

Pakistan-Afghanistan Incidents Pose Threat of All-Out War

by Ramtanu Maitra

Dec. 11—Two major incidents in Pakistan and Afghanistan during the last two weeks have withered all hopes that the growing instability in Pakistan and Afghanistan can be contained. While the attack on two Pakistani military posts by the NATO helicopters close to the Afghanistan-Pakistan border killed at least 24 Pakistani soldiers, the killings of 60 Shi'a mourners on the holy day of Ashura Dec. 5 in two Afghan mosques has raised the specter of a full-fledged and bloody sectarian and ethnic civil war in Afghanistan.

There is no question but that the British-Saudi nexus, aided by a warmongering Obama Administration in the United States, through these two incidents have furthered efforts to spread the flames of violence in these two Muslim nations. What is most disturbing, is the fact that Pakistan, a nation of 170 million, is fast becoming ungovernable, as its military, considered the only institution that could hold the country together, has weakened significantly, and is under serious attack from both Washington and Brussels (NATO).

The broader context of this attack, however, is not to be found within these countries, but in the crazed British-Obama drive for confrontation with Asia, the neighborhood in which Pakistan and Afghanistan live. Blowing up nations on the border of China, is part and parcel of the provocations leading toward World War III.

The All-Out War Danger

The Afghanistan-Pakistan situation can no longer be identified as separate from what has happened in the recent days throughout Arabia and the Maghreb nations in northern Africa. These are all Muslim nations, and virtually all of them have been rendered unstable by a Saudi-Britain-France-United States-led policy of regime change through violent acts. The devastation within Iraq caused by the U.S. invasion in 2003, backed

by Britain and Saudi Arabia, has enraged a large section of the Muslim community, the vast majority of whom are Shi'as.

The subsequent killing of Muammar Qaddafi in Libya, and the spread of violent uprisings in Syria, backed again by the same forces, has deepened the chasm between the Sunnis and Shi'as. Now, Iran is in the crosshairs of the U.S.-Britain-Saudi-Israel axis, and there are indications that a covert war to dislodge the Iranian regime is in progress.

Under the circumstances, it would have been a Herculean task for the leaders of Pakistan and Afghanistan to restrain the reactionary forces within their countries from striking back at those who were aiding and abetting destabilization in the Muslim countries. What has happened in Pakistan and Afghanistan during the last two weeks, was a further deterioration of an already unstable situation; and there are reasons to believe that the U.S.-Britain-Saudi-Israel axis is moving to spread the conflict throughout the vast area stretching from northern Africa to the borders of Russia, China, and India.

A day after the attack, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar spoke to Russian and Chinese counterparts, Sergei Lavrov and Yang Jiechi, to brief them on the "unprovoked" NATO/ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) attack on Pakistani territory. Khar underscored that in addition to being a gross violation of established international norms, such attacks pose a threat to regional peace and stability as well.

The Nov. 28 Lahore *Daily Mail* quoted the Russian foreign minister asserting that a nation's sovereignty should always be upheld, even when hunting "terrorists." "Leaders of NATO in Afghanistan should carry out a meticulous investigation into this incident," Lavrov told Khar.

A statement issued by the Pakistani Foreign Minis-



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On Nov. 26, two Pakistani military outposts were attacked by NATO helicopters, killing 24 soldiers. Islamabad has declared it a wanton act. Shown: A NATO/ISAF helicopter strike in Pakistan, November 2011.

try said, “The Russian foreign minister emphasized the unacceptability of violating the sovereignty of states, including during the planning and carrying out of counter-terrorist operations.”

Chinese Foreign Minister Yang expressed deep shock and concern over the incident, and extended condolences to the aggrieved families. He said that Pakistan’s independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity must be respected, and called for a thorough and serious investigation into the matter.

The Incident, According to Pakistani Authorities

In the early morning hours of Nov. 26, two Pakistani military outposts, Vulcan and Boulder, in Mohmand Agency in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) came under attack from two or three NATO helicopters, resulting in the death of 24 Pakistani soldiers, including two officers, while 15 others sustained injuries. Following the incident, Washington and Brussels claimed that the NATO helicopters encountered some fire, and that there was a breakdown of communication which led to the tragedy. However, no helicopter was downed, nor any NATO casualty reported.

Since the incident, Islamabad has maintained that the attack was a wanton act. Pakistan’s Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) Maj. Gen. Ashfaq

Nadeem, briefing Pakistan’s Senate Standing Committee on Defense Dec. 8, said the Nov. 26 attack on those outposts was a deliberate act and part of a “plot,” *Dawn News* reported. Briefing the group which met in Islamabad under the chairmanship of Javed Ashraf Qazi, Nadeem said the attack was conducted by U.S. Special Forces, as NATO has no control over them in Afghanistan.

He said NATO officials deceived the Pakistani officer on duty at the coordination center by giving him wrong information about the location of the operation. The DGMO further said the attack was pre-planned, and was aimed to strengthen the Taliban, because the two military checkpoints attacked were built to curb militants’ infiltration, and had been serving the

purpose effectively. He also warned of more attacks, comments likely to fuel tension with the United States.

It is evident that neither Washington or Brussels agree with Nadeem’s statement, but that is irrelevant at this point in time. The mood of the Pakistani citizens, except for perhaps a handful, has become virulently anti-U.S. and anti-West.

Following the incident, Pakistan took several retaliatory measures: The supply line through Pakistan that brings more than half of all lethal and non-lethal supplies to the 150,000-plus foreign troops fighting the insurgents in Afghanistan, was cut off, and has remained closed at the time of writing. ISAF chief Gen. John Allen has claimed that the stoppage of supplies is not hurting the troops, and Islamabad has shown no intention to reopen the supply routes, posing worries in Washington.

Pakistan’s Retaliatory Measures

Following the attack on the military outposts, Pakistan gave a 15-day deadline for the United States to vacate the Shamsi air base, also known as the Bhandari Airstrip, a Pakistan Air Force-controlled airfield, located about 200 miles southwest of Quetta, and about 248 miles northwest of Gwadar in the Balochistan province of Pakistan.

Reports indicate that U.S. forces have already moved out of the base, removing a drone in the last

phase, and have informed Pakistani Air Traffic Control and Defense Ministry of their withdrawal. The United Arab Emirates government would take over the control of the airbase, news reports said.

In addition, the Pakistani Army is reportedly bolstering air defenses along its Afghan border, including deploying shoulder-to-air missiles, officials said this week—a move that could potentially threaten NATO jets in the border region. “Primarily, it will be early warning systems, but there will be certain weapons deployed in certain areas,” Pakistani military spokesman Brig. Gen. Azmat Ali said on Dec. 9, stressing that the move was defensive rather than offensive in nature.

“It became very embarrassing for our troops. They were killed like sitting ducks,” he said, adding that the decision had been taken in response to pressure from the troops themselves. “If there is another attack, they should have something to defend themselves.”

Moreover, Pakistan boycotted the Dec. 5-6 conference at Bonn, Germany, called Bonn II, attended by over 1,000 delegates from some 110 nations and international organizations. The objective of the conference was to ensure international support for Afghanistan in the coming years to establish stability and an economic beginning. Not even the belated offer of condolences over the killing of Pakistani soldiers from U.S. President Barack Obama to Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari over that weekend sufficed to change Islamabad’s mind. As a result, two empty chairs represented Pakistan and the Taliban, perhaps the two most important elements in the so-called Afghan resolution, and those empty chairs announced loudly the non-event that Bonn II turned out to be.

Beyond the measures and counter-measures that followed the Nov. 26 incident, what the incident has further ensured is the weakening of Pakistan’s military. It is evident that the incident has made President Zardari a lame duck, and weakened the country’s feeble democratic institutions even further. But, its democratic institutions never played any role in stabilizing the nation whenever the country faced danger. It was always the



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The Pakistani Army is reportedly bolstering air defenses along its Afghan border, including deploying shoulder-to-air missiles, to defend against NATO strikes. Here, non-combatant civilians killed by a U.S./NATO strike, Nov. 5, 2009.

Pakistani military which had moved in under crises to stop the rot, at least temporarily.

On earlier occasions, Washington had backed those military takeovers despite the fact that those they had undermined democratic institutions—a bugaboo of the democracy-preaching Washington.

The present situation, however, is entirely different. It is the United States, working with NATO, that has deliberately weakened the Pakistani military and, through various actions, has made the country’s top military leaders look inept and inadequate. The mood inside Pakistan is dangerous, and many anti-West demonstrations are taking place, providing succor to the militants and the anti-West jihadis, controlled internationally, primarily from Britain and Saudi Arabia.

Cry ‘Havoc,’ and Let Slip the Dogs of War

On Dec. 5, the holiest day of the year for the Shi’as—the festival of Ashura in the sacred first month of Muharram in the Islamic calendar—a suicide bomber, who detonated explosives at the gate of the Abu-UI Fazil shrine in the capital Kabul, killed at least 56 people; many of them were children.

In a separate attack, a bicycle bomb near a mosque in the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif killed four wor-

shippers, a district police chief said. The Taliban condemned the bomb attacks in Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif as the brutal work of “enemies,” a spokesperson for the armed group said. “Very sadly we heard that there were explosions in Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif, where people were killed by the enemy’s un-Islamic and inhuman activity,” Zabihullah Mujahid, a Taliban spokesman said, in a statement published on their website.

If the Taliban did not do it, who did this killing? Within the next 48 hours, a spin-off group of the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), a Pakistani-based Sunni terrorist group, with close links to al-Qaeda, a Sunni-Deobandi terrorist outfit, almost indistinguishable from the Wahhabi version of Sunni Islam, claimed responsibility for the attack in Kabul.

LeJ has been responsible for a series of sectarian attacks over the years in Pakistan that have taken lives of hundreds of Shi’ite Muslims. But the Pakistani government never took any serious action against it. Perhaps this monster, in its various forms, has become stronger than what the weakened Pakistan’s law-and-order forces can handle.

LeJ was formed in 1996 by a breakaway group of radical sectarian extremists of the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), a Sunni extremist group, which accused the parent organization of deviating from the ideals of its slain co-founder, Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangvi. It is from Maulana Jhangvi that the LeJ derives its name. It was formed under the leadership of Akram Lahori and Riaz Basra. The LeJ is one of the two sectarian terrorist outfits proscribed on Aug. 14, 2001, by President Pervez Musharraf. LeJ, like the SSP, LeT, and scores of Sunni militant groups that thrive in Pakistan, are funded by Saudi Arabia, and controlled by their old master, British intelligence.

Following the Shi’a killings, Afghan President Hamid Karzai, who was in Europe at the time, hurried back to Kabul and pointed the finger at Pakistan. “Without any doubt, the enemies of Afghanistan are trying to separate the Afghan people,” Karzai said in a statement. He told the news media: “We will pursue this issue with Pakistan and its government very seriously.... Lashkar-i-Jhangvi is based in Pakistan, therefore the government of Afghanistan, with all its strength and international support, will pursue this issue. Afghanistan cannot ignore the blood of its children.”

Four days later, on Dec. 9, another suicide bomber

killed a district police chief from the restive eastern Kunar province, and at least five other people, in an attack at the gate of a mosque after Friday prayers, the provincial police commander reported. “The Ghaziabad police chief, a member of the national directorate of security, two policemen, and two civilians were killed. Nine have been wounded,” said Kunar provincial police chief Hewaz Mohammad Nazari. In a text message, the Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack, and claimed they killed the Ghaziabad police chief and six of his bodyguards. It was a claim that surprised many, since the Wahhabi version of Islam is at the core of the Taliban’s ideology, and they have in the past denied any role in attacks on religious sites in Afghanistan.

What that implies is that the sectarian killings, instigated and launched in Yemen, Bahrain, Iraq, Pakistan, and Syria, by the British-Saudi forces in recent months, will now have a new theater—Afghanistan. It appears that the enemies of the Kabul government may be seeking to fracture the country along the sectarian fault line that exists between the Sunnis and Shi’as. A civilian advisor to former Afghanistan commander Gen. Stanley McChrystal, Andrew Exum, told the Associated Press:

“One big worry over the past year has been that factions within Afghanistan have—independent of anything NATO has been doing—begun to prepare for another civil war in the aftermath of a NATO withdrawal,” said Exum, a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security, a think tank in Washington. “I see the attack simply hastening that process.”

Analysts believe the regional players of old still have a stake in Afghanistan’s instability. Unity between Shi’as and Sunnis, and unity among ethnic groups and political factions, leaves no room for Iran or the British-Saudi forces to wield influence. And they are not the only ones who are getting ready. The future of Afghanistan is probably evolving up north now, as the Indians, Russians and Iranians are engaged with the Northern Alliance, which will wage a bloody battle if any effort is made in the future to seat any Sunni-religious group, the kind the Taliban were, in Kabul.

The Northern Alliance, with whom the U.S. allied in 2001, is secretly arming once again, according to former anti-Taliban fighters interviewed in northern Afghanistan’s Panjshir Valley. Their information was confirmed privately by a top U.S. official, and reported in the media.