

# U.S.-Pakistani Army Conflict Intensifies

by Ramtanu Maitra

At a briefing organized by the Directorate-General of Military Operations (DGMO) for a selected few journalists on Nov. 14 at Rawalpindi, Pakistani Army officers said that Gen. Ashfaq Pervez Kiyani, the Vice-Chief of Army Staff (VCOAS), who is expected to take over the Chief of Army Staff (COAS) job from Gen. President Pervez Musharraf by the end of this month, believes that the failure to deal effectively with jihadi terrorism in Pakistani territory was in part due to the over-militarization of Pakistan's counter-terrorism strategy under American influence. Ayesha Haroon of News International reported on Nov. 15 that Kiyani stresses that "military solutions must be politically acceptable," and "only minimum use of force must be resorted to."

How this difficult task can be achieved was not discussed at the briefing, nor was it the place to discuss such a long-term policy, yet the statement itself is a clear indication that Islamabad has finally made clear its fundamental differences with Washington on how to conduct the war on terror on Pakistani soil. It is likely that such differences were discussed before, but they were not made public. However, there are warning signals that such differences cannot be suppressed any longer.

## Emergency Will Continue for Now

On Nov. 15, President Musharraf appointed Senate chairman Mohammed Mian Soomro, a former banker from a political family in Sindh, as caretaker prime minister to oversee general elections.

The day before, Musharraf told the Associated Press that he would step down as Army chief after a Supreme Court ruling on the validity of his re-election, which he said was expected by the end of November. He added that he would subsequently begin a new Presidential term as a civilian, warning that the country risked chaos were he to give in to opposition demands to resign.

Musharraf's statements and actions amounted to a categorical rejection of White House demands. In fact, President Bush has sent the number two in the U.S. State department, Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte, to Pakistan to convey a terse message: Lift the state of emergency and hold free and fair elections. Musharraf has made clear there will be no lifting of the emergency now, and "free and fair" elections will be held in early January of 2008, with the state of emergency very much in place.

The differences between Washington and Islamabad had been deepening for a while, but went into fast-forward mode following the declaration of emergency on Nov. 3, defying a last minute call from U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Prior to Nov. 3, the security situation was already precarious, but Musharraf had ostensibly agreed, at Washington's behest, to a power-sharing arrangement with the twice-failed former prime minister, Benazir Bhutto. It was evident then, as it is now, that the insertion of Bhutto was designed by London to foment further chaos within Pakistan. It is also likely that the neocons in Washington, headed by Vice President Dick Cheney, were eager participants in this project, although each side had its own specific objectives.

### Create a Militant Islamic State

The objective of the British, whose empire has been based upon splitting Islam along sectarian lines, and promoting a feudal class (the Bhuttos are in this category) within Islamic countries, to maintain control over the many by owning a few, is to create an unstable Islamic militant state along the oil and gas fields of Central Asia, separated from the more stable and populous part of Pakistan. This would not only ensure British control over very important natural resources, but it would also ensure that the oil and gas profits would find their way to the City of London—the life source of British power.

For the neocons in Washington, since 9/11, Pakistan has been considered to be the hub of Islamic terrorism. According to these neocons, the war on terror would be futile unless the terrorists inside Pakistan were eliminated. Since the Pakistani Army had rejected efforts to kill off Pakistani citizens to assuage the Americans, the neocons picked up the “democracy” and Benazir Bhutto options as cudgels to dethrone the Army from power in Islamabad.

However, these external plans did not go wholly unnoticed in Islamabad, nor in Rawalpindi—the seat of the Army's power. In fact, according to reliable ex-military sources, cited by an analyst, at the meeting of the Corps Commanders of the Pakistani Army convened by Musharraf on Nov. 10, there was a unanimous endorsement of his deci-

sion to impose the emergency, suspend the Constitution, and sack Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry of the Supreme Court.

However, the majority of the Corps Commanders expressed their reservations over the wisdom of Musharraf's attempts, under U.S. pressure, to reach a power-sharing agreement with Benazir Bhutto. It is interesting to note in this context the phase-change in Bhutto's tactics since she landed in Pakistan after eight years of self-imposed exile. Initially, after her Oct. 18 arrival, she expressed her desire to share power with Musharraf—as Washington and London had told her to do.

But since Nov. 3, Bhutto has gone hammer-and-tong against Musharraf and the Army, and is now fully engaged in unleashing civil unrest to overturn the powers-that-be. Her reckless policy, to unleash street-dominated civil unrest and create chaos, is what scares the Pakistani Army. While there is absolutely no question that the Nov. 3 emergency declaration was rejected by virtually all Pakistanis, there is also no question that the dangers posed by the militants in the tribal areas bordering eastern and southeastern Afghanistan is not fully understood. What is also not understood is the capability of the suicide bombers, who now exist by the dozens, if not by the hundreds, and are hidden throughout the country, silent as fish in water, to surface and cause mayhem at any time. But the failure to convey this crisis to the population lies squarely on Islamabad and the Pakistani Army.

### The Next Phase of Crisis?

Now, Musharraf and the Pakistani Army are preparing for the next phase of crisis, and it could be a dangerous one: a cocktail of London-inspired chaos led by Benazir Bhutto and her protestors, and interspersed with suicide bombers sacrificing themselves on behalf of those who plan to set up a separate, independent Islamic *shariat*, or religious state, bordering Pakistan and Afghanistan.

On Nov. 14, anticipating exactly such developments, Pentagon press secretary Geoff Morrell told the news media that the U.S. military is looking at alternate routes to send supplies to troops in Afghanistan, “in case the political crisis in Pakistan makes supply lines unavailable.” The U.S. military sends 75% of its supplies for Afghanistan through, or in the skies over Pakistan, including 40% of the fuel for the troops, the U.S. Defense Department said.

“In light of the fact that there is civil unrest in Pakistan, in light of the fact that there is a state of emergency in Pakistan, we feel it is responsible, given the importance of the Pakistani supply lines to our operations in Afghanistan, to have a contingency plan,” Morrell added.

### Nuclear Weapons

The fear of civil unrest is what inspired the Pentagon to develop a contingency plan so that U.S. and NATO troops

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ons may end up in the hands of al-Qaeda, as a result of the steady disintegration of law and order within Pakistan. Alarmed by the political crisis in Pakistan, U.S. spy agencies have stepped up their scrutiny of the country's nuclear weapons program and directed analysts to reexamine the risk that rising instability could lead to the loss of a nuclear device or material, according to U.S. intelligence officials, and an article in the *Los Angeles Times* on Nov. 4.

"That was one of the things people immediately started asking about" when Musharraf declared emergency rule in his country, and suspended the Constitution, a senior U.S. intelligence official said. "How do we game this out? How might it happen?"

The scenarios being considered include an attempt by al-Qaeda or another terrorist network to launch an attack on a nuclear site, or a move by a faction of the powerful Pakistani military to gain power by aligning with Islamic militant groups.

As a result of this growing cacophony, President Musharraf has come out openly declaring that Pakistan's nuclear arsenal is fail-safe, and fully under control. Although the Pentagon said on Nov. 14 that it was

can be supplied with what they need. But the talk of taking such measures evokes a great deal of uneasiness in Rawalpindi. The reason for this concern is the recent focus in the United States on Pakistan's nuclear arsenal.

Pakistan, like India and Israel, is a non-signatory to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT) and is outside of the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) jurisdiction. Pakistan, also like India and Israel, has developed nuclear weapons, having tested its nuclear explosives in 1998. Washington has always expressed concern over these "illegal" nuclear weapons, and has tried to exercise control over them. The 9/11 event forced the Bush Administration to seek Pakistan's assistance to fight the war on terror and temporarily sweep under the rug the nuclear issue, although the non-proliferation community of the United States—a huge bureaucracy, large enough to populate a small nation—has kept its knives sharpened.

Recently, the knives were taken out. All over the United States, news media have begun raising the alarm about Pakistan's nuclear weapons. Their claim is that these weap-

not worried about the security of Pakistan's nuclear weapons amid the political crisis there, there are many in Rawalpindi who believe that an all-out crisis inside the country would be used as an excuse by Washington to get control of Pakistan's nuclear button. As a corollary, some of the uniformed Pakistani officials believe that the contingency plan announced by Pentagon spokesman Morrell is associated with some such plan.

Under no circumstances will the Pakistani Army allow its nuclear command and control to slip out of its hands. If that happens, Rawalpindi believes the United States will ride roughshod over Pakistan.

It is perhaps this crisis that has led Musharraf to announce that he would soon visit Riyadh, Saudi Arabia to discuss the situation. According to one senior Pakistani scribe, it is likely that Musharraf aims to convey to the West through King Abdullah, that the Americans will never be allowed to fill any vacuum in Pakistan. Rather, chaos will play directly into the hands of the very militants and extremists the West fears so much.