

The Talibanisation of Pakistan*

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Taliban violence engulfing Pakistan is causing great concern in India and the world. Serious dangers appear to lie ahead if Pakistan should succumb to fundamentalist jihadi Islam with a termination of its pseudo democracy. Pakistan's nuclear assets are also in danger of falling into radical hands of terrorists or a rogue military force. In discussing these aspects we will consider the historical background of the conflict in the northwest frontier regions of Pakistan and the rise of Islamic jihadi fundamentalism. The free education of youth in madrassas will be reviewed and how a Taliban defeated in 2001 was able to rise again in Afghanistan. We need to examine the problems faced by the US in this region and what ails Pakistan which confronts a developing civil war. Finally, we must consider how India can react to safeguard our borders and what future policy appears necessary for USA.

The Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) regions of Pakistan, and of erstwhile British India, have a history of unremitting violence for hundreds of years. The restive Afghan Pashtun tribal groups revel in petty conflict and revenge as a way of life as they lack education, basic resources, civic systems and development. They have never accepted the Durand Line, established by the British Raj in the late 1800's as a boundary between undivided India (now Pakistan) and Afghanistan, and continued violent raids into British India despite concerted defence by the Army. How then has Pakistan effectively defended this border since its Independence in August 1947, while still conducting a number of wars and conflicts against a much stronger India?

Since the first attack into J&K State of India by Pakistani "raiders" in October 1947, Pakistan has organised the tribal groups of the northwest and destitute youth groups of the Punjab province, as a clandestine, ruthless 'Islamic-Jihad civilian army', acting as a back-up force to the Pakistan Army. They were well trained, equipped, paid and controlled through the aegis of their secret service, the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), and the Frontier Corps. They have been used extensively in all Pakistan-India wars and for terrorist operations into Indian territory. They have also been used in the 1980s for the successful terrorist war against the occupying Soviet forces in Afghanistan with huge financial, armaments and advisory support by the USA.

Pakistan was thus able to create an effective 'defence' of their northwest frontier by the reorientation of various tribal lashkars (armed fighting groups) to jihad. This policy has given rise to independent and increasingly powerful fundamentalist terrorist organisations such as the Mujahideen and Taliban in NWFP, FATA and Afghanistan; and Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad based in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir and Pakistan. All are supported by the Army and ISI, backed by massive US funding, but are increasingly functioning on their own and defying control by the Army or ISI. Pakistan has so far only exploited their tribal regions for their own military advantage and industrial resources, with no governance or any effort to develop the criminal tribal areas or create jobs for poverty-stricken youth.

There has also been the massive increase in free "education" of millions of destitute children in FATA and Pakistan by thousands of 'madrassas', funded mostly by Saudi Arabia. A number of madrassas provide good all-round education besides religious Koranic studies. A large number, however, basically teach fundamentalist Islamic jihad. Pakistan has lost nearly two generations of their youth to Islamic education for jihad and terrorism, especially in FATA and NWFP, with substantial numbers having been converted to suicide bombers. Pakistan will face serious societal conflict in their tribal regions for the next 30 to 60 years, no matter how the present conflict ends.

The Taliban has re-established control in the countryside of Afghanistan after their defeat by coalition forces in 2001. This was nurtured by continued clandestine support of the Pakistan Army and ISI when US attention had shifted to Iraq. Pakistan still dreams of post-conflict control over Afghanistan for their stated aim of "strategic depth" in Afghanistan. This, however, indicates Pakistan's hegemonic designs in Central Asia and is likely to be resisted by the Taliban should they ever come to power in Afghanistan again. The US home population and politics is increasingly questioning whether their country is again getting more deeply involved in a "Vietnam-type" military failure, by backing a lame-duck and corrupt Karzai government. There is political resistance to the demand for further increases in the US troop strength, which are militarily necessary. The situation is unlikely to resolve any time soon, and until more statesmanship is displayed by all leaders involved, including those of neighbouring states.

With the US pressure and the series of recent terrorist attacks in major cities of Pakistan, the Army has finally moved against the Taliban in South Waziristan where fierce fighting is ongoing. For the first time since Independence, the Army appears to have seriously acted against their own jihadi tribals who have been used throughout for the Army's tactical aims against India and Afghanistan. This is an interesting development and perhaps bodes well for the future.

It is apparent that the elected civil government in Pakistan is endeavouring to gain some control over the Army and ISI, but this is contested by the Army Chief. The recent US grant of 7.5 billion dollars over the next five years under the Kerry-Lugar Bill also has stipulations of the US Government certifying that the aid is used for development under the civil government, despite objections by the Army. This indicates that Obama is changing the policies of previous US Administrations by giving increasing support to the elected civil democratic government, rather than backing the Military Chief. The US is also coercing the Pakistan Army into firm action against armed rebels. This too bodes well for future democracy in the region and is a positive sign of the US

policies changing for the better.

So what ails Pakistan? This nation was born and bred in hate for India in the holocaust of Partition. There is abiding envy at India's rapid growth with stability as compared to Pakistan's political and monetary travails, their utter financial dependency on first the UK and then the USA, coupled with poor political and military leadership. Pakistan also faces the frustration of not being able to achieve their aims in Kashmir or avenge their thorough defeat by India in East Pakistan in 1971. The USA and UK still take full advantage of Pakistan's vulnerabilities to proceed with their own perceptions of the required Western strategies to retain power, trade and financial viability of the West with control over resources and energy production of the Gulf and Central Asia. The encouragement of jihadi forces with clandestine funds and the opium trade out of NWFP is now going against the cohesion of the Pakistani State whose actions have raised the 'Frankenstein monster' which has now turned against its own people. There are a fairly large numbers of jihad sympathisers within the Pakistani military; these elements require control and specific defence of nuclear assets arranged with the US assistance.

What is the answer to this situation and can Pakistan survive as a peaceful stable democracy? The situation is rapidly evolving to some sort of solution by the raging armed conflict and large casualties. The US is presently stuck in Afghanistan and Pakistan, with well nigh forty thousand troops and no solution in sight. With the recent major Pakistani offensive against the Taliban in South Waziristan, there are good chances of some control over that region. But tribal hate for their Military and Government will only get worse until some peace deal can also be arranged, with sufficient funds set aside for concerted development and education in FATA, with creation of jobs for the youth. Meanwhile the violence is likely to increase as will terrorist attacks against high-value targets in Pakistani cities.

How then is India to act? At this juncture it will not be of any advantage to organise a military offensive against cross-border Pakistani terrorism. This may only serve to unite Pakistani warring internal factions and their Army, against a common Indian threat. Yet we must continue to adequately defend our borders and line of Control (LoC) and inflict heavy casualties on infiltrators. Adequate defence includes limited hard-hitting cross-border/LoC temporary actions, to limit or destroy infiltration groups and their concentration or support areas.

Our laws need careful change so that captured terrorists do not get easily released by our courts without punishment as at present. Our intelligence services require much more dedicated functioning with reorganisation and effective coordination between themselves, the military and civil administration. Superior modern technologies require to be inducted for all intelligence services, to improve acquisition of information and intelligence and for accurate evaluation with user agencies.

Diplomatically India must remain on the offensive against international crimes being committed by Pakistani terrorists shielded by their government. Our political leadership needs to acquire more 'spine and guts' and speak out against aggressive actions against India and be prepared to retaliate when in a advantageous position. We must continue our support to Afghanistan's people in alleviating their problems in daily living and providing essential needs of communications, transportation, electricity, water and medical succour, despite any resentment in Pakistan. We must also support the Pakistani people's desire for peace, good governance and democracy based on their Constitution.

India is growing more powerful, economically stable and self confident every day. But our inherent weakness of intense political dissention, greed in political office with growing corruption of officials, weakens our international stand and reduces our clout against Pakistan and jihadi terrorism. We need much better governance in every sphere and a determination in every political leader and official to always do right by the masses and the desperately poor, and never to exploit them for personal advantage. We need very severe punishment against all who are found acting to the contrary. If we are able to somewhat develop this internal cohesion and strength, India will be a stable and strong democratic nation which can help create a better world order and face up to the growing threat on our borders.

The USA must be motivated to 'go the distance' in this area and not abandon their aim of destruction of Al Qaeda and Taliban. They must help 'clean up' this region before they abandon it. India and the neighbouring nations of Afghanistan can greatly assist USA to support democracy in Pakistan and the civilian elected government. The problems of Pakistan could be easier dealt with if the Pakistan Army is encouraged or coerced to serve the nation and its government rather than itself. The elected government must be given the unfettered right to rule, without the Army's private agenda for its own political power in defiance of the law, with the excuse of the 'threat' from India.

The ISI must be brought under the firm jurisdiction of the elected government. Pakistan must also be deterred from hegemonic designs in Afghanistan. All funds and financial aid granted to Pakistan by the US and other donor nations must only be dedicated to development and correct job-related education, especially in the lawless tribal areas of FATA and NWFP.

This may take decades but is likely to help in converting Pakistan from a nation rapidly succumbing to terrorism and chaos to a useful member of the international community. Indians desire the status of a great nation; it does not befit us to be antagonistic and just watch the situation, passively awaiting whatever be the result in Pakistan. We need to give active whole-hearted support and sympathy to the people of Pakistan, their desire for democracy, their law, their culture and their very out-spoken, effective media. This may help in bringing a better peace to South Asia.

*Text of the talk delivered to the Cavalry Officers Association at USI, New Delhi on 12 November 2009 in the memory of late Major MAR Sheikh, Vrc, of 16th Light Cavalry killed in action during 1965 War with Pakistan. Published in USI Journal "By courtesy of the Cavalry Officers' Association".

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Journal of the United Service Institution of India, Vol. CXXXIX, No. 578, October-December 2009.