

Pakistan could end cooperation in war on terror

By [Global Research](#)

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The furor intensified Friday over Washington's decision to pursue Islamic militant targets inside Pakistan, with opposition lawmakers threatening the country could pull out of the war on terror if the U.S. refuses to respect its borders, reported [Associated Press](#).

About 100 protesters burned American flags after the latest missile attack left at least 12 people dead in the North Waziristan region of the troubled northwest. Residents said they heard the sound of propeller-driven U.S. Predator drones circling overhead before the explosions.

President Bush secretly approved more aggressive cross-border operations in July, current and former American officials have told The Associated Press.

Since Aug. 13, there have been at least seven reported missile strikes as well as a raid by helicopter-borne U.S. commandos that Pakistani officials claim killed 15 civilians in tribally governed territory where the government has little control. The frontier region is considered a likely hiding place for Osama bin Laden and his deputy, Ayman al-Zawahri.

Pakistan's government and military have issued stiff protests to Washington over the recent rash of cross-border strikes, although the criticism appeared to be mostly rhetoric aimed at soothing domestic anger, given that Pakistan has few options for stronger action.

Domestic media have criticized the government for not reacting more strongly, even suggesting the public criticism is just lip service and that a secret deal has been reached with Pakistan's leadership allowing cross-border incursions.

Pakistan army chief Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani has denied that and vowed to protect the country's sovereignty "at all cost."

Leaders, including new President Asif Ali Zardari, have reiterated their commitment to fighting violent Islamic extremism and have aired no threats to withdraw their cooperation.

However, they are sensitive to public opinion in Pakistan, which is hostile to U.S. policy in the region.

Agitation on the issue by former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who heads the main opposition party and has a large popular following, could make it hard for Islamabad to maintain the close alliance with Washington forged by Zardari's predecessor, Pervez Musharraf.

"We need at this time to make it clear to foreign countries that Pakistan will not tolerate such actions," said Ahsan Iqbal, a lawmaker in Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-N party. "If it continues, then Pakistan can consider pulling out completely from this war on terror."

Iqbal and another party leader called for an urgent parliament session to debate how Pakistan can respond.

"The parliament must be convened on a one-point agenda, because the nation is under a threat of war," said lawmaker Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan. "Irrespective of where the threat is, every inch of this country is sovereign. Every inch of this country is sacred."

Defense Minister Chaudhry Ahmad Mukhtar said Pakistan's armed forces were "ready to meet any such eventuality if this is repeated" and evoked Pakistan's war against India in 1965.

Despite the strong language, parliament has few options beyond issuing a condemnation of cross-border raids and reiterating the country's sovereignty.

Realistically, there's not much Pakistan can do to stop the U.S. from mounting cross-border attacks, short of shooting down helicopters carrying allied forces. And breaking off relations would mean an end to billions of dollars in U.S. aid at a time when Pakistan's economy badly needs foreign assistance.

Most analysts doubt Pakistan is ready to reverse Musharraf's decision in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks to stand with Washington. Even Musharraf raised the specter of pulling out of the war on terror, complaining repeatedly that Pakistan's sacrifices in fighting the militants were not properly recognized.

Officials say more than 1,000 troops and police have died since 2001, far more than the losses for international forces in Afghanistan. Pakistan has also suffered a wave of suicide bombings that began last year and has killed and maimed thousands more.

Pakistani commentators have been near-unanimous in predicting that unilateral U.S. strikes and civilian casualties will wreck the moderate government's effort to persuade its citizens that fighting violent Islamic extremism is in their own national interest.

"America is daily deepening the well of resentment against itself that no amount of aid or pious diplomatic platitudes will ever fill," The News daily said in an editorial Friday.

Some analysts suggest the Bush administration is turning up the heat in Pakistan, hoping for last-minute victories in the face of a growing Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan.

But such cross-border operations are a "risky maneuver" and the U.S. has to be careful not to dismiss the help it is getting from Pakistan, said Robert Hathaway, director of the Asia program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington.

"Too many of these operations will make the Pakistani army less willing to work with us," which could negatively affect future U.S. leadership," he said.

"Because the situation in Iraq has by most accounts improved, there's a capacity for the administration to shift gears and devote more military and intelligence resources to Pakistan and Afghanistan issues," said Daniel Markey, senior fellow at the Council on Foreign

Relations.

“What I don’t know and what will be important is whether this is a shift that will be lasting,” he said.

Zardari and Afghan President Hamid Karzai, at a joint news conference Tuesday, emphasized the need to eliminate civilian casualties, which fuel anti-government sentiment.

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