population,” he continued. “Unfortunately, al-Qaida burrows within these areas, you know, safe havens as well as areas where there are civilians, but we’ve been very, very judicious in working with our partners to try to be surgical in terms of addressing those terrorist threats. . . .”

In Washington, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, in a May 3 interview Judy Woodruff on Bloomberg TV, said the U.S. will continue to launch drone strikes against militant sanctuaries in Pakistan, even if that nation’s government keeps opposing them. While Panetta declined to be more specific when asked about the unmanned vehicles, because they “remain covert operations,” he said, “The United States was attacked on 9/11, and we know who attacked us. . . . We know that al-Qaeda was behind it. . . . And we are going to do everything we can, use whatever operations we have to, in order to make sure that we protect this country and make sure that that kind of attack never happens again.”

It is difficult to imagine that Panetta believes what he said. He should know that there is no evidence that suggests that the killing of militants and innocents in Pakistan’s tribal areas would ensure security to Americans in America. On the contrary, evidence is plentiful

that drone attacks are strengthening the jihadis and weakening their opponents.

Within hours following the breakdown of the U.S.-Pakistan talks, in which the U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Marc Grossman, according to *The Nation* May 6, told Pakistani officials, without apology, that the United States had decided to intensify the drone strikes in tribal areas to mount pressure on Islamabad to restore NATO supply lines, a teenage suicide bomber blew himself up in a bustling square in Khar, the main town of Bajaur tribal district, near the Afghan border, killing at least 29 and injuring scores of others.

On May 6, a day after a U.S. drone strike reportedly killed ten insurgents, militants attacked a Pakistani military convoy in the Northwest, injuring three soldiers, officials said. The attack triggered a gun battle that raged for more than two hours near Miranshah, the main town in the militant stronghold of North Waziristan, a tribal police official told AFP.

The militants’ retaliations against Pakistani citizens for the drone-fired missile attacks are by no means a surprise. In fact, those attacks were expected. Thousands of Pakistani citizens have been killed since 2007 when insurgency picked up momentum in Afghanistan.

Radicalization of Pakistan

There are many reasons why Pakistan has become radicalized. The list is long, and the contribution of London, Riyadh, and Washington to this enterprise over the years has been more than significant. This is not the place to lay out those extensive and gory details, but those are well-known to the Obama Administration’s policymakers. It is also well-known to them that killing Pakistanis with remote-controlled drones, has infuriated the Pakistani people, alienated a section of the “ever-so-trusted” military, and helped the jihadis to accomplish their aims. Many jihadi-trainers had come from London, trained by British intelligence. Money was never a problem, since Saudi oil money and the cash generated by Afghan opium/heroin traffic could easily sustain militant activities.

Moreover, the Saudis are allies of both London and Washington, while Afghan opium, a necessary ingredi-

ent to keep the bankrupt global banks alive, is also protected by the same lot. So, there is no cash-flow problem—none, at all.

But the question remains as to why it is necessary to turn Pakistan into a jihadi nation. A well-reputed Indian analyst, retired Maj. Gen. Afsir Karim, in the May 2012 edition of the quarterly security-related magazine *Aak-rosh*, pointed out that, “in Pakistan, unlike in West Asia and Africa, it is clear that the society is moving towards radicalization; here, a strong anti-democratic movement is pulling the society towards radicalization that may lead to the establishment of a rigid Wahabi regime on the lines of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Pakistan possesses nuclear weapons and has a strong army that is favorably inclined towards radical religious groups, which it considers as important strategic assets.”

Karim added: “The main problem is that the Durand Line, separating Afghanistan and Pakistan, is highly porous and the Pashtuns on either side of the border have never recognized it as a legitimate dividing line between them. The people in these areas move freely across the Durand Line, and tribes, communities and families intermix and intermarry. To add to the confusion, U.S. armed drones continue to mount frequent attacks on suspected militant hideouts and assemblies in this area. Although some prominent militant leaders have been killed in these attacks, adverse reactions to the attacks have expanded the support base of the insurgents.”

This is dangerous stuff, so why is it encouraged by the Obama Administration? To answer that question, one has to step back and look at things from a greater distance. U.S.-Pakistan relations over the last six decades have never been the bilateral relations of equals. While Washington, a mighty superpower, never considered that an equal partnership was a necessity, the Pakistani authorities (read: military), on the other hand, accepted this junior partnership in exchange for a few pieces of silver. It was always a business relationship. The Pakistani military was told to do “things” which would hurt Washington’s real, or imagined, enemies, and in return, Washington had met partially, if not wholly, the financial and military demands of Rawalpindi.

That relationship is now under such great strain, that many American “experts” tell us that it cannot be repaired. A section of the Pakistani authorities, both in Islamabad and at Rawalpindi, are deeply afraid of the jihadis, and would like that transactional relationship to continue. But, it seems the Obama Administration has other plans. What could those plans be?

To find the answer, one must look at the new, and surely more dangerous, forces that the London-Riyadh-Paris-Washington combination has brought to the fore in the Arabian peninsula and the African Maghreb, under the pretext of creating the so-called Arab Spring, which one Indian analyst rightly identified as the “Wahabi Winter.” In Libya, for instance, a stable regime was violently uprooted to unleash a state of war, not only in the Maghreb nations, but one which spread southward to engulf a significant part of Africa. The same process is now being attempted in the Arab world, where the stable Syrian regime is the prime target. The London-Riyadh-Paris-Washington axis knows that the process may uproot some of their Arab allies, but the axis has accepted that as a small price to pay for achieving their end.

In the case of Pakistan, the story is somewhat similar. If Pakistan turns jihadi, and particularly the type of jihadis (the Caliphate-seekers) that London nurtures and Riyadh funds, the movement will spread northward and eastward, targeting China, Central Asia, and beyond, to Russia, and India. That would serve the colonial interests well, as it would the Obama Administration, since it has joined hands with London and Paris to find ways to undermine and weaken these three nations—Russia, China, and India—which are big, populous, and becoming increasingly powerful and assertive.

The first casualty will be Pakistan-China relations, which go back decades. China has provided Pakistan with military and industrial help for many years, for which China has received little or no material gain, but it considers the stability of Pakistan a necessity for its future economic interests in the Arabian Sea, the Persian Gulf region, and for the development of western China. If China has had any geopolitical interests, such as to strengthen anti-India sentiment in Pakistan, as has been asserted by geopoliticians of all colors and creeds, Beijing has never made that public.

Target Areas: China...

The strengthening of China-Pakistan relations, at a time when China, Russia, and India have begun to find unity on a number of global issues, seeking each other’s strength to stabilize and develop the region, would be a positive ingredient. Over the years, the growth of militant Islamic forces in Pakistan has made both India and Russia extremely uneasy. It seems now that China is becoming uneasy as well.

Pakistan’s former Ambassador to China, Zafar

Hilaly, in an April 21 article, “Pak-China ties changing?” in *The News International*, pointed out that numerous problems have cropped up recently in China-Pakistan relations, and said Pakistan has noted this: “There was alarm when the Chinese foreign ministry spokesman praised [Pakistani President Asif Ali] Zardari’s trip to India. Not just that. He also accused ‘a country in South Asia,’ for providing sanctuary to six Muslim Uighur leaders of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement who ‘not only threaten China’s national security’ but, according to the official Xinhua news agency, ‘poses the most direct and real safety threat that China faces.’ Xinhua also made brief references to how important India-Pakistan normalization is for China today, because Beijing sees sub-continental stability to be in its strategic interest.

“Such candor from the reticent Chinese is unusual, but unique when directed at Pakistan, even if it is insinuated. Though implicit, the message seems clear enough: our very special relationship is losing its luster and restoring it will now require a new perspective and an updated mindset on our part in a vastly changed environment.”

Indeed, Chinese authorities have asked Pakistan to hand over members of the extremist East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) believed to be operating out of the country, naming six terror suspects in a list issued on April 6 that described the group as the “most direct and real safety threat that China faces.” It is to be noted that these Uighur separatist-terrorists are trained in Pakistan with Saudi money, and receive routine support from the West in general (human rights groups and other NGOs), and from Britain, in particular.

...and Central Asia

In Central Asia, the jihadis, trained and armed in Pakistan, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and funded from Riyadh’s oil money, have already made the “stan” countries highly vulnerable. This vulnerability, aided by the money generated through Afghan opium and heroin, has also deeply affected the North Caucasus region in Russia. Violent incidents in Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, and parts of Ossetia have become regular events, and the separatist-terrorists are openly challenging the might of Moscow.

The jihadi activities in Central Asia began soon after the Soviet Union collapsed, and Afghanistan became a center of migration for the Central Asian separatist-terrorists seeking to overthrow Central Asia’s “stan” coun-

tries’ leaders with the intent of establishing an Islamic Caliphate. All this has been well documented over the years.

In the August 2001 issue of the Strategic Studies Institute, United States Army War College online publication *SSI*, Dr. M. Ehsan Ahrari pointed out the threat Central Asia’s jihadis pose to regional stability and international security. “They operate in a geographically contiguous and increasingly interlinked environment that stretches from Pakistan’s safe havens up through the Ferghana Valley. Ongoing hostilities and deteriorating conditions in Afghanistan and Pakistan could transform what has been a relatively minor problem into a potent destabilizing factor in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. The time to address this issue is now, before it metastasizes,” he said.

Ehsan added that “the known organizational structures for this phenomenon in Central Asia are the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU)... For example, according to a Kyrgyz member of Hizb ut-Tahrir, the IMU, al Qaeda, and the Taliban were all created by the United States to serve its interests. When asked, this individual stated that this was a commonly held view.”

Since then, over the years, many other terrorist groups, some of them splinters of bigger groups, and more violent in nature, have emerged in Central Asia, indulging in terrorist activities against the security forces of the respective nations. An unholy alliance between the drug-trafficking networks and the jihadis has made the situation even more volatile and dangerous.

Everything stated in this article is known in-depth to the Obama Administration and its “expert advisors,” and yet, the obdurate implementation of drone attacks to kill Pakistani citizens indicates that Washington is hell-bent on weakening Pakistan’s well-organized military and its not-so-well-organized democratic forces. The purpose, stated or otherwise, is to strengthen the jihadi forces, despite what Defense Secretary Panetta wants us to believe.

Looking at the wider vista, one cannot but agree that the grandiose plan of London’s Obama Administration is to use a chaotic Pakistan, in which the jihadis would gain increasing power, to weaken the southwestern flank of China, the southern flank of Russia, and the northwestern flank of India—three large Eurasian nations which could soon challenge the murderous colonial policies that the Obama Administration has embraced.