

Rumsfeld Helped Al Qaeda Establish a Stronghold in Northwestern Pakistan

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The Bush administration is contemplating sending US Forces to Pakistan with a view to neutralizing Al Qaeda in its safe haven in the Northwestern region of Waziristan.



Map: Waziristan including Federal Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)

This initiative is part of the Administration's "preemptive war doctrine".

The Al Qaeda stronghold in a remote mountainous area is said to constitute a threat to the security of the American Homeland. According to the Directorate of National Intelligence,

"Al Qaeda remains the most serious threat to the United States (...)

We assess the group has protected or regenerated key elements of its homeland attack capability, including: a safe haven in the Pakistan Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), operational lieutenants and its top leadership." (Inside The Pentagon July 26, 2007),)

At closed sessions of the Senate and House Armed Services and Intelligence committees, Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence James Clapper confirmed the Administration's resolve to dismantle the "terror network" inside Pakistan:

"The United States was not content to sit still while the militant network blamed for the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington regenerated its strength in North Waziristan. (...)

"I think our objective will be to neutralize, not eliminate, but certainly make this safe haven — as we have the others — less safe and less appealing for AQ

[Al Qaeda],” (quoted by Reuters, 26 July 2007)



Waziristan

This statement was made following the release on July 11, 2007 of the CIA’s “National Intelligence Estimate” which points to a possible Al Qaeda attack on America. The intelligence report also suggests that Al Qaeda’s stronghold from which it plans its terrorist operations is in the tribal areas of Northwestern Pakistan. Both Washington and Islamabad accuse militant tribesmen in Waziristan of “harboring al Qaeda and supporting the Taliban”.

The White House Favors a US Military Operation in Pakistan

Bush’s Homeland Security adviser Frances Townsend, who advises the president on domestic security issues, concurs with this assessment:

“the White House is not ruling out using [the] U.S. military to attack terrorists camps in Pakistan.” (Fox News, July 22, 2007)

In Chorus

In an evolving interagency consensus, the State Department has made similar statements. In separate hearings before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns broadly concurs with The Pentagon and the White House:

“The United States would take unilateral action against Al Qaeda in Pakistan under certain circumstances.” (Reuters 26 July 2007).

The logic of these statements is that Al Qaeda is indelibly plotting a second major attack on America out of its Waziristan stronghold, and “we must go after them”.

According to the Senate and House committees, Pakistan’s military involvement has been ineffective. A carefully planned and targeted US military operation directed against Al Qaeda’s headquarters is called for:

“Al Qaeda is now in a part of Pakistan that is largely inaccessible to Pakistani forces, the Pakistani government. Always has been. And it is a very difficult operating environment for them,” said Edward Gistaro, the top U.S. intelligence analyst on transnational threats. (Reuters op cit)

Providing a Safe-haven to Al Qaeda Fighters?

(The following section of this article is in part based on the author’s earlier analysis in “*War on Terrorism*”, Chapter XIV entitled *Providing a Safe-haven to Al Qaeda Fighters*)

The Bush administration is using the alleged presence of Al Qaeda operatives in Northwestern Pakistan with a view to justifying a pre-emptive military intervention on a sovereign country. Such an action on the part of the US administration would have far-reaching implications. It could potentially lead to an escalation of the US sponsored “war on terrorism” beyond the boundaries of the Middle East -Central Asian region.

Is the Al Qaeda stronghold in Waziristan a real threat to the security of America?

How did Al Qaeda manage to establish its headquarters in Northwestern Pakistan in the first place? This question is crucial in assessing recent Bush administration’s commitments to neutralizing the terror network:

The Al Qaeda stronghold was established in the months following the US-NATO invasion of Afghanistan. The military campaign commenced in early October and was completed in late November 2001. The invasion was a war of retribution directed against Afghanistan, for the alleged sponsorship of the September 11, 2001 attacks by the Taliban government. (To this date there is no evidence that the Afghan government had any involvement in these attacks.)

In late November 2001, the Northern Alliance supported by US bombing raids took the hill town of Kunduz in Northern Afghanistan. Eight thousand or more men “had been trapped inside the city in the last days of the siege, roughly half of whom were Pakistanis. Afghans, Uzbeks, Chechens, and various Arab mercenaries accounted for the rest.”

(Seymour M. Hersh, *The Getaway*, *The New Yorker*, 21 January 2002, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/articles/HER206A.html>)

Also among these fighters, were several senior Pakistani military and intelligence officers, who had been dispatched to the war theater by the Pakistani military.

The presence of high-ranking Pakistani military and intelligence advisers in the ranks of the Taliban/ Al Qaeda forces was known and approved by Washington. Pakistan’s military intelligence, the ISI, which also played a direct role in the 9/11 attacks, was overseeing the operation.

(For details on the links of ISI to the CIA, see Michel Chossudovsky, *America’s “War on Terrorism”*, ch. II, IV and X.)

President Bush in a November 2001 statement in the Rose Garden of the White House confirmed America’s resolve to going after the terrorists:

I said a long time ago, one of our objectives is to smoke them out and get them running and bring them to justice... I also said we'll use whatever means necessary to achieve that objective — and that's exactly what we're going to do. (The White House, November 26, 2001)

Ironically, rather than arresting Al Qaeda “foreign fighters” who were combating alongside the Taliban, the US military actually facilitated their evacuation in military planes to Northwestern Pakistan.

A large number of these “foreign fighters” were never brought to justice, nor were they detained or interrogated. In fact quite the opposite: as confirmed by Seymour Hersh, they were flown to safety on the orders of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld:

The Bush Administration ordered US Central Command to set up a special air corridor to help insure the safety of the Pakistani rescue flights from Kunduz to the northwest corner of Pakistan ...

[Pakistan President] Musharraf won American support for the airlift by warning that the humiliation of losing hundreds-and perhaps thousands-of Pakistani Army men and intelligence operatives would jeopardize his political survival. “Clearly, there is a great willingness to help Musharraf,” an American intelligence official told me [Seymour Hersh]. A CIA analyst said that it was his understanding that the decision to permit the airlift was made by the White House and was indeed driven by a desire to protect the Pakistani leader. The airlift ‘made sense at the time,’ the CIA analyst said. ‘Many of the people they spirited away were the Taliban leadership’-who Pakistan hoped could play a role in a postwar Afghan government. According to this person, “Musharraf wanted to have these people to put another card on the table” in future political negotiations. “We were supposed to have access to them,’ he said, but ‘it didn’t happen,” and the rescued Taliban remain unavailable to American intelligence.

According to a former high-level American defense official, the airlift was approved because of representations by the Pakistanis that “there were guys-intelligence agents and underground guys-who needed to get out. (Seymour Hersh, op cit)

In other words, the semi-official story was: “we were tricked into it” by the Pakistanis.

Out of some 8000 or more men, 3300 surrendered to the Northern Alliance, leaving between 4000 and 5000 men “unaccounted for”. According to Indian intelligence sources (quoted by Hersh), at least 4000 men including two Pakistani Army generals had been evacuated. (Ibid). The operation was casually described as a big mistake, leading to “unintended consequences”. According to US officials:

“what was supposed to be a limited evacuation, apparently slipped out of control, and, as an unintended consequence, an unknown number of Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters managed to join in the exodus.” (quoted in Hersh op cit)

An Indian Press report confirmed that those evacuated, courtesy of Uncle Sam, were not the moderate elements of the Taliban, but rather “hard-core Taliban” and Al Qaeda fighters.

(Times of India, 24 January 2002).

“Terrorists” or “Intelligence Assets”?

The foreign and Pakistani Al Qaeda fighters were evacuated to Northwestern Pakistan as part of a military-intelligence operation led by officials of Pakistan’s ISI in consultation with their CIA counterparts.

Many of these “foreign fighters” were also incorporated into the two main Kashmiri terrorist rebel groups, Lashkar-e-Taiba (“Army of the Pure”) and Jaish-e-Muhammad (“Army of Mohammed”). In other words, one of the main consequences of the US sponsored evacuation was to reinforce these Kashmiri terrorist organisations.

Saving Al Qaeda Fighters, Kidnapping Civilians

Why would the US military arrange for several thousand “foreign fighters” to be airlifted and flown to safety?

Why were they not arrested and sent to Camp Delta, Guantanamo?

What is the relationship between the evacuation of “foreign fighters” on the one hand and the detention (on trumped up charges) and imprisonment of so-called “enemy combatants” at the Guantanamo concentration camp.

While Defense Secretary Rumsfeld claimed at the time that the Guantanamo detainees, were “vicious killers”, the evidence suggests that most of those arrested and sent to Guantanamo were in fact civilians:

...The Northern Alliance has received millions of dollars from the U.S. Government, and motivated the arrest of thousands of innocent civilians in Afghanistan on the pretext they were terrorists, to help the U.S. Government justify the “war on terror”. Some Guantanamo prisoners “were grabbed by Pakistani soldiers patrolling the Afghan border who collected bounties for prisoners” 13. Other prisoners were caught by Afghan warlords and sold for bounty offered by the U.S. for Al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters⁸. Many of the prisoners are described in classified intelligence reports as “farmers, taxi drivers, cobblers, and laborers.

(Testimony provided by the Lawyer of Sageer, quoted in America’s War on Terrorism)

Whereas Al Qaeda fighters and their senior Pakistani advisers were “saved” on the orders of Donald Rumsfeld, also on the orders of the Secretary of Defense, innocent civilians, who had no relationship whatsoever to the war theater, were routinely categorized as “enemy combatants”, kidnapped, interrogated, tortured and sent to Guantanamo.

Why?

Did the Bush administration need to “recruit detainees” among the civilian population and pass them off as “terrorists” with a view to bearing out its resolve and commitment to the “global war on terrorism” (GWOT).

Did they need to boost up the numbers “to fill the gap” resulting from the several thousand

Al Qaeda fighters, who had been secretly evacuated, on the orders of Donald Rumsfeld and flown to safety?

In other words, are these detentions part of the Pentagon's propaganda campaign?

Conversely, did the Bush administration require the existence of an Al Qaeda stronghold to continued military interventions in its preemptive war on terrorism. Were these "terrorists" needed in the Kashmiri Islamic militant groups in the context of a ISI-CIA covert op?

Whatever the motivation, we are dealing with a diabolical intelligence operation.

More than 600 people from 42 countries, have been held in the Camp Delta concentration camp in Guantanamo. While US officials continue to claim that they are "enemy combatants" arrested in Afghanistan, a large number of those detained had never set foot in Afghanistan. They were kidnapped in several foreign countries including Pakistan, Bosnia and The Gambia on the West Coast of Africa, and taken to the US military base in Bagram, Afghanistan, before being transported to Guantanamo.

Several children were held in Guantanamo, aged between 13 and 15 years old. According to Pentagon officials: "the boys were brought to Guantanamo Bay because they were considered a threat and they had "high value" intelligence that US authorities wanted." (Washington Post, 23 August 2003). According to Britain's Muslim News: "out of the window has gone any regard for the norms of international law and order ... with Muslims liable to be kidnapped in any part of the world to be transported to Guantanamo Bay and face summary justice."

(<http://www.muslimnews.co.uk/index/press.php?pr=177>)

The children were arrested but none of the real "foreign fighters" who had been evacuated, courtesy of Uncle Sam, were considered a security threat. Quite the opposite they had been flown to safety in US and Pakistani military planes.

Going after Al Qaeda in Northwestern Pakistan

In the months following the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the Pentagon decided to boost its counter terrorism operations in Northwestern Pakistan with the support of the Pakistani military. These operations were launched in the tribal areas of northern Pakistan, following the visit to Islamabad of Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage and Assistant Secretary of State Christina Rocca in October 2003.

The operation was aired live on network TV in the months leading up to the November 2004 US presidential elections. The targets were bin Laden and his deputy Ayman al-Zawahri, who were said to be hiding in these border regions of Northern Pakistan.

The Pentagon described the strategy of "going after" bin Laden as a "hammer and anvil" approach, "with Pakistani troops moving into semiautonomous tribal areas on their side of the border, and Afghans and American forces sweeping the forbidding terrain on the other". (The Record, Kitchener, 13 March 2004).

In March 2004, Britain's Sunday Express, quoting "a US intelligence source" reported that:

bin Laden and about 50 supporters had been boxed in among the Toba Kakar

mountainous north of the Pakistani city of Quetta and were being watched by satellite... Pakistan then sent several thousand extra troops to the tribal area of South Waziristan, just to the north. (quoted in South China Morning Post, 7 March 2004)

In a bitter irony, it was to this Northern region of Pakistan that the estimated 4000 “foreign fighters” had been airlifted, in the first place, in November 2001, on the orders of (former) Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. And these Al Qaeda units were being supplied by Pakistan’s ISI. (UPI, 1 November 2001)

In other words, the same units of Pakistan’s military intelligence, the ISI, –which coordinated the November 2001 evacuation of foreign fighters on behalf of US military — are now involved in the “hammer and anvil” search for Al Qaeda in northwestern Pakistan, with the support of Pakistani regular forces.

From a military standpoint, it does not make sense. Evacuate the enemy to safe-haven, and then a few years later “go after them” in the tribal hills of Northwestern Pakistan.

Why did they not arrest these Al Qaeda fighters in November 2001?

Was it incompetence or poor military planning? Or was it a diabolical covert op to actually safeguard and sustain “enemy number one”?

Because without this “outside enemy” personified by Osama bin Laden, there would be no “war on terrorism”.

The operation certainly makes sense from the point of view of war propaganda

The terrorists are there, we put them there.

And then “we go after them” and show the World that we are committed to weeding out the terrorists.

The Bush campaign needs more than the rhetoric of the “war on terrorism”. It needs a “real” “war on terrorism”, with an Al Qaeda headquarters in the chosen theater of the tribal areas of Waziristan.

Where is the Threat?

In recent developments, the existence of this Al Qaeda stronghold is now being used as a justification for a US military intervention in Pakistan on the pretext that a coordinated “attack on the American Homeland” is being designed and masterminded from these inaccessible mountainous areas, which have little in terms of infrastructure and communications networks.

Believe it or Not!



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