



American Military Operations inside Pakistan Will it help the US, Pakistan and India?

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Ever since the failed bombing attempt in New York's Times Square and its link to Pakistan through Faisal Shahzad, there has been increased discussion in the US, whether Washington should consider crossing the Durand line and expand its military operations into Pakistan. This option exists, but the following questions should be answered: What will be the primary objective of the US in expanding its military operations across the Durand Line? To punish the Taliban for plotting such activities and Pakistan for not doing more? Or to effectively neutralize the Taliban infrastructure within Pakistan, so that no future attacks occur on American soil? Or to achieve American objectives in Afghanistan?

Equally important are other questions. Can the US afford to increase its troops strength into Pakistan? More importantly, will this strategy make the situation better for the US on the western side of Pakistan, and for India on its eastern side?

I

"DO MORE CAMPAIGN"

THE DEBATE ON AMERICAN MILITARY EXPANSION INTO PAKISTAN

The debate on military expansion of US troops across the Durand Line is not a post Faisal Shahzad phenomenon. For the last couple of years, there has been a debate in the US on exploring the possibility of an American military presence in Pakistan for two reasons. Both reasons, understandably, arose in support of the American led international War against Terrorism in Afghanistan.

The first reason is to go on the offensive and seal the Durand Line effectively, thereby neutralizing any Taliban movement across the Durand. It is no secret that the Taliban has been using the Federally Administered Tribal Agencies (FATA) as a safe haven and recouping area to fight the US led troops in Afghanistan. It is also not a secret that Washington is unhappy with Pakistan's cooperation in terms of

curbing and neutralizing the Taliban network in FATA. The purpose of this essay, though is not to focus or explain why Pakistan, especially its intelligence agencies, are not cooperating with the US on this issue, it is enough to mention that they are playing a double game in neutralizing the Taliban.

The recent statement by Hillary Clinton that some officials in Pakistan's administration "are more informed about al Qaeda and Taliban than they let on...I believe somewhere in this government are people who know where Bin Laden, al Qaeda, Mullah Omar and the Afghan Taliban leadership are," is a reflection of these doubts and fears. Many in the American administration are convinced that Pakistan is reluctant to help the US to achieve its objectives, but worse, is acting against the U.S., by sharing information with Taliban groups, like the Huqqani network, based in Jalalabad, and with the Quetta Shura.

Hence, a section in the US is calling for a military operation inside Pakistan, if there has to be any positive result in the War against Terrorism in Afghanistan. The initiation of drone attacks into Pakistan's territory during the Bush administration and its continuation by the Obama administration is part of this debate. If the US cannot physically enter Pakistan to go after the Taliban network, it can at least make use of technology to cripple the militant leadership in the FATA. Drone attacks, may be a political liability in terms of collateral damage and create a bad image for the US. But, it has been a huge success militarily, in terms of eliminating many top Taliban and al Qaeda leaders in the region.

The second reason underlying the American debate for expanding its military presence into Pakistan's territory is defensive – to protect its supply lines to Afghanistan. At present, most of these supplies go through the Chaman crossing in Balochistan and Landikotal in the famous Khyber pass. Since 2008, there have been increasing attacks on the supply lines; trucks, materials and ammunition were looted and/or burnt from Peshawar to Landikotal. Hence,

there is a debate in the US to have a physically presence in Pakistan to protect the supply lines, and to fight the Taliban, if they interfere. Pakistan has staunchly refused to accept both reasons, though it has allowed drone attacks, due to its inability to effectively oppose the United States.

The current debate, calling for American military operations inside Pakistan began after the failed attack in New York's Times Square. A section in the US sees the involvement of Faisal Shahzad, his Pakistani background, and his connections with the Taliban as a "gamechanger" in US-Pakistan relations and wishes to pursue a 'So far, No more' approach. The real issue should not be whether there is a need for American military intervention, physically, in Pakistan against the Taliban. Rather it should be, what can such a strategy achieve, in terms of fulfilling the original American objectives.

II

DEBATING THE EXPANSION

WHERE? HOW MUCH? HOW LONG? AND FOR WHAT POLITICAL OBJECTIVES?

What can the US really do? Where can the US troops undertake any military incursion in Pakistan's territory to neutralize the Taliban? What will be the political and military objectives of this incursion? Do the US have sufficient troops to pursue such an incursion strategy? More importantly, will this attain the American objective?

The above questions are important to find out whether or not an incursion strategy will help the US, Pakistan (and of course India). First, where can the US send its troops into Pakistan's territory? To the FATA, especially North and South Waziristan? Or the NWFP? Should the US send its troops into Waziristan and the other Agencies of the FATA, what will the Taliban do? Will they fight against the American troops or slip away further east into the settled districts of NWFP and Punjab, and perhaps even go upto Karachi?

Given the way the Taliban retreated in Afghanistan when the American troops landed after 9/11, they are likely to repeat the same strategy, if the US chooses to expand its military presence into FATA. What else can the American troops do? Chase them

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into NWFP as well? Unlikely. Despite, the rhetoric, the US does not have the political will to pursue such an expansionist strategy.

Second, even if the US has the political will, do they have enough troops to pursue this strategy? The international community is closely watching the War against Terrorism in Afghanistan, in terms of military offensives, and troop levels present and required to wage a successful war. There are not enough troops available in Afghanistan to fight the Taliban. Any expansion into Pakistan will not only stretch the American troops, but seriously affect the ongoing war in Afghanistan.

Especially after the Marjah offensive (Operation *Moshtarak*) in Afghanistan during March-April 2010, and with the US planning a similar offensive in Kandahar, any military expansion into Pakistan will be counter productive for the war against terrorism against the Taliban in the rest of Afghanistan.

If the US does not have enough troops to pursue a military strategy in Pakistan, can it plan another Operation *Moshtarak*, meaning a combined operation, with international assistance? With most of the other countries discussing a withdrawal from Afghanistan, it is unlikely that the US can get any international support for such an initiative. After the recent elections, the UK is not likely to approve any such strategy; certainly not Germany and France. Even if is an open invitation is given, it is highly unlikely that countries like India and Israel would like to join this initiative!

Third, if a military presence is unlikely to materialize, can the US use its technology to wage a war while not being physically present? The US has been using its drone technology to its fullest extent to wage a war against the Taliban infrastructure in the FATA. Can the US expand this strategy and strike militant targets elsewhere, say in Balochistan (against the Quetta Shura) and the settled districts of NWFP?

Recently, there have been a lot of literature highlighting the understanding with the government of Pakistan on drone attacks. Some analysts, basing their arguments on interviews and surveys, have even concluded that the local tribal population welcomes the American drone attacks. The first argument is based on the thesis that Pakistan government tacitly approves the drone attacks, hence "the expansion of incursions into Pakistani territory would be met with vocal opposition, but would be more or less tolerated by the current Pakistani establishment."

Pakistan may tolerate these drone attacks if they are limited to the FATA, but is unlikely to continue that toleration, if the drone attacks expand into NWFP

and Balochistan. Let the US test Pakistani resolve by a couple of drone attacks into NWFP and Balochistan, and wait for Pakistan's response to find out whether they would tolerate them.

The second argument is based on the understanding that the Pashtun tribes of FATA are basically against the militants; since the drone attacks target the al Qaeda and Taliban, they welcome these drone attacks by the US. This negates the collateral damage argument, and makes one believe that there is an anti-Taliban and anti-al Qaeda feeling existing primarily in the various tribal agencies, which supports the American initiatives. This argument does not seem logical, especially if the collateral damage caused by these drone attacks is cited as a reason for Faisal Shahzad's anger, leading to the failed terrorist attempt in the Times Square in New York. Perhaps, there is a section within the Pashtun community, which does not support the Taliban justice; for example, many tribal elders are secular and do not agree with the Taliban's brand of fundamentalist Islam. Many tribal elders, secular leaders and jirgas have been targeted by the Taliban. But to believe that there is a pro-American sentiment and that the local Pashtun communities welcome drone attacks does not sound logical.

Finally, what is the political objective of such an expansion into Pakistan? Will this incursion force and threaten Islamabad to cooperate, or will it rupture the US-Pakistan relations? Will such incursions threaten and neutralize the Taliban of the Afghan and Pakistan lineage, or will it end up increasing their support base? More importantly, will this incursion undermine the anti-American sentiments in Afghanistan, which is the primary reason for the evolution of Faisals? Equally importantly, will this incursion make the political and military establishments [where? Pakistan or Afghanistan or both?] to feel safe and secure and pursue a rational policy, or will it increase their real and presumed insecurities?

The answer to the above questions is likely to be in the negative. The next section will argue out the reasons, but also conclude that any such military incursions will only destabilize the regions and make it even more insecure.

III

WHAT AFTER THE MILITARY EXPANSION? POLITICAL & MILITARY OBJECTIVES

The government of Pakistan is unlikely to welcome any overt American troops presence on its soil. Not because Islamabad is concerned about its sovereignty. Had it been a question of sovereignty, Islamabad would not have limited its writ in the tribal areas and argued that these tribal regions had

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never been effectively governed by the federal and provincial governments Islamabad would also not have allowed thousands of foreigners from Yemen to Chechenya to be illegally present in its territory from Karachi to Khyber.

More than the question of sovereignty, it will be issues relating to public hysteria and political opposition. President Musharraf could successfully take a U-turn and survive, thanks to the military support and forced silencing of his opposition. President Zardari and his PPP will not be able to repeat this story, especially with a huge anti-American sentiment, open and free media, and more importantly a shrewd and opportunistic opposition led by the Sharif brothers.

There will certainly be no open invitation to the American troops from the political leadership. Nor is the military likely to welcome any such developments. American boots on the ground can only occur with Washington arm twisting Pakistan's political and military establishments, worse, totally rupturing US-Pakistan relations. If the second contingency is to happen, it will be considered an invasion by the US. And Pakistan is no Afghanistan or Iraq. With nuclear weapons in their hands, this is what the Americans would want never to happen. Hence, they will settle for the first option – to force the military and political leadership to agree to American military presence.

Will a forcible American military incursion into Pakistan meet any political or military objectives? Least likely, for the following reasons. First, Pakistan is unlikely to cooperate; any collateral damage will be blown up out of all proportions by the media. Worse, Pakistan will stop cooperating or provide limited assistance. Maximum, Pakistan, under pressure will allow some American troops presence in the FATA.

Second, presuming that the American troops land in the FATA, what will the Taliban and al Qaeda do? They will effectively get displaced from the FATA and enter into the settled districts of the NWFP. With a section already settled in Balochistan, known as the Quetta Shura, the movement of Taliban into Punjab-- the biggest province of Pakistan-- cannot be discounted. Worse, they can even move into South

Punjab. In the recent months, there has been a huge discussion about the Punjabi Taliban, primarily from the Bahawalpur and Multan areas in South Punjab. Many of the sectarian organizations of the Shia persuasion, along with the Jaish-e-Mohammad, have been fighting along with the Taliban. These groups from the Punjab, referred to as Punjabi Taliban, can provide safe havens east of the Indus. Given the substantial presence of Pashtuns and religious political parties in Karachi, the dislocation of Taliban from the FATA into the largest port town of Pakistan can also not be discounted. The military incursion by the US, even if limited to FATA, will thus dismantle the Taliban network from FATA, but only to spread it all over Pakistan.

In this situation, what will the youth like Faisal Shahzad do in Pakistan? Will they feel threatened and submit to the American military power? Or will they get angrier and join the Taliban and other radical organizations? Given the inbuilt anti-American sentiments among the youth in Pakistan, the last option is likely to take place. Thus the very purpose of American military action will get defeated, and not get cooperation from Pakistan. Worse, it will expand the Taliban network, create more Faisal Shahzads, and destabilize the whole of Pakistan.

This will be a perfect recipe for a military takeover in Pakistan, even before the American withdrawal from Afghanistan. Unless, the Americans are ready for the long haul and decide to clean up the extremist network, come what may. Given their past and recent histories, has there been any political or military engagement, that the US has fought to the finish? The history of the post-Second World War is littered with half hearted efforts by the US based on narrow political and military objectives, which have not only destabilized individual countries, but also entire region.

IV CONCLUSIONS IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

Many in India secretly wish that the Americans would enter Pakistan and physically clean up the militant mess. Will that help India, in the long run? Will the region be stable after American military incursion into Pakistan?

With the Taliban shifting from Afghanistan into the FATA, and absorbing youths and organizations like the Jaish and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, any American military incursion will only shift the militants base closer to the Indus. If the Taliban had crossed the Durand Line after 9/11, they will cross the Indus now, if there are any further military incursions into FATA. More importantly, it will only increase anti-American feeling in Pakistan, which forms the basis for

extremism among the youth (educated and uneducated, from lower and elite classes), which the intelligence agencies could exploit to pursue their anti-Indian agenda.

Any adventurism, without taking into account the long term political and security fallouts, will only make the region more unstable, as happened in the 1980s, with the jihad strategy led by the US and in the 1990s, with the Taliban strategy led by Pakistan. India, though, was not part of the conflict in this region in the 1980s and 1990s, the pangs of conflict was felt in J&K and elsewhere. Pakistan's military, its intelligence agencies and extremist forces would not have become so powerful within the country, had it not been for the jihad and instability across the Durand Line during the 1980s and 1990s. Nor, would there have emerged a strong anti-Indian sentiment amongst the Pakistani youth. Any American military intervention in Pakistan, is not likely to help the US achieve its primary objectives – political and military. Nor is it likely to make Pakistan a stable democracy. Nor is it likely to secure the region and address India's concerns. Unless, the US is planning for the long haul and to build a democratic Pakistan from the scratch, which is unlikely.

To conclude, it is useful to refer to an exchange from the Mahabharat, the great Indian epic. Just before the beginning of the Great War in Kurukshetra, between the Pandavs and Kauravas, Lord Krishna, who believed he had all the answers and carried the burden of finding a solution to every problem, called for a meeting among the Pandavs. He then asked the wise and brave present in the meeting: Given the destruction that such a war is likely to cause, is there any way, the war can be avoided? With the armies arrayed on both sides and waiting to fight each other, every one answers in the negative, except for Sahadeva. Considered to be a master of astrology who knows what is likely to happen, Sahadeva conveys the options available and concludes: Lord, finally, if we could tie you up and make you dis-functional, the war can certainly be avoided.

In the same way, the US believes it has the answer to every issue and carries the burden of finding a solution for every problem. Without understanding, that in many parts of the world, its policies and strategies is a part of the problem, rather than the solution. Wish one could be Sahadeva and tell the US: If only we could tie you up and make you dis-functional!



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