

Shifting the “War on Terror” to Pakistan: The Real Target is Pakistan’s Nuclear Potential

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Global Research, October 13, 2010

[The Nation \(Pakistan\)](#) 13 October 2010

Region: [Asia](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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The NATO forces attack on FC post in FATA has evoked “deep concern” from Pakistan, as the media reports indicate. Our Foreign Minister has expressed this concern to NATO’s Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen at its headquarters in Brussels. One hoped that the NATO would see the gravity of reaction in Pakistan, but that was a wishful thinking. Mr Rasmussen in the “good and open” discussion with our FM admitted that the attack was carried out “intentionally” – so much for our deep concern. The NATO boss thinks that by offering condolences and expressing regrets he has settled the incident.

In a previous article regarding America’s strategic objectives in Pakistan, I had opined that the ongoing war on terror in Afghanistan is aimed to take the operations into the Pakistani territory. The real target is Pakistan’s nuclear potential; they have no plausible security threat from the ill-equipped Talibans or ragtag extremist. Arthur Herman, an author and scholar at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), has hinted at the real objective of the US. AEI is a think tank closely associated with the neoconservatives and is openly committed to Israel’s security. It supplies advisors to officials of the US administration and serves as “incubator for new policy ideas and is critical part of the web of power in Washington” (The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy by Mearsheimer and Walt).

What Herman suggests in his write-up is in fact a policy direction to the US administration. He implies that the policy of sending drones and attacking the militant hideouts in the Pakistan territory has not worked. His line of argument is that Pakistan encourages drone attacks on those terrorist who pose a threat to them; they do not support attack on groups who target the Afghan government. His underlying thrust is obvious, he wants to tell the US and NATO forces to prop up the Afghan government against Pakistan.

One can understand now why President Hamid Karazai vents his anger on Pakistan from time to time. Herman suggests that if Pakistan government is further destabilised “the only thing keeping the country’s nukes out of the hands of Al-Qaeda may have to be the US troops.” So, the thrust is Pakistan’s nukes. It is a tacit way to tell the policymakers in Washington to keep the pressure on our country, which will weaken the Pakistani government’s standing causing instability. That will provide the reason for the US troops to move in.

What is unknown to the public in Pakistan is that the pressure is escalating. Herman quotes interesting figures of NATO excursions into the Pakistan territory. In 2009, he lists 45 Predator drone attacks, in 2010 so far the attacks have tripled – 22 attacks in September alone. We know about the drone attacks as these are reported in the media, but what we do not know and our media does not report, is the fact that the US-led NATO forces are

launching crossborder raids into Pakistan to flush out the Taliban insurgents. For this, CIA is operating Counterterrorism Pursuit Teams in Afghanistan. These teams are regularly mounting ground raids into the Pak territory. Bob Woodard in his latest book, *Obama's Wars*, claims that CIA boss Leon Panetta has demanded more powers and authority to wage a secret war inside Pakistan. In this way, things are getting hot as far as the war on terror is concerned. Pakistan is moving to become centre stage in this war. Bruce Riedel, a former CIA and NSC official, has advised Mr Obama to shift the focus of war "from Afghanistan to Pakistan"; this is what we are witnessing in the shape of heightened war effort into the Pakistan territory.

Another American author, Eric Margolis assesses USA's perception about Pakistan, as an "ungrateful ally and a potential enemy of US interests in the region." America is amidst mid-term elections in which the Republicans see a chance to return in majority. There will be stronger calls for tougher military action in the war on terror. After the polls, there are chances that there will be deeper "air and land attacks" in Pakistan. Pentagon, too, seems convinced on this strategic approach. Whatever way we look at the situation America is moving gradually towards invading Pakistan.

The line of arguments puts the emphasis on the perceived fact that the US cannot win the war on terror in Afghanistan, unless the militant sanctuaries in Pakistan are shutdown or 'blown out' - but the current US policy is not achieving that goal. The hidden suggestion is obvious: there has to be an escalation in the crossborder military attacks. What we have witnessed in the latest NATO raid on FC post is a step towards that direction. It was intentional, as the NATO Secretary General has said; they knew the post was not a terrorist sanctuary and yet they attacked it. It is a deliberate provocation to test the response from Pakistan side.

My assessment is that the US-led NATO troops are not yet ready to move into Pakistan in a big way. The US, thus, is not inclined to militarily move into Pakistan and stay here for a longer duration in occupation mode. With Pakistan army's fighting potential and the general hostility of the masses it will be a very costly affair. America does not want another Vietnam in this region. They would like to mount a lightning strike to take out Pakistan's nukes. That can happen only once General David Petraeus is reasonably assured about the location of our nuclear assets.

I had voiced my apprehension in a previous article about the role and tasking of the notorious Blackwater and its deployment in Pakistan. The USA's Defence Department hired it to provide security to its military installations in Iraq. Its exploits are elaborately covered in a book, according to which it had been tasked to do other dirty works too. What is it doing in Pakistan no one knows? In fact, it has just vanished. It may be vigorously searching the storage facilities and locations of our assets which weigh heavily on the American mind, or should one say the Israeli mind. Israel is wary of nuclear capability with any Muslim country. During Zia's regime, it is reported that Israel with the connivance of India wanted to destroy Kahuta by launching an air raid.

More so, the political clout that Israel exercises on the US administration is obvious. The fact that policy suggestions to take the war to Pakistan emanate from the think tanks, who work for the Israel lobby, indicates that this lobby is using all its might to force the Obama administration to create conditions where it becomes possible to go after Pak nuclear assets. For the time being, aerial and ground based pressure will be exercised to keep

things hot. Once the ground reconnaissance by Blackwater confirms the targets, there will be an all-out effort to destroy them. Till then, the US led “anti-terror forces” will keep Pakistan engaged by raids in FATA area stepping up the tempo. Pakistan needs to remain vigilant and be prepared for the worst.

It may sound cynical and alarming, but one should view the US designs with doubt. Pakistan has gained nothing from their friendship and it lasts till the US sees any benefit to its policy, and then we are thrown to the wolves to fend for ourselves. It is high time that we should chalk out a political course for ourselves which can help us to act in national interest.

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