

U.S. Troops Move Into Pakistani Tribal Area: A British Stronghold

by Ramtanu Maitra

In recent weeks, particularly following the removal of Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan's former President and Chief of Army Staff, on Aug. 18, Washington has begun to train its guns on Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), which is on the border with Afghanistan. On Sept. 3, U.S. troops raided a known habitat of Taliban leaders in South Waziristan, without seeking permission from Islamabad.

The U.S.A.'s unilateral violation of Pakistani territory created a furor in Islamabad, but it is evident that Washington has come to the dangerous conclusion that the Durand Line—the international border that separates Pakistan from Afghanistan, and was drawn on sand more than century ago by a British clerk—does not hold any longer. In order to secure Afghanistan, and tame the insurgents there, Washington has decided that U.S. troops have no choice but to take the bull by the horns and move into the FATA physically, to eliminate the Taliban leaders.

Beside the furor that the raid has caused, it is evident that the Americans do not really understand what they are taking on. It is not that the U.S. troops are not militarily competent to deal with the enemy, no matter what the strength of that enemy could be; the real issue here, is that Washington refuses to acknowledge who its actual enemies are. On the ground, the FATA is controlled by the tribal groups, who have remained non-integrated as a result of the British policy of divide and rule, and by the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), a section of which works hand-in-glove with MI6. In other words, the enemy is the British controllers, not the local tribesmen.

In a recent article, the senior Indian journalist Bhaskar Menon pointed out that relations between the ISI and the British intelligence community have been close for decades, and have extended into a variety of areas. Britain's post-World War II role as the patron of the

Muslim Brotherhood (inherited from Nazi Germany), developed into a low-profile alliance with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, to guide the most effective anti-communist movement in the Islamic world. "The Brotherhood has provided the leadership of every major 'Islamic' terrorist organization, including the Taliban and al-Qaeda," Menon noted.

Know Thine Enemy

Following the U.S. incursion into the FATA, Pakistan's newly appointed President Asif Ali Zardari travelled to London to seek the British Prime Minister's support against the U.S.-led border violation. While it is true that the FATA is basically controlled from London, with the help of the MI6 and the ISI, it is nonetheless strange, but at the same time revealing, that Zardari, who "got" his job by ousting Musharraf, with the help of the United States, ran to London, and not to Washington, to seek help. It raises the question: Who really controls Zardari?

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, whose popularity at home is at about the same low level that Zardari enjoys in Pakistan, refused to condemn Britain's "ally," the United States. Subsequently, however, Britain's Secretary of State for Justice, Jack Straw, in a meeting with Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif in Lahore, reiterated the U.K.'s commitment to stop both cross-border movement of terrorists, and attacks by U.S.-led forces in Pakistan. The Pakistani media noted that Straw's statement was in contrast with an earlier statement by Brown, backing U.S. incursions into Pakistan. Punjab Law Minister Rana Sanaullah told the media after the meeting that Straw has also pledged his country's support to Pakistan to improve law and order.

Meanwhile, the visiting U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Adm. Michael Mullen, on Sept. 17, reiter-



Online photo/Muhammad Iqbal

The incursion by U.S. troops into Pakistan's tribal areas has provoked a furor in Islamabad, and is contributing to the instability that has created fertile conditions for the explosion of the opium trade. Shown: Pakistani paramilitary forces attack militants near Peshawar, June 2008.

ated the U.S. commitment to respect Pakistan's sovereignty, while Pakistan made clear that unilateral air-strikes in its territory are not acceptable.

This double-dealing by London's Labour leaders, Brown and Straw, should not surprise anyone, since this is the standard modus operandi of the British, and a section in Washington has been completely taken over by this British notion of "fair play." But, Washington must understand that Straw's pledge was not simply rhetoric. It portends dangerous consequences, which are not yet even on the radar screens of U.S. authorities.

Reports indicate that Pakistan's ongoing support for America's fight against terrorism has helped the British-led ISI to dissolve ideological differences

among the Islamic militants in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and that they have united in a dangerous new militia war.

Reports also show that, as the U.S./NATO and the Pakistani Army have a single agenda to curb the insurgents in the FATA, the ISI has combined the Pakistani Taliban leaders and the al-Qaeda to wage the regional war against the Pakistani armed forces. This is the battleground that the British designed in recent years to separate the tribal area, bordering Afghanistan, from Pakistan, in order to take full control of the separated state.

Using the U.S. To Unify the Separatists

The unification of these disparate tribal groups was also helped by controversial U.S. drone attacks. It was reported that several missiles were fired recently at an Islamic madrassa (seminary) and the house of powerful Taliban commander Jalaluddin Haqqani in Dandi Darpa Khail in the North Waziristan tribal area near the Afghan border. In the last week in August, fighters loyal to commander Haji Nazeer attacked Pakistani security forces in South Waziristan. Haji Nazeer operates the biggest Taliban network in the neighboring Afghan province of Paktika.

According to a Pakistani analyst, there are now fears in the Pakistani military that the militia war could lead the country into deeper chaos, like that seen in Lebanon during the civil war, in neighboring Afghanistan, and in several African countries.

What Washington must realize is that what has been triggered in Pakistan's tribal areas, and in the adjoining Pushtun-dominated border provinces in Afghanistan, is the old British-led scenario to bring about a Greater Pushtunistan. This plan had always been opposed by Islamabad, but now, since Islamabad is backing the U.S.-led troops inside the Pushtun areas, the British-led forces have joined hands to go after the Pakistani Army, which is much weaker now than before 9/11. In addition, the infiltration of young British Muslims, deployed by MI5 into the ISI and the

military, has given the separatist movement a boost. But the war cry of the jihadis is against the Pakistani Army, which has allied with the U.S. troops, who, in return, have repeatedly violated the sovereign territory of Pakistan.

Opium: Britain's Best Ally

However, in order to get a clearer understanding of what keeps the British grip strong in this area, one must realize that this is also Pakistan's opium-growing region. In Afghanistan, British troops are active in Helmand province, which produces more than 50% of Afghanistan's opium. It is anyone's guess how much of that opium money is used to shore up the City of London's bankrupt financial storefronts.

Poppy crops have been cultivated on more than 4,500 acres in the remote areas of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and the FATA this year, says an official report.

However, it has also been pointed out that the teams could not carry out an accurate ground survey of the poppy production areas because of the fragile security situation in the areas. Sources said that respective political authorities and district administration did not give clearance to the survey teams. Despite resistance from the growers, the poppy crop was destroyed in some parts of FATA and settled areas of the province this year. According to the official figures, poppy has been cultivated on 4,275 acres in Khyber, Mohmand, and Bajaur regions of FATA and on 296 acres in several parts of the NWFP, including Kaladhaka and Kohistan.

Poppy cultivation was brought to "zero level" in the NWFP and the tribal areas in 2000, according to the official reports. At that time, the Taliban government had also placed a ban on poppy production in their country. However, people in the FATA and parts of the NWFP, particularly Kaladhaka and pockets of Charsadda district, resumed poppy cultivation, and officials said the banned crop was cultivated on 8,000 acres in 2002.

Inside Pakistan, the vast bulk of illegal opium is cultivated in the tribal areas, and in Baluchistan near Quetta, bordering Afghanistan's Pushtun-inhabited borders. Together, Afghanistan and Pakistan today are responsible for an estimated 95% of the world's illicit opium production. The border between the two opium regions is more or less non-existent.

At the same time, this is precisely the area which is

now the base of Pakistani Taliban strength, as well as the location of the many radical Islamist madrassas, along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. The FATA heroin goes from Quetta or Hyderabad to Lahore, and from there, either directly to the West, or to Mumbai, or Delhi. India serves only as a major transit state for far more lucrative markets in Europe for processed heroin.

Moreover, most of the heroin laboratories, which refine the vast amount of opium produced year-after-year in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, are located in the FATA, and many of the "chemists" who run these labs, are British Muslims, who have come over from London, perhaps under orders of MI6, serving British financial interests.

What is particularly disturbing is the fact that a section of the British- and Saudi-led Pakistani officials have also dipped into the opium jar from time to time. For instance, former Pakistani Chief of Army Staff, Mirza Aslam Beg, in 1989, told a Pakistani newspaper that "Afghanistan and Pakistan were two countries but one people, and any future war will be our war, which gives the Pakistani Army added capability." Together with the then-ISI chief, Gen. Assad Durrani, Beg sought approval in 1991, from then-Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, for his "detailed blueprint to sell heroin to pay for covert military operations." In a 1994 interview, Sharif told the *Washington Post*, "Both General Beg and General Durrani insisted that Pakistan's name would not be cited because the whole operation would be arrived at by trustworthy third parties." The "third parties" were not named, but it is not difficult to guess who they were.

The cooperation of Britain and Pakistan in supporting terrorism was most open in the effort to expel the Soviet Union from Afghanistan during the 1980s. Those operations involved running the notorious Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI), which was wound up when American regulators began an open investigation of its activities after the end of the Cold War. U.S. Congressional reports have detailed BCCI involvement in a range of criminal activities, including laundering drug money and supporting terrorists. The specifics of British involvement in BCCI have been difficult to put on the record, because the Bank of England has claimed sovereign immunity, to shield itself from investor lawsuits aimed at discovering them.