

US occupation of Afghanistan precipitates deadly disorder

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On January 1, US drones pounded Waziristan in Pakistan's Tribal Areas. Death toll was 5. It was an obnoxious new year message (reiterated on Jan. 2 with 3 more deaths) to Pakistan: 2009 would not be different from the previous year.

"In 2008, US attacked Tribal Areas and Frontier province for at least 35 times", a defence official told this scribe. "Since 2004, the USA has attacked Pakistan at least 50 times, claiming over 450 lives", he added.

These strikes---by Predator drones as well as commando raids from helicopter--- increased in frequency during Bush's waning months and have been seen in Pakistan as America's third war. Unlike the other two, Iraq and Afghanistan, the war against Pakistan is though undeclared yet it was, according to *New York Times*, approved by George Bush in July 2008.

Commentators fear an increased US onslaught as Barack Obama assumes office since he has been publicly advocating that the United States must be willing to strike al-Qaeda targets inside Pakistan. "If we have actionable intelligence about high-value terrorist targets and President Musharraf won't act, we will," he told a union-activists meeting back in August 2007. His comments have caused great anxiety in Pakistan.

Apparently, Pakistan government has strongly condemned the US strikes inside Pakistan but has not reacted militarily. However, recurring Taliban attacks on Nato supplies moving through Peshawar have been seen as a Pakistani shot across the bow to Washington. Reportedly, 70 percent Nato supplies, destined for Afghanistan, move through Pakistan. In last six months, 230 trucks have been destroyed in six such attacks. In December, Nato supplies thrice came under attack in 24 hours. Talking to this scribe, Ahmed Rashid attributed the war-like situation at Pak-Afghan border to "Taliban's winter offensive aimed at pre-empting arrival of 30,000 US troops reaching Kabul any time this year." Writer of Taliban, journalist Ahmed Rashid has been supportive of post-9/11 US intervention in Afghanistan. Asked why Pakistan became a target for suicide bombers only after US occupation of Afghanistan, he blamed "Musharraf regime's dual policy: chasing al-Qaida under US pressure while supporting local extremist groups." He sees an "assertive military policy" coupled with "political strategy and socio-economic uplift" of the region as a solution to present chaos in Tribal Areas bordering Afghanistan.

Asfandiyar Wali, president of Peoples National Party (ANP), however, advocates "Peace Deals" with Taliban. The ANP, a party tracing its roots in Gandhi's Indian National Congress, won the elections in February 2008 and formed a coalition government in Frontier province. In a telephonic interview with this scribe, Wali attributed the turmoil on Afghan border--- displacing 30,000 citizens only in Bajour district only--- to US-sponsored proxy war against Soviet presence in Afghanistan during 1980s.

Activist and writer Tariq Ali, however, believes: "The strikes against Pakistan represent - like the decisions of President Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, to bomb and then invade Cambodia - a

desperate bid to salvage a war that was never good, but has now gone badly wrong”.

The Nato body count in Afghanistan has surpassed 1000. Ali thinks ”when in doubt, escalate the war is an old imperial motto”.

Besides precipitating hitherto undeclared Pak-US war, occupation of Afghanistan has further inflamed Indo-Pak tensions. Recent terrorist attack on Bombay was yet another effect of this occupation. Many observers believe, the Bombay attack November last year was an attempt to provoke Indo-Pak tension thus forcing Pakistan to move 130,000 troops from Afghan border to Indian border. However, Pakistan is also nervous over growing Indian influence in Kabul. A deadly suicide attack on Indian embassy in Kabul, July last year, was blamed on Pakistan. Iran is understandably nervous over US presence in Afghanistan but Russia and China, concerned over US presence, have also conducted joint military operations. Both these countries understand that US wanted to site military facilities on their borders in the guise of ”war on terror” while all the talk about ”liberation of Afghan women” was mere a fig leaf.

If anything, US occupation of Afghanistan has not merely triggered further terrorism but most dangerously: district after district in Frontier province is being lost to Taliban while the writ of Pakistani state has simply evaporated in Tribal Areas. Since 2003, 13648 people have been killed in clashes between Taliban and Pakistan’s security forces, 5282 of them civilians, 1833 security forces’ personnel and 6305 insurgents. In districts now under Taliban control, a strict ’Shria code’ has been implemented. Beheading, stoning to death, lashing and amputations are the punishments publicly meted out to ’adulterers’, ’thieves’ and ’US spies’. Besides dress code and compulsory beards for men, women have been told to stay home. Girls education has not merely been forbidden, Taliban simply set girls’ schools on fire. Only in Swat district, over 130 schools have been gutted leaving 72,000 students without any chance of learning (*The News* Dec 25). The ”war on terror” instead of liberating the Afghan woman is instead fast depriving Pakistani woman of whatever little rights she had won.

P.S.

* Farooq Sulehria’s ZSpace Page.

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