

America's Quest for Hegemony

The Alleged Threat of Al Qaeda

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In-depth Report: [PAKISTAN](#)

The current received wisdom in the United States is that the militants in northwest Pakistan have provided safe havens to Al Qaeda has along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border and the greatest threat to America's security comes from this region. No US official or journalist or think-tank has ever raised or answered the question that Alan Greenspan posed in his book, *The Age of Turbulence*:

"There was no bigger question in Washington than, Why no second attack? If Al Qaeda's intent was to disrupt the US economy, as bin Laden declared, the attacks had to continue. Our society was open, our borders porous, and ability to detect weapons and bombs was weak. I asked this question of a lot of people at the highest levels of government, and no one seemed to have a convincing response."

Mr Greenspan is no ordinary person. He is not just a former chairman of the Federal Reserve. He has known George Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and other top leaders for years and has had access to everyone who is anybody in Washington. The reason he did not get a convincing response is that the people at the highest level of [US] government do not have one. Why?

On Dec 21, 2007, US Defence Secretary Robert M Gates said a resurgent Al Qaeda terrorist network has shifted the focus of its attacks to Pakistan. "Al Qaeda right now seems to have turned its face toward Pakistan and attacks on the Pakistani government and Pakistan people," Gates told press reporters.

The Washington Post noted that the Pentagon chief did not specify the nature or location of the group's operations in Pakistan, and quoted Pentagon specialist on counterterrorism efforts on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, who dismissed the defence secretary's assessment. "Gates is drinking the . . . Kool-Aid like this administration has for the last six years". He also said that the fighters there are not affiliated with Al Qaeda. He spoke on the condition of anonymity because he wants to keep his job.

Nor is it clear that Al Qaeda is the real threat in the rest of Pakistan, commented Teresita C Schaffer, a former deputy assistant secretary of state for South Asia. "Clearly, extremist violence has emerged as the biggest danger to the Pakistan state," she said. "I don't know if it is Al Qaeda or not."

On Jan 2, 2008, Thomas H Kean and Lee H Hamilton, who served as chairman and vice chairman, respectively, of the 9/11 commission wrote an op-ed piece in *The New York Times*, accusing the US government of a cover up as no one in the administration ever told the commission of the existence of videotapes of detainee interrogations. "As a legal

matter, it is not up to us to examine the CIA's failure to disclose the existence of these tapes. That is for others. What we do know is that government officials decided not to inform a lawfully constituted body, created by Congress and the president, to investigate one of the greatest tragedies to confront this country. We call that obstruction," they concluded.

The commission itself was not keen to pursue the full facts. On page 172 of its report, it states that ultimately the question of who financed the attacks "is of little practical significance", noting that "to date the US government has not been able to determine the origin of the money used for 9/11 attacks." That's right. The 9/11 Commission concluded in its report that it isn't important to follow the money trail leading to those ultimately responsible for this crime

It is a matter of record that even after more than five years of his arrest, the US government has refused to try the alleged mastermind of 9/11, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, in a normal civil federal court.

Why would the US government not pursue the Al Qaeda money trail leading to 9/11 attacks? Why would the CIA destroy video tapes containing hundreds of hours of interrogations of Al Qaeda detainees in Guantanamo Bay? Why would it obstruct independent investigation by members of the US Congress? Why would the Pentagon and the CIA not try Khalid and other Al Qaeda members in a normal court?

These are crucial and extremely important questions. Unless the US can answer these critical questions, its critics can rightfully and legitimately question its theory that Al Qaeda has safe havens in Pakistan.

In the past, the US intelligence had concluded that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. That was a lie that has been so well documented that it needs no further comment. The real motive was to conquer Iraq and control its oil fields.

In October 2007, President Bush had suggested that a nuclear-armed Iran could lead to "World War III" and Vice President Dick Cheney promised "serious consequences" if the government in Tehran did not abandon its nuclear program. But the US establishment and its intelligence agencies had decided to shift their focus away from Iran. In December 2007, a National Intelligence Estimate that represented the consensus view of all 16 American spy agencies, concluded that Iran halted its nuclear weapons program in 2003 and that the program remained frozen, contradicting its own judgment in 2005 that Tehran was working relentlessly toward building a nuclear bomb.

Given that the US has thus far failed to establish the responsibility for 9/11 attacks, the fact that there has been no attack by Al Qaeda on the US soil since 9/11, the real motive behind Iraq War, and the systematic disinformation campaign about Iran's nuclear program, it is perfectly logical to question the real motives of the US policy in Pakistan.

The issue has assumed greater and urgent significance by the mischievous remarks of Joe Biden, the Democrat vice presidential candidate, made in the debate with Sarah Palin. "Pakistan's (nuclear) missiles can already hit Israel," Biden thundered. But what was he talking about? Pakistan does not have the capability to hit Israel. It has never threatened Israel. Jackson Diehl of Washington Post (Oct 3) commented: "a good deal of what Biden said was exaggerated, distorted or simply false — especially in his nominal area of expertise, foreign policy."

Robert Fisk, writing in the UK's The Independent (Oct 4) ridiculed Biden's statement that there have been 7,000 madrassas built ... and that's where bin Laden lives and we will go at him if we have actually (sic) intelligence. Fisk chided: "Seven thousand? Where on earth does this figure come from? Yes, there are thousands of religious schools in Pakistan - but they're not all on the border". Fisk warns about the real US agenda, "We must gird ourselves for the next struggle against 'world evil' in Pakistan".

Despite all the propaganda in the US media and think tanks about the alleged threat of Al Qaeda, the ground realities tell a different story. On August 5, 2008, The News International reported, "Impeccable official sources have said that strong evidence and circumstantial evidence of American acquiescence to terrorism inside Pakistan was outlined by President Musharraf, General Kayani and DG (ISI) Nadeem Taj in their separate meetings with US Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mullen and CIA Deputy Director Stephen R Kappes on July 12 in Rawalpindi." The top US military commander and the CIA official were also asked why the CIA-run predator and the US military did not swing into action when they were provided the exact location of Baitullah Mehsud on May 24, 2008.

It is a matter of record that Abdullah Mahsud, Baitullah Mahsud's cousin and former leader of the so-called Taliban-e-Pakistan, was captured by the US troops in Afghanistan in December 2001 and kept in custody till March 2004 when he was released from Guantanamo Bay and allowed to return to Waziristan. Abdullah played a key role in organizing the 'militants' before he was killed by Pakistan's security forces when Musharraf came under heavy pressure from the Chinese after Abdullah Mahsud kidnapped two Chinese engineers.

What does it all add up to for Pakistan? Where all this is leading to? What is the current strategic objective of the United States in Pakistan? Prof. Michel Chossudovsky, a professor at Ottawa University and the director of the Center for Research on Globalization, Canada, offers a chilling explanation:

"The political impasse is deliberate. It is part of an evolving US foreign policy agenda, which favors disruption and disarray in the structures of the Pakistani State. Indirect rule by the Pakistani military and intelligence apparatus is to be replaced by more direct forms of US interference, including an expanded US military presence inside Pakistan. This expanded military presence is also dictated by the Middle East-Central Asia geopolitical situation and Washington's ongoing plans to extend the Middle East war to a much broader area."

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