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Special Report

As ISAF Command Changes, Time for a Reality Check on the Conflict in Afghanistan and Pakistan

Analysis. By Gregory R. Copley, Editor, GIS. Wishful thinking, a failure to look at history, and a belief in their own propaganda is inducing Washington policymakers and NATO analysts to believe that the NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is making major strides in the US-led campaign to create a *Taliban*-free society in Afghanistan.

Moreover, this artificial view of the situation causes Washington to blame all problems incurred in achieving “victory” in Afghanistan on the US’ own major ally, Pakistan, when Pakistan is, in reality, bearing far more than the US and NATO of the burden of a conflict which Pakistan did not initiate.

A “reality check” on the situation becomes critical as the ISAF command moves from US Gen. Dan K. McNeill to Gen. David D. McKiernan, who took command of ISAF on June 3, 2008.

US military and political demand for “immediate” — and therefore almost axiomatically unrealistic — solutions to entrenched and long-term obstacles in Afghanistan, along with a refusal to look at historical lessons and the consequences of current and earlier actions, has had the effect of deepening the conflicts in both countries while at the same time causing Washington’s allies to despair of the US as a reliable partner.

In some instances, US allies or their interests have been placed at serious risk by the refusal of US commanders, policymakers, and the media to absorb the complexities of the situations.

In the case of the conflict in Afghanistan, US impatience has resulted in a generic US view of the situation which is about 180 degrees from the realities on the ground. The result is that virtually no progress has been made in the effort to stabilize and unify Afghanistan, while at the same time the conduct of the war in Afghanistan, under US leadership, has created an enormous potential for instability in Pakistan, which Washington has claimed is a major “non-NATO ally” on which it depends.

US and Western media reporting currently portrays the problems facing ISAF as coming into Afghanistan from Pakistan, but the reality is the reverse of this: stirring the problem in Afghanistan causes problems to flow into Pakistan.

Always brushed aside in Washington discussions is the reality that Pakistan still cares for 3.5-million Afghani refugees remaining from the earlier proxy war which the US waged from 1980 to 1988 against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. And, with the US-led conflict against the *Taliban* in Afghanistan since September 11, 2001, the problems continue to pour from Afghanistan into Pakistan. Moreover, as the US intelligence community is well aware, this is a problem which is exacerbated not only by the *Taliban* alliance with the so-called *al-Qaida* movement, moving into Pakistan from Afghanistan, but also because

of covert support by the Indian Government and its intelligence services — principally RAW, the Research & Analysis Wing — for the *jihadi* movement.

India's involvement follows an historical geopolitical pattern, but much of it is institutionalized as “payback” for Pakistani Government support for the Muslim separatist movement in Indian-occupied Jammu & Kashmir over the past decades. At the same time, close US-Indian intelligence ties at a formal level and within the Afghan battlespace mean that India is feeding a range of “tailored intelligence” into the US system which shapes US political and intelligence perceptions of the situation, encouraging the belief that “Pakistan is the problem” in resolving the counter-*Taliban* conflict in Afghanistan.

There is no doubt that it is comforting for many US analysts and journalists to have a scapegoat for the frustrations of the conflict, and it certainly avoids any self-examination by US policymakers, or any considered view of recent and longer-term history.

One reality is that ISAF has only some 47,000 troops on the ground in Afghanistan, and not all of those are along the Pakistan-Afghan border. Moreover, quite separately from anything which could be blamed on Pakistan, the Afghan Helmand province is home to a significant proportion of ISAF troops and yet still cultivates some 50 percent of the opium poppy produced in Afghanistan. Some 70 percent of the opium coming from Afghanistan — and funding the *Taliban* and *al-Qaida*/Iranian-linked terrorist movements in the region and as far afield as Kosovo and Bosnia — is produced in five Afghan provinces bordering Pakistan.

These are provinces “controlled” by ISAF, not by Pakistan, and the nexus between the drug mafia and the *Taliban/al-Qaida* is evidenced by the amount of money which *Taliban* members are paying to defectors from the Afghan security forces and other officials, as well as in the purchase of weapons for their own use. Indeed, the *Taliban/al-Qaida* ability to generate income and control derives not just from trafficking in narcotics on their own account, but also on their ability to charge “transit fees” and to demand payments for protection.

The whole process of poppy cultivation, transportation, processing, and the like is more than merely a *Taliban/al-Qaida* event; it is pervasive through much of Afghan society, and divides the population from both ISAF and national governance. Opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan rose from 104,000 hectares in 2005, to 161,000 hectares in 2006, to 193,000 hectares in 2007, despite the fact that 13 out of 34 Afghan provinces have been declared to be “drug free”. In terms of quantities produced, opium production rose by 59 percent from 2005 to 2006, and 30 percent from 2006 to 2007.

Afghanistan's internal opium economy is worth some \$4-billion, some 53 percent of the Afghan GDP (and some \$50-billion on the international market). Clearly, if the bulk of the Afghan economy is narcotics-driven, then the ability of either the Afghan Government or ISAF to control the situation is limited, quite apart from the *Taliban/al-Qaida* input.

It is not surprising, therefore, that some 60 to 70 percent of the Afghan Parliament is occupied by former *mujahedin*, ex-communists, drug barons, and warlords, who not only control both houses of Parliament but, as a result, prevent the establishment of the Central Government's writ across the country. It is clearly not in the interests of most of the lawmakers that the national Government should exercise law and order across the land, and, meanwhile, Pres. Hamid Karzai is hardly in a position to marginalize these lawmakers.

Indeed, 2008 is proving to be a pivotal year for Pres. Karzai. He has been unable to create any sustainable agriculture and employment in the country, and has been unable to create a climate of security. This situation is unlikely to improve: non-Pushtuns, and particularly the Afghan Tajik population, remain concerned that any unity within the Pushtuns would work against their interests, and consistently attempt to marginalize them. Pres. Karzai is a Pushtun.

The recent (2006-07) creation of the United National Front (UNF) party — essentially a new incarnation of the old Northern Alliance — (led by former President of Afghanistan Burhanuddin Rabbani) threatens Pres. Karzai, and he has launched a new party, the *Hizb-e-Jamhuri Khwahan Afghanistan*, to counter the UNF. So the instability in Afghanistan extends far beyond the issue of the resurgence of the *Taliban* or the presence of remnants of *al-Qaida* (or groups or individuals claiming allegiance to *al-Qaida*).

In essence, Taliban recruiting has thrived in the past few years because of the failure of the central Government, and ISAF, to develop any momentum with the economy, and, as a result, there has been a growing reliance on military action to resolve issues, further compounding the cycle. And while NATO forces increased the scale of their military attacks — with growing civilian casualties — *Taliban* operations in 2007 changed in doctrine from large-scale, set-piece battles to small-scale hit-and-run operations, gradually expanding Westward and Northward.

At the same time, the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) by *Taliban* forces has increased, and infra-red IEDs are now being introduced. IR IEDs began to be introduced into the Iraqi battlefield in about 2005, but are now finding their way into operations in Afghanistan, and, from there, potentially into Pakistani tribal areas.

Suicide attacks against Government and foreign targets has also increased, up from only 33 in the entire 2001-2005 timeframe to 131 in 2006, 154 in 2007, and at a rate in early 2008 which promises to see an increase again for the full year of 2008. Kabul, Baghlan, Kandahar, and Spin Boldak were the cities most affected by recent suicide bombings.

As well, the Afghan National Army (ANA) is falling behind in its recruiting, retention, and capability goals. It should have had 150,000 men on strength by 2006, but it still stands at only some 70,000 troops, and its units are not capable of undertaking independent operations. The National Police force (ANP) has fared little better. Some 58,000 personnel of the ANP, Highway Police, and Border Police have received training — mostly from Germany, with US assistance — and of these some 12,000 have received specialist training.

Only the presence of ISAF forces, in fact, keeps the nominal writ of the Afghan Government alive, and then only because of the advanced technology, logistics, and skills of the foreign military forces. But this is insufficient to achieve long-term success. Indeed, as the conflict extends, it broadens and forces an increase in unrest which spreads across into Pakistan.

Indeed, far from the solution being to “put US boots on the ground” in Pakistan, ISAF should wish for Pakistani “boots on the ground” in Afghanistan, but this would only compound Pakistan’s own problems, as well as its costs in human and economic terms. It may be that the US feels that Indian activities which put weapons in the hands of tribal members inside Pakistan keeps Pakistan on the defensive, and forces it to deal with the problems of the tribal areas — which have remained outside the control of the central Government since the times of British occupation in the mid-19th Century until the 21st Century — but the reality is that Indian stimulation of *jihadism* or tribal unrest in the Pakistani Federally-Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and elsewhere merely compounds the problem in the entire region.

The Afghan Government of Hamid Karzai is actively cooperating with the Indian intelligence agencies through the Afghan intelligence agencies, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Ministry of Borders and Tribal Affairs (under Karim Barahowie), in launching covert activities against Pakistani areas. Part of this may be out of concern over earlier (post-Soviet occupation, but pre-9/11) cooperation by Pakistan with the *Taliban*, although clearly Pakistan abandoned and then turned on the *Taliban* after the “Global War on Terror” began, and it became clear that the *Taliban* was engaged in supporting the spread of international terrorist activities.

Whatever the reason for Pres. Karzai’s support for Indian use of Afghanistan as a base of operations against Pakistan, it is clear that the US Government is aware of the cooperation and the input of substantial amounts of direct and indirect weapons and financial support to the *jihadist*, criminal, and terrorist movements operating inside Pakistan, and yet does nothing about it. Massive quantities of munitions, much of it identified as coming from India, have been captured by Pakistani forces operating against insurgents in Swat, FATA, and Baluchistan.

Apart from the strong presence of Indian advisors dominating the Afghan Government, India has established a string of consulates and intelligence posts inside Afghanistan along the border with Pakistan.

A report in *Defense & Foreign Affairs Special Analysis*, on [October 6, 2007](#), and entitled *Pakistan: the Delicacy, and Inevitability, of the Political Transition Now Underway*, noted:

The Indian Government has created a string of “consulates” along the Afghan side of the Pakistan border, largely as intelligence collection facilities, and the large number of Indian intelligence officials were working closely with Afghan intelligence officials. This has caused the Pakistan Government some concern, given that the US has facilitated the Indian intelligence build-up against Pakistan to be conducted while the Pakistan Army and Government have been working with the US in the area. There is more than a little feeling in Islamabad that this has been an act of poor faith on the part of the US toward Pakistan, on which the US is completely reliant.

At the same time, Pakistan, now facing a major food and energy shortage, continues to pump economic and other aid to the Karzai Government in Afghanistan. Pakistan has committed some \$300-million to reconstruction in Afghanistan, and even while I was with Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani on May 22, 2008, he was called by Pres. Karzai asking for Pakistan to release a further 30,000 or more tons of wheat aid to Afghanistan. Apart from that, however, the well-financed Afghan black market has the ability to finance wheat and flour smuggled across the border from Pakistan, causing Pakistani domestic prices and supply into a precarious position.

As this writer has noted elsewhere [*Defense & Foreign Affairs Special Analysis*, [May 20, 2008](#): *Lessons of the Great War for Civilization*], the entire epoch of war which has engulfed Afghanistan and much of Pakistan has caused the tribal areas of Pakistan’s FATA, Baluchistan, and areas of North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) to finally be broken open, and the control of this hitherto inaccessible area now possibly open to the writ of the national Government. In other words, it may now be possible — assuming that Islamabad can actually exert its writ over the tribal areas — to bring all of the country into the Pakistani entity.

But that cannot happen solely by force of arms. It involves not only ensuring the long-term ability of the Federal Government to enforce law and order, but also to introduce the priority of Pakistani nationalism ahead of tribal identity, and to ensure the introduction of the national educational curriculum, and the infrastructure required to integrate the tribal areas into the national economy.

As the 11th/12th century Persian poet Omar Khayyám said: “Ah Love! could thou and I with Fate conspire / To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire, / Would not we shatter it to bits ... and then / Re-mold it nearer to the Heart’s Desire!”

Despite the reality that this is a long-term process, the US Government has kept hinting — and privately insisting — that it should be allowed to put “boots on the ground” and intervene militarily in the complex FATA and other tribal areas of Pakistan, even though the US has been unable to manage affairs inside Afghanistan, or even to prevent the Afghan unrest from spilling in human, ideological, corruption, narcotrafficking, and weapons trafficking terms into Pakistan. Indeed, there is no consciousness of the reality that the situation began to unravel in Afghanistan as a direct result of US Pres. Jimmy Carter’s moves to destabilize and overthrow the Shah of Iran, which gained momentum in 1978 (and to which this writer had close, first-hand knowledge).

The Carter destruction of the Shah, with all of its unforeseen consequences, led to the downfall on April 29, 1978, of Afghan Pres. Mohammed Daud Khan, whom the Shah had long supported. The coup, led by *Khalq*-faction (communist party) chief Nur Mohammed Taraki, led to an invitation to the USSR to send troops into Afghanistan, and the war began which has continued in various forms until this day. This writer spent considerable time in Tehran during the 1970s, with the Shah, and then in Pakistan, watching these events unfold, and watching the tide of unrest and instability move across the Durand Line from Afghanistan into Pakistan.

And even as the US funded the anti-Soviet *mujahedin* in Afghanistan — via Pakistan and with the help of then-Pres. Mohammed Zia ul-Haq — India maintained a strong presence in Kabul, as it does now. This is a strategic imperative for India, but US officials should not be unaware of the consequences of India’s, or the US’, actions.

US media reporting and US officials, buying their own propaganda that the war against the *Taliban* is going well — a process known in the intelligence community as “drinking your own bathwater” — and insisting that the problem is only that Pakistan is “not doing enough in the war on terror” have failed to understand that (a) Pakistan has committed more men and lives to the “war on terror” than the US, but is also suffering far more from it than the US, and (b) that Pakistan is using both carrot and stick to achieve

long-term victory over terrorism, insurgency, and secessionist or anarchical tendencies in its border areas.

Pakistan has significantly controlled the supply of weapons in the country, while trying to control the porous border with Afghanistan. It has issued a ban on new weapons' licenses, a ban on displaying any kind of weapons, and a ban on the possession of illegal weapons. It has recovered some 600,000 weapons in the past few years, along with 3.5-million rounds of ammunition. It has promulgated a new Anti-Terrorism Act and established Anti-Terrorist Courts to deal speedily with terrorism cases.

It has dramatically reorganized, retrained, and upgraded its police forces. It has required the registration of the *madarasas* — Islamic schools — some of which were once used as recruiting facilities for *jihadi* fighters. The Government had, by May 2008, registered 14,800 *madarasas* and was in the process of registering a further 400, while at the same time legally demanding that these schools adhere to a Government-approved curriculum, and keeping a check on foreign students at these facilities. New *madarasas* can be opened only with Government permission.

Substantial new immigration controls have ensured that the normal flow of people into Pakistan through airports and official checkpoints can be strictly monitored through the PISCES (personal identification secure comparison and evaluation system) process.

The Pakistan Government has banned seven sectarian organizations, seven *jihadi* organizations, and one ethnic organization which were believed to have been engaged in questionable activities. The entire Government has reoriented its approach to intelligence and security at a strategic level, creating a capability which is now world class, and which has as a key component its counter-terrorist wing (CTW). As a result, Pakistan now cooperates with more than 50 governments worldwide.

Pakistani security forces had, since the start of the "Global War on Terror" and until late May 2008, conducted 407 raids on suspected foreign nationals in the country, arresting 871 individuals, of whom 600 were extradited. Pakistan was responsible for busting *al-Qaida's* Anthrax Network in 2003, the al-Ghuraba Network in September 2003, the big UK-based Anglo-Pakistani network (March 2004), the Jandullah Group (June 2004), the Amjad Farooqi Network (September 2004), the Abu Faraj Network (May 2005), the Abu Talha Network (September 2004), the Hussain Bana Network (October 2005), the *Taliban* Media Support Network (October 2005), the Hamza Rabbia Network (November 2005), a key London-based network (August 2006), and a major suicide bomber group (February 2007), and so on.

The list of arrested senior terrorist figures, and the list of killed senior terrorist leaders, by Pakistani forces, is significant. It has also arrested (as of late May 2008) 298 senior *Taliban* figures, and most of these were repatriated to Afghanistan Government care. However, not only has the Afghan Government failed to account for what happened to these *Taliban*, the Pakistan Government has since identified that some of them were released by the Afghan Government despite being on so-called wanted lists of the Karzai Government. As a result, the Pakistan Government has, for the moment, stopped handing over some arrested *Taliban* figures so that they could be questioned by Pakistani officials.

Clearly, however, as anyone who has viewed the Afghan-Pakistan border can attest, there is no possibility that the Pakistan Government — nor the NATO forces — could control ingress and egress across the border, the 2,560km of the Durand Line. The terrain along the border, barren and mountainous, is not only difficult to access, but also determines the life and hardiness of the tribal populations along it. And, of course, many of these tribal peoples have been divided by the arbitrary nature of the border drawn (or approved) by Sir Mortimer Durand, the Foreign Secretary of the British Indian Government, in 1894-95.

The US Government quietly wants to insert Special Forces units into these areas to pursue *Taliban* and/or *al-Qaida* leaders, and has already violated agreements with Pakistan by launching air strikes into Pakistani territory several times in 2008 alone. But if the US wanted to "put boots on the ground", it would be best served by offering to put US Army Corps of Engineers capabilities into the tribal areas to help build roads, clinics, schools, and the like, to ensure that the underpinnings are secured for the creation of a stable, educated, and productive population which can be persuaded to become Pakistani, removing them from the influence of either the funds and weapons being offered, tantalizingly, by the new generation of minor and major Afghani warlords, or their own *maliks*, the tribal chiefs or elders.

This is no easy task: the Pakistani tribal areas have a population of 3.8-million, of whom 90 percent live below the poverty line.

But first, however, US policymakers have to decide whether they really wish to win the conflict they are fighting in Afghanistan, or merely whether they wish to find someone to blame for their failure.

Nepal Moves, Without Constitutional Legality, From Monarchy to Federal Republic, But Threat Now is Pressure for a “People’s Republic”

Analysis. From GIS Station Kathmandu. Highly-reliable sources in Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, indicate that the transformation of the country into a federal republic was likely to be merely a first stage in the maoist “revolution” which was aimed at transforming the state into a radically-governed “people’s republic”. This is giving considerable concern to the Government of India, which borders Nepal, and its new Ambassador to Kathmandu, Rakesh Sood, has been meeting with the maoist leader behind closed doors.

The rush to remove Nepal’s constitutional monarchy — a foregone conclusion given the widespread international support for the maoist revolutionaries who had terrorized Nepal until they were included in the Government — did not appear, however, to signal an end to the instability which had plagued since the maoist revolt began in 1996.

Maoist leader Prachanda (uses a single “revolutionary name”; born Pushpa Kamal Dahal on December 11, 1954) told a public meeting in Kathmandu on May 30, 2008, that Nepal had swiftly turned into a republic because of King Gyanendra’s “stupidity”. He then warned the centrist Nepali Congress and the moderate communist UML (Unified Marxist Leninist) that now their folly might soon change Nepal from a “democratic republic” into a “people’s republic”.

Prachanda also mentioned Russia’s October 1917 Revolution, although it was not clear if he was merely trying to add pressure on caretaker Prime Minister Koirala to quickly vacate his post to enable Prachanda’s party, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), to try to form a transitional government. Although it could not secure a majority, the maoist party had the largest representation of the 25 parties in the Constituent Assembly.

National elections on April 10, 2008, proved to be a formality which would mark the move of Nepal away from its status as a constitutional monarchy. Although non-maoist political parties garnered more than 70 percent of the vote, it was clear that the threat by the maoists to return to violence if their anti-monarchical views were not adopted had blackmailed the other parties into agreement.

The newly-elected Constituent Assembly (CA) voted on May 28, 2008, to formally transform Nepal’s monarchical status into a federal republic. King Gyanendra Shaha, 60, was formally removed from office on June 4, 2008, just before he had completed seven years of his reign. The caretaker Government, headed by Girija Prasad Koirala, sent a letter to the King Gyanendra to vacate the Royal Palace within in two weeks, and the King agreed without resistance. The Palace, which had housed Nepalese Kings for 120 years, was to be transformed into a museum.

However, *Asia Times Online* noted that “in a rush to abolish the ‘feudal institution’ (of monarchy), leaders of the three prominent parties ignored important procedural matters that could be challenged in a court of law”. Firstly, the media outlet noted, the assembly was called into its first crucial session without having been made into a complete body of 601 members, as stipulated by the interim Constitution. The Government failed to nominate the 26 members needed to give the CA its complete look. Secondly, the resolution on a republic was proposed by a minister of a caretaker government, Krishna Sitaula, who was not a member of the House. (He had contested the April 10, 2008, election but was defeated). Thirdly, the resolution was put to the vote without a debate. The motion was adopted with 560 in favor and four against. “The manner in which the republic was declared was not only objectionable,” said Nepal’s *News Front* weekly on June 2, 2008, “but also defied all norms and practices of any established democracy”.
