

The Solution to the Afghanistan Imbroglia

by Ramtanu Maitra

Oct. 9—President Obama held yet another long session on Oct. 7 with administration officials, debating the options for Afghanistan in the coming days. The stated objective is to stabilize Afghanistan, and to enhance the security of the United States and its allies. However, the options discussed, as reported by the news media, amount to an absurd hoax.

As of now, the administration is allegedly divided into two groups, each backed by its sycophants, who masquerade as “experts”; each tries to influence the President to adopt either a strategy based on counterinsurgency, or counterterrorism. In case of counterinsurgency, the U.S. must infuse as many as 40,000 troops, in addition to the 68,000 U.S., and 35,000 NATO troops already stationed there. In this scenario, bringing the strength of the foreign troops up to 143,000 is necessary, not only to fight and defeat the surging “Taliban,” but also to protect the Afghan people, in large population centers, and to train more Afghan National Army (ANA) personnel and Afghan Police. What comes with that formulation is the Vietnam-era’s failed strategy of “winning the hearts and minds” of the people. This phrase was borrowed by the Americans in the 1960s, from the British colonialists, who applied this cruel hoax in their former colony, Malaysia, in the 1950s.

The opponents of this argument claim that the stabilization of Afghanistan will ensue only if the “bad guys”—in this context, what is loosely identified as al-Qaeda militants—are knocked off, using drones, mis-

siles, and other electronically targetted weapons. The counterterrorism advocates claim that once Afghanistan and Pakistan are free of the militants, Afghanistan will be stable, and the U.S. and its allies will be safe. The saving grace of those who hold this view, is that the killing of Afghan citizens under the pretext of annihilating the “Taliban” is not on their agenda. They do admit that some “collateral damage” (read: killing of innocent civilians) would surely occur.

What is evident, is that proponents of both these strategies do not discuss withdrawal from Afghanistan as a necessity. They do not dwell on how long the process will take to stabilize the country, and make assertions, after eight years of squandering money and people’s lives, that the conditions that are necessary to make their schemes work exist.

The Hoax

The debate, as posed so far, has blinded most Americans, if not the President himself, to the reality: Putting a large number of troops in Afghanistan at this juncture will mean more deaths and more expense, yielding nothing. Almost 60% of the territory of Afghanistan is controlled by the insurgents, who are hell-bent to drive out the foreign occupiers. The proponents of counterinsurgency have failed to recognize the fact that the enemies of the foreign troops are not the “Taliban” alone, but insurgents of all ethnic groups. This was pointed out by Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef, a conduit between Tal-



White House/Pete Souza

Both sides of the debate over Afghan policy—counterinsurgency vs. counterterrorism—are doomed to fail. President Obama is shown here with his commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, Gen. Stanley McChrystal, Oct. 2, aboard Air Force One, in Copenhagen, following Obama's rejection by the Olympic committee.

iban supremo Mullah Omar and the Afghan government, when he recently told an Associated Press correspondent that the militant leadership refers to its forces not as Taliban now, but as “mujahideen,” a throwback to the Afghan “holy warriors” who ousted the Soviet Union at the end of the 1980s. The reason is that only one out of ten militant fighters is a true “Taliban.” The rest are ordinary Afghans, Zaeef said.

Those who are aware of the ground situation know that Zaeef was not whistling in the dark. In fact, at least one very well-known Tajik warlord, based in the western province of Herat, has publicly taken up arms against the foreign troops. This commander had been on the U.S. side in 2001, when U.S. Special Forces, aided by the Tajik-Uzbek-dominated Northern Alliance, ousted the Taliban regime, within a span of six weeks, incurring minimum losses. In addition, it has become public knowledge that in many provinces of northern Afghanistan—Kunduz province, in particular—where the Pushtuns are a minority, Uzbek militants have taken control, and are now gunning for German and other NATO troops.

The second part of this hoax is the assertion that building up the Afghan National Army, which now

totals 80,000 or 90,000, according to “experts,” will help to stabilize the country. In reality, the ANA is a “foreign army” to the Pushtun-led militant groups: The vast majority of its personnel are recruited from the Tajik-Uzbek and other non-Pushtun ethnic groups to fight the Pushtun-led Afghan militants. These army personnel do not venture out in the Pushtun-dominated areas. When Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the U.S. and NATO Commander in Afghanistan, sent 4,000 Marines in July, to Helmand province, a southern stronghold of the Pushtun militants, to clear out villages and destroy opium/heroin stores, promising a quick success, he was able to mobilize only 600 ANA troops. The whole campaign has now been recognized as an abysmal failure; it has also come to light that the non-Pushtun ANA personnel did their very best not to counter their ethnic rivals in this Pushtun-dominated area.

The third part of this hoax is ignoring the cost of maintaining 240,000 ANA troops. According to one estimate, maintaining an Afghan soldier costs the United States close to \$11,000 annually, and this does not include the cost of training them. Training requires an additional \$250,000 a year for each American trainer, in an insecure environment like Afghanistan. In other words, the maintenance cost of the Afghan soldiers, if this hoax is allowed to be perpetrated, will be much greater than the GDP of Afghanistan. According to one ground-level operator, it could be as high as three times the GDP of Afghanistan.

The fourth part of the hoax is what is ignored in this argument. As pointed out in last week's *EIR* (“The British Plan: Send More Troops, To Partition Afghanistan”), if this war is continued, with no plan to end it, it is almost a certainty that the Pakistani Pushtuns will become a part of it. And the Pushtun community in Pakistan is much larger than that in Afghanistan. This means that the draining of U.S. and Pakistani manpower and resources, not to mention those of Afghanistan, under such circumstances, would be much bigger than it ever was in Vietnam. What London understands, and fully welcomes, and Washington does not, is that such an endless war has only one possible outcome: the break-up of Afghanistan along ethnic lines.



It should also be noted that, in this part of the world, and particularly after years of bloodshed, such a partition will not come through peace negotiations. It will come out of the barrels of Kalashnikovs, rocket launchers, grenade launchers, and other targeted weapons.

While the proponents of counterinsurgency are propagating a policy which will not only bring back the morbid memories of the Vietnam War, and weaken the already economically devastated United States, the proponents of counterterrorism are lying through their teeth, as well. To get an idea of this hoax, one must take into account certain truths. To begin with, when the United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001, al-Qaeda was lodged only in Afghanistan. Today, the intelligence community points out that after eight years, al-Qaeda has bases in almost 60 countries. Killing the “bad guys” in Afghanistan-Pakistan may create a few heroes, but the fact remains, that al-Qaeda, which had been a wing of the International Islamic Movement, and its co-operators have expanded enormously.

Moreover, even if one accepts, in toto, that 9/11 was perpetrated entirely by the members of al-Qaeda, there is no evidence whatsoever that 9/11 was planned inside Afghanistan and Pakistan. All intelligence information suggests the plotters were located in Western Europe.

The second part of the hoax perpetrated by the counterterrorism protagonists, is the claim that the Pakistani Army and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) will go all out to eliminate al-Qaeda and the other militants. In fact, it is on the record that some Pakistani commanders operating along the Afghan borders have already told at least one tribal group in Pakistan’s Federally-Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) not to attack the Taliban and other militants. One commander explained that, if the militants are killed off, “who is going to fight the U.S. troops and NATO?”

In other words, the Pakistani Army’s covert, or sometimes overt, protection of the

“bad guys” stems from the fact that foreign troops are operating on the other side of the border, and have been threatening Pakistan’s sovereignty for some time. Thus, the proponents of counterterrorism will soon find out that their drones and missiles, instead of getting the “bad guys,” were causing more “collateral damage,” and stirring up more trouble for Islamabad.

What To Do?

After eight years of pursuing insane policies in Afghanistan, under the Bush, and now, the Obama Presidencies, Obama is left with only one option: to call a regional conference, which will include the U.S.A., Russia, China, India, Pakistan, and Iran. No organization, such as NATO, or the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, will attend; nor will Saudi Arabia, Britain, or any other European nation. This will involve only the United States, because of the circumstances that exist today, and the five regional powers. Once that conference takes place, the U.S. can bring back its troops, and earn the respect of larger regional powers.

The objective of the conference is the stability of Afghanistan, and what the regional powers can do to ensure that, and to enable the United States and NATO to get out of this quagmire. The regional powers must be told that much of the threat in that region ensues

from the violence and instability in Afghanistan.

Calling the conference, Washington must make clear that it would maintain a few of its military bases, until such time that it is unanimously agreed upon, that Kabul, with the help of the regional powers, has become stable. The regional powers also should be told clearly that it was the Saudis and the British who created the Taliban, and how and why they continue to fish in the troubled Afghan waters.

The Russians, the Central Asian nations, and perhaps the Iranians, understand, to a large extent, the role of the Saudis and Britain in Afghanistan. Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the emergence of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakstan, and Turkmenistan, bordering Afghanistan, as independent nations, the Saudis have pumped in money to indoctrinate the citizens of these nascent states. They provided the money, and Britain provided the manpower, in the form of a religious group, the Hizb ut-Tahrir (HuT). The HuT is headquartered in England, but banned in many Central Asian states. If one were to ask Tony Blair or Gordon Brown about the HuT, one would be told that the group is “peace-loving.” Both prime ministers, despite the demands of many Britons, have refused to ban the group’s activities in Britain.

On the other hand, ask the same question of any of the Central Asian heads of state, and he would point out, that the most ferocious militant group in Central Asia is the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), and that almost all the members of the IMU were former HuT members. Both groups are dedicated to destroying Islamic sovereign nation-states and establishing a caliphate. Understanding all this will be vital for the future stability of Afghanistan and the region.

British Colonial Legacy Haunts the Region

In addition to these five nations’ requirements, what Washington would encounter in setting up such a conference, where each nation will have to cooperate to stabilize Afghanistan, is the continuing British colonial mindset that drives the people in power in this region.

The India-Pakistan divide is rooted in the partition of the country by the British Raj. The most glaring example of that divide is the Kashmir dispute, left



Margaret Bourke-White

The India-Pakistan conflict, which will have to be resolved for regional stability to take hold, originated in the British Raj’s partition of India, in 1947, during which millions died, were displaced, or immiserated. Shown: Rural Sikhs migrate by ox-cart to India, from the Pakistani Punjab region, 1947.

behind, and exacerbated, by London during the Cold War days. Neither India, nor Pakistan, could resolve this problem—not because a resolution could not be worked out—but the imperial mindset of divide-and-rule vibrates throughout the power corridors of both New Delhi and Islamabad. In addition, the powers-that-be in both nations practice, within their respective countries, the British-led policy of exclusion and division. In Pakistan, Balochistan and the FATA were kept virtually separated from mainstream Pakistan, and out of all developmental processes, because they were not part of the British Raj, but were, instead, British protectorates.

In India, since independence in 1947, the Northeast has been split up into smaller and smaller states and autonomous regions. The divisions were made to accommodate the wishes of tribes and ethnic groups which want to assert their sub-national identity, and obtain an area where the diktat of their little coterie is recognized. New Delhi has yet to comprehend that its policy of accepting and institutionalizing the superficial identities of these ethnic, linguistic, and tribal groups has ensured more irrational demands for even smaller states. It has also virtually eliminated any plan to make these areas economically powerful, and the people scientifically and technologically advanced.

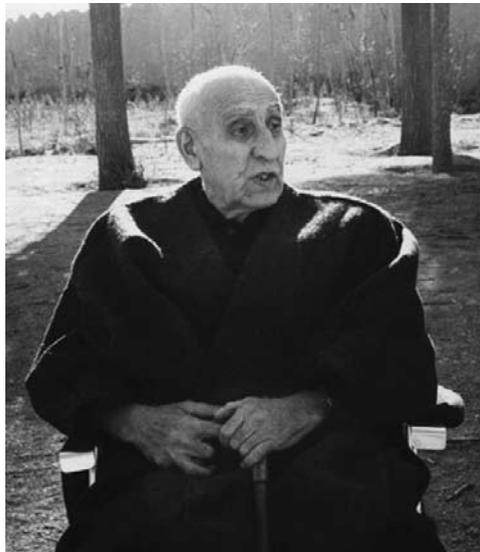
Following annexation of Northeast India, the first strategy of the British East India Company during the

1830s toward the area was to set it up as a separate entity. The British plan to cordon off the Northeast tribal groups was part of their policy of setting up a multicultural human zoo during 1850s, under the premiership of Henry Temple, the third Viscount Palmerston. Lord Palmerston, as Temple was called, had three “friends”: the British Foreign Office, the Home Office, and Whitehall. The Indian leadership never realized that, to set up a true republic, these British policies would have to be abandoned, and appropriate conditions adopted to integrate the various tribal groups.

Sino-Indian relations are also affected by British policy, which is to keep them at each other’s throats. The McMahon Line in the Himalayas, that separates India and China, along the north-eastern and central part of the boundary, was drawn by the British Raj arbitrarily, and left undemarcated, like the Durand Line that separates Pakistan from Afghanistan, as a potential conflict point. Neither Beijing nor New Delhi have been able avoid the trap; they fought a pointless war in 1962, which merely concretized their differences, which have remained settled for almost five decades.

Subsequently, when China moved in to take over Tibet, London picked up the Dalai Lama and projected him as the legitimate owner of a nation called Tibet. Although India has overcome this part of the British perfidy, the Tibet issue still lingers as one of unexpressed suspicion between the two nations.

In Iran, the British legacy goes back to the post-World War II days, when, in 1951, then-Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh broke off negotiations with the U.K.’s Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, in response to threats issued to Iran by imperial Britain. As Mossadegh’s nationalist faction hardened its anti-Britain stance, and moved towards nationalizing Iran’s oil production, America’s anglophile President Truman sent Amb. Averell Harriman to cool down Mossadegh. In his book, *Negotiating with Iran: Wrestling the Ghosts of History*, the U.S. diplomat John Limbert quotes the late Vernon



Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh (1882-1967), bluntly told the anglophile U.S. diplomat Averell Harriman: “You do not know how crafty [the British] are. You do not know how evil they are. You do not know how they sully everything they touch.” Mossadegh was overthrown in 1953, by a CIA-orchestrated coup d’état.

Walters, who attended the Harriman-Mossadegh meeting. According to Walters, Mossadegh looked at Harriman and said, “You do not know how crafty they [the British] are. You do not know how evil they are. You do not know how they sully everything they touch.” While Harriman, another anglophile, taken aback by Mossadegh’s conviction, said there are good and bad among the British, like most people, Mossadegh, who was obviously not referring to individual Britons, continued, “You do not know them. *You do not know them.*”

The tragedy in that part of the world, is that those who knew what Britain represented, such as Mossadegh, were assassinated, or removed from office. That tradition continues unabated as well, in the mindset of the leaders of

the Indian subcontinent—now broken up into three nations. To cooperate to resolve a conflict which would open up opportunities for the people that they serve, and strengthen the nation and the region in the process, remains an anathema to most of those who were, or are, in power in this region.

What To Expect

Leading up to the conference, Washington will have to do its homework, which means having direct talks with the leaders of each of these five nations, stating the U.S. interest clearly. Also, Washington must make clear that the conference will not entertain any attempt to resolve any bilateral conflicts that exist among the participating countries; but the importance of Afghanistan’s stability, in the context of the region’s stability, must be presented fully. It is evident that in getting the proverbial nod from the participating countries, Washington will be confronted with a number of demands from the regional countries. To name a few:

Iran: The country has been devastated by the Afghan opium explosion. Tehran is also deeply concerned about the Saudi-British push to bring to the fore in Afghanistan, and in the Central Asian nations, the indoctrinated Wahhabi militants. Followers of this ex-

treme orthodox variety of Sunni Islam, born in, nurtured by, and spread by Saudi Arabia, in collusion with Britain, pose a serious threat to all Islamic nation-states, but particularly to the Shi'a Republic of Iran. To a Wahhabi, a Shi'a is as much an infidel as a Hindu or Christian. In other words, Iran will be more than willing to participate in this conference, but will most certainly seek to open up bilateral relations with the United States, and work in the area as an equal partner.

Russia: Russia has also been badly affected by the opium/heroin produced in vast amounts in Afghanistan. A significant amount of opium and heroin, as well as hashish and marijuana, produced in Afghanistan, travels routinely by road to Russia, destroying its youth and criminalizing society. The drug-traffickers operate hand-in-glove with the HuT, IMU, and other criminal elements that are now operating inside Russia, in provinces such as Chechnya, South Ossetia, and Ingushetia. These groups generate cash by running drugs, to help some of the secessionist forces within Russia. Russia is also concerned about NATO's presence in Afghanistan, and Washington's use of NATO as a battering ram to weaken Russia's southern flank. It is only expected that Russia will bring up these issues with Washington in preparation for the conference.

China: China is becoming increasingly aware of the Uighur militancy being run through Afghanistan by the British. Also, a huge amount of Afghan drugs is moving into Pakistan through the wholly unpatrolled areas of Badakshan. It is kind of a free-for-all region. There is no road on which motor vehicles can travel, in this narrow strip of Afghanistan that juts inside southwestern China.

China has also deployed its defensive arsenal along the Kazakstan borders. Reports indicate that China has missiles, nuclear and non-nuclear, along these borders. From time to time, Beijing has expressed concerns about the U.S. air base in Manas, Kyrgyzstan, which is less than 40 minutes' flying time away from western China's defensive line.

In addition, China is seeking a land-based outlet to



ISAF photo/USAF Sgt. Laura K. Smith

Every country in the region, from Iran to Russia, has been devastated by the explosion of Afghan opium production and traffic. Here, Afghan Border Police examine illegal drugs and weapons seized during an ambush, Dec. 14, 2008.

the Persian Gulf. The present plan is to develop a north-south highway through western Pakistan, and make that outlet more effective, by connecting it to Afghanistan and Central Asia. The instability of Afghanistan, because of the ongoing war, and the instability in Pakistan's southwestern province of Balochistan, centered on anti-Iran activities run from this area by Britain and the United States, have prevented China from developing infrastructure in this area. Such infrastructural development would not only benefit China, but all the nations linked to those roads and railroads.

India: India's major concern in this context is the terrorism pushed into its territory, by forces that operate within Pakistan. New Delhi is convinced that these anti-India forces can be curbed by the Pakistani authorities. India's other major demand will be to secure help from Pakistan to develop a land corridor through Pakistan into Afghanistan, Iran, and Central Asia. India has already requested it be permitted to open a rail corridor through Pakistan to Europe.

Pakistan: Devastated by the insurgency that followed the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, there is no question that Pakistan will require financial help from the United States, other foreign nations, and international financial institutions. Islamabad will also make sure that the Indian presence in Afghanistan does not become too large. Pakistan will welcome Chinese, as well as Iranian, presence in Afghanistan.