

## Afghanistan and Pakistan

### AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN: A TURNING POINT IN THE STABILIZATION PROCESS

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#### **Afgh 1/ A crucial time for the Nato Mission in Afghanistan**

*The next six months will be crucial for the Nato effort in Afghanistan. British general, David Richards, chief commanding officer of the thirty-one thousand troops currently on the ground there, is convinced that the military superiority of the troops will not be enough to see them prevail and points to the need to speed up the reconstruction projects and improve the Afghan people's standard of living otherwise "70% of the population could start to support the Talebans once more". This is why the "Oqab" mission is being launched. It is the first mission in which the various reconstruction projects will be "synchronised" to render them "more visible" and "more focussed". Richards has also explained that he wants to ensure that the country's reconstruction projects are fast-tracked so that the Afghans will begin to see signs of real change.*

*The Talebans are not, however, giving up (see Afgh/2), despite the heavy estimated losses of one thousand militia in recent months (3,100 have been killed in Afghanistan this year, a third of whom were civilians) since Nato forces from Britain, Canada, and Holland, took control of Southern Afghanistan, on 31 July last. This is a difficult mission, Nato's most important, and it involves a redefinition of its own role in future scenarios. Some commentators have pointed out that there is an inadequate number of soldiers employed in covering this zone which is the same size as France. In previous Nato missions, such as the peace-keeping mission in the much smaller Bosnia-Herzegovina, 60,000 men were involved.*

*The request for fresh combat forces for Southern Afghanistan cannot be delayed much longer. In the meantime, the failure to send reinforcements risks opening up a yawning gap between the intended and the actual composition of the "the new" Nato peacekeeping force in Afghanistan.*

*The Nato commander, Marines general James Jones, has repeatedly stated that a further 2000-2,500 men are needed to reinforce the Canadian, English, and Dutch forces involved in the tough war with the Talebans in Southern Afghanistan. In addition, the soldiers are in urgent need of attack helicopters and transport planes. In reality, what the Nato command is requesting was originally promised in the initial plans for the expansion to the south. The problem is that the main countries involved - Italy, Germany, Spain, and France - pretend not to hear and are determined not to send a single soldier more, not to mention reinforcements, to the South. The same applies to Turkey, which initially seemed well-disposed.*

*In October, Nato also took command of operations in Eastern Afghanistan, where 12,000 US troops are employed. Thus, the alliance has extended its control throughout the country. According to American general Karl Eikenberry, it must now prepare to remain there for a further ten years. Ed Butler, commander of the English parachuters who have been involved in fierce combat in recent months in the South, says it will take 20 years to pacify the country. "I believe that the courage and strength of the Talebans was underestimated", he says. He also points out that the military involvement in Iraq has taken some of the focus and energy out of the Afghan campaign and allowed the Taliban threat to re-emerge. During the period in which the English, Canadians, and Dutch, took over from the Americans in Southern Afghanistan, the shortage of helicopters and tanks as well as of soldiers became quickly evident. The head of*

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*the British Armed forces, Richard Dannat aims to reduce by between one-third and a half the number of English troops employed in Bassora in order to deploy them elsewhere in Afghanistan.*

Despite these difficulties, Nato has launched a fresh initiative throughout Afghanistan in order to maintain pressure on the talebans during the autumn and winter and to prevent them from regrouping for the spring. At the same time, interesting agreements are being drawn up with tribal leaders, which will see local authorities and clans being put in charge of security in their own areas.

*The Nato troops and the Talebans, in agreement with the tribal chiefs, have withdrawn and suspended hostilities. This form of truce began as a pilot project in the Musa Qala zone in the province of Helmand when both the English and the Talebans pulled back in mid-October. Agreements like this could be reached in at least 12 districts bordering with Afghanistan which stretch between the "hot" provinces of Kandahar and Kunar. The local clans, which effectively guarantee that the truce holds, are mostly Pashun, which is the same tribal base as that of the Talebans. .*

### **Afgh 2/ Increase in the number of battles and kamikaze attacks with the anti-governmental forces**

*Every spring, the remaining members of the Talebans and of Al Qaida intensify the guerrilla war and increase the number of terrorist attacks but this year there was a real military escalation, even if the level of violence over the past weeks has shown a decrease in the number of battles and attacks. The leaders in hiding of the forces hostile to the international coalition (Talebans, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb i Islami and Al Qaida's remaining supporters) decided to intensify their offensive to coincide with the broadening of the Nato mission into the south of the country. They probably hope that the English, Canadian and Dutch troops, who have taken over from the Americans, will be easier targets and be less inclined to fight than the US soldiers. The Afghan Defence minister, Rahim Wardak, agrees that the intensification of military activities can be linked to the handing over of power from the US to Nato. "Because of the sensitivity of public opinion in some European countries, and the the political problems that arise as a result of this – Wardak declared - the Talebans choose this moment to intensify their activities in order to influence public opinion abroad". The Talebans are trying to gain control of the provinces which have a Pashun majority in Southern and Eastern Afghanistan and they make use of a strategically important hinterland in the pakistani tribal areas over the border. They claim to have armed 12,000 men but Nato believes the number is about half this. The underlying problem, however, is that in Afghanistan, and especially in the Southern, Pashun-dominated areas which are the ethnic home to the Talebans, the use of force is not enough. There is a need to win "the minds and hearts" of the population.*

The most alarming development is that the anti-governmental forces and not only the Al Qaida extremists are increasingly resorting to terrorist kamikaze tactics. 78 suicide attacks have been carried out in Afghanistan in the last six months, sixty of which involved mined cars, the other 18 involving bicycles, motobikes or with explosive belts. These acts left 195 dead, 142 of them civilians, as well as hundreds of injured. 27 suicide bombers were arrested before blowing themselves up or because their detonators did not work. A further ten suicide attacks took place in October as evidence of the fact that the use of kamikaze tactics is on the increase compared

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*with last year when they were first used and the number of attacks of this type carried out in 2006 is the highest in the country's bellicose history.*

There is a growing belief that the Talebans, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's forces and Al Qaida are increasingly resorting to the terror tactics that are already widely in use in Iraq. In one of the rare interviews with western media given by the Taliban commanders, Hajji Mullah Wahid Ullah, who is active in the Helmand province, told the BBC that the use of kamikazes will increase. "Up to now you have only seen individuals launch kamikaze attacks, but in the future you will see up to six of us launching attacks at the same time – the commander explained – we have an endless list of volunteers for suicide attacks". *In another interview with Sky news, given on the Pakistan border with Afghanistan, the Taliban commander Mullah Mohammed Amin even threatened to launch terrorist attacks in Europe claiming that "the killing of European civilians was justifiable on the grounds that the governments that they had elected had sent invasion forces into Afghanistan".* Mullah Dadullah, the leader of the military shura of the Taliban commanders was filmed in a propaganda video while handing out "tickets to paradise" to potential kamikaze volunteers ready to answer the call. In the same video, eight informers, who had "confessed" to helping the Americans, were decapitated.

The Taliban spiritual leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar, for the occasion of the end of Ramadan, prepared a written message to the Afghans in which he promises, over the next six months, "an intensification and a greater organisation of the resistance against the crusaders". *Keeping in mind the fact that the winter usually brings a halt to the fighting, it is feared that the Talebans and above all Hekmatyar's men have infiltrated kamikaze cells into the bigger cities, starting with Kabul, in order to set off episodes of urban guerrilla war.*

For this reason, discussions are taking place to create a green zone to guarantee the safety of westerners, as has already been done in Baghdad.

The hostile forces have improved greatly at preparing bomb traps (Ied), training kamikaze volunteers and rigging out mined cars and bomb jackets, a sign, this, that they are being trained by instructors brought in from Iraq. They continue to learn the techniques of Iraqi terrorism available in manuals and on the internet. *However the high number of victims has caused a split among Taliban commanders, some of whom want to continue this campaign and others who are worried about its negative impact on the Pashtun population.*

### **Afgh 3/ A Record Opium production helps the Talebans**

This year's opium crop is the biggest ever recorded in Afghanistan. *It is estimated that the crop is made up of 6,100 tons of poppy, a 49% increase on the previous year. Despite a stepping up of the programme to root out opium production, the land employed to this end increased by 59%, from 104 thousand hectares to 165 thousand. Not surprisingly, the province with the greatest increase is Helmand which has a large Taliban presence. Opium production provides work for almost three million Afghans and produces 90% of the world's overall heroin output.*

These alarming figures were provided Antonio Maria Costa, director of the United Nation's anti-drugs and organised crime office (Unodc). The Talebans are paid a toll to let the truckloads of opium pass and for this reason they deliver fliers to the peasants, at night, encouraging them to increase opium production. The director of Unodc has also denounced the collusion between the drugs traffickers and the members of Afghanistan's politically class, such as the former governor of Helmand, Sher Mohammed Akhund, who is now a member of parliament.

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*Costa called on Nato to “destroy the heroin laboratories, the break up the open-air poppy bazaars, to attack the trucks carrying opium (for heroin production) and to arrest the large-scale traffickers. Nato general secretary Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, pointed out that “Nato cannot do everything in Afghanistan”. There is a fear that opening a second front, in addition to the complicated one they are already engaged in against the Talebans, could alienate the peasants and cause a popular revolt against the foreign soldiers.*

*It is up to the Afghan government to wage a war on drugs but president Hamid Karzai says that it will take 10 to 15 years to achieve meaningful results. For the moment the “Buy Afghan morphine campaign” run by the Italian Red cross and the French NGO Senslis Council, represents the only alternative. This aims to facilitate the legal production of morphine from opium and thus to guarantee vital medicines to those countries in dire need of analgesics, and, at the same time, to support the Afghan peasants whose economy is entirely based on opium production.*

### **Afgh 4/ Double Jirga on both the Afghan and the Pakistani sides of the border**

*One of the decisions taken at the three-man Washington summit involving US president George W. Bush, Afghan president Hamid Karzai and his Pakistani counterpart Pervez Musharraf was to convene a double and contemporaneous sitting of the Loya Jirga on both sides of the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The traditional assembly, which is made up of tribal chiefs and religious representatives, is usually convened in moments of crisis so that delicate collegial decisions can be made for the entire country. This time it will have to tackle the terrorist issue and the problem of Taleban infiltrations into Afghanistan from the Pakistani tribal hinterlands. The two assemblies are to be presided over by their respective heads of state and a joint sitting is planned so that the Afghan and Pakistani Pasthun can engage in direct talks. The two countries should appoint a joint commission to monitor to workings of the double Jirga and facilitate the results being monitored by the international community.*

*Karzai is keen on the idea and would like it to take place by December. The Pakistani are less enthusiastic because this initiative risks bringing the pro-Taleban tendencies of the tribal areas into public view.*

### **Pak 1/ Kashmir peace negotiations resume following train bombings**

On 11 July, a coordinated terrorist attack involving a series of bombings of commuter trains in the large Indian city of Mumbai, caused 182 deaths and left more than 800 injured. This resulted in the cancellation of the meeting between the Pakistani and the Indian ministers, which had been planned for 21 July to discuss the Kashmir problem.

*The New Delhi government accused one of the independence movements in Kashmir, which was supported by the Pakistani secret services, of involvement in the bombings.*

President Pervez Musharraf immediately condemned the attack, offered to collaborate in the investigations and denied that ISI, the powerful military secret services, was involved.

The Indian anti-terrorism agents are convinced that the Lashkar-e-Taiba (Army of the Pure), one of the best known Kashmir Independence groups, which is engaged in armed combat against the Indians, is behind the terrorist attack.

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Lashkar, it seems, made use of local elements connected with the Indian Islamic Student movement which was outlawed in 2001. *Lashkar and Qahhr, (Army of the wrathful), which, according to some analysts, is the new armed wing of Lashkar-e-Taiba, claimed responsibility for the attack. The supporters of Kashmir independence, accused of being behind the train bombings, described them as "inhuman and barbarous".*

The real problem is that massacres such as the Mumbai bombing reopen the gap between India and Pakistan and complicate the Kashmir negotiations which have been going on for the past two and a half years. As soon as meetings are to be held at the highest level and a breakthrough is about to be made the terrorists reappear hoping to derail the peace process.

*India and Pakistan only resumed talks last month. The Indian prime minister, Manmohan Singh, has announced that he has accepted an invitation to visit Pakistan.* The invitation was issued last April by Pakistan's president Musharraf and was renewed during the meeting of the non-aligned countries in Cuba. A handshake between Singh and Musharraf in Havana brought about a thaw in relations between the two countries following the Mumbai attacks.

The first bilateral meetings, designed to unblock the situation and to relaunch a dialogue between the two countries, will be held on 14 and 15 November in New Delhi. Pakistan's undersecretary for foreign affairs, Riaz Mohammad Khan, will lead his country's delegation to the Indian capital. The meetings will concentrate on the Kashmir question and on the war against terrorism. *The Indian secret services are expected to provide the Pakistani with proof of Pakistani terrorist involvement in the Mumbai attacks.* The november meetings are part of the third round of "composite dialogue" which began three years ago and has brought significant progress with regard to road and rail links, the field of nuclear coverage and the free movement of people.

### **Pak 2/ The shadow of terrorism continues to hang over Pakistan**

*The Pakistani judiciary ordered the release of Hafeez Muhammad Saeed, who is to be held under house arrest. He is founder of the Lashkar-e-Taiba, whose terrorist group has been accused by India of involvement in last July's train bombings. The decision to free him came at the same time as the announcement that talks would resume between India and Pakistan (see Pak 1).* It has been proven that Saeed's organisation had links with Al Qaida until 2001. In December of that year, India accused the terrorist group of involvement in the attack on the parliament in New Delhi which risked causing yet another war to break out with Pakistan. Lashkar-e-Taiba was outlawed but soon returned under its new name, Jamaat ud Dawa, a supposedly charitable organisation involved in social work and humanitarian aid. *It is no accident that Jamaat ud Dawa was in the front line in bringing help in Kashmir following last year's devastating earthquake which claimed 70,000 lives. Pakistan has placed the new organisation on a list of those "under special surveillance" because of suspicions of links with internal terrorism but it has not banned it.* Saeed continues to lead Jamaat and obviously he denies India's accusations and claims that false confessions were extracted under torture from its supporters.

*The terrorists have also threatened Pakistani president, Pervez Musharraf, who has already been lucky to survive several attempts on his life.* At the start of October, remote controlled rockets, designed to hit various strategic targets in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, including the head of state's residence, were discovered.

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Some devices did actually explode but thanks to others that remained intact it was possible to trace the terrorists and identify individuals involved from the armed forces, in particular the airforce. Khalil Wayin, son of Dural Rashid, a retired brigadier general, was among those arrested.

*As happened in 2003, when terrorists made two attempts on Musharraf's life, embarrassing incidences of collusion have emerged which show that fundamentalism is pervasive in the Pakistani armed forces and that they have been infiltrated by radical elements that are in contact with Al Qaida's terrorist cells.*

### **Pak 3/ Attacks in Afghanistan triple following the truce in Pakistan's tribal zones**

*The truce, signed in September, by the Pakistani army and the pro-Taleban Pashtun clans in the tribal area of Waziristan, on the border with Afghanistan, is fragile and does not appear to have stopped guerrilla fighters and terrorists crossing the border.*

*Since the coming into effect of the agreement, which commits the tribes to blocking the passage of armed groups, hostile actions against Nato troops and Afghan security forces in the eastern part of the country have tripled. This increase was noted in the Afghan border provinces of Khost, Paktika and Paktia and the situation has also worsened in the interior provinces nearer Kabul.*

The Talebans and the remaining Al Qaida fighters are identifying new points, besides Waziristan, at which to cross the border and enter Afghanistan. In addition to establishing a settlement in Miranshah, the provincial capital of southern Waziristan, the Talebans send their young militia out to patrol the bazaar wearing armbands that identify them as having been authorised to keep order by the student warriors. By employing their brutal methods, the Talebans have been able to drastically reduce crime levels but in addition to chasing bandits they have hunted down and killed many suspected of working as informers for the Americans.

*Waziristan risks being turned into a safe haven for the followers of Mullah Omar and Osama bin Laden, now that the Pakistan army has wound down its activities as result of the truce.*

*The Islamabad government attempted to reach an agreement, similar to the one in force in Waziristan, with the local Pashtun clans in Bajaur, another slice of tribal area in the north of the country, as a way of contrasting Al Qaida move and stopping the Talebans from setting up a safe haven there. The Pakistan army is stationed on the border of this tribal region in which the Islamic extremists openly support Osama bin Laden. At the end of October, in an attempt to send a sharp message that could unblock the stalled negotiations, the Pakistanis attacked a Koranic school in Bajaur area sometimes frequented by Al Qaida's number two, Ayman al Zawahiri, the operating head of what remains of the terrorist organisation. Al Zawahiri was probably the real target but he was not in the Madrasa unlike his "protector", maulana Liaqat Ullah Hussein, a noted religious exponent in the area, who was part of a group of pro-Taleban Islamic priests. Hussein, along with some eighty others defined by the central government as "militant extremists", was killed in the bombing of the Koranic School.*

This resulted in twenty thousand people taking to the streets of Bajaur to protest against the attack and to shout slogans against both President Musharraf and George W. Bush. Similar protests took place in Peshawar, provincial capital of the North-eastern border zone and in other cities in Pakistan. They were organised by the Mutahida Majlis-e-Amal (Mma) a radical

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alliance of Islamic groups opposed to Musharraf. A kamikaze attack killed 42 army recruits in the northwestern town of Dargai as revenge for the air strike on the religious school.

*Islamabad's latest idea is the creation of a mined "barrier" along the border designed to block infiltrations of armed groups into Afghanistan. An earlier proposal to build a wall between the two countries was rejected by Kabul.*

*Unfortunately no adequate tactic has yet been adopted to stem the danger which the tribal area between Pakistan and Afghanistan represents. In addition to undermining Afghanistan's security, it risks becoming a mini-Kingdom of Islamic extremists that Islamabad will not be capable of controlling.*

### **Pak 4/ The killing of the leader of the revolt in Baluchistan worsens the crisis**

*Baluchistan is another thorn in Musharraf's side. The tribal leaders of this province, the poorest in Pakistan and yet also full of natural gas, have asked the central government to bring a stop to the military operations. The autonomist revolt is becoming more and more dangerous and the tribal leaders, meeting in a Loya Jirga, the traditional assembly that sits in moments of crisis, have defined "the military operations state terrorism". The assembly was convened following the killing, during a planned raid by the Pakistani armed forces on 26 August last, of the seventy-nine year old leader of the revolt in Baluchistan, Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti. His death, rather than removing the head of the fight for autonomy has reinforced and united the different militia groups who continue to attack government symbols.*

The International crisis group (Icg), an influential think tank based in Brussels, has published an alarming report about the situation in Baluchistan. Icg has asked Islamabad to halt the military operations and to establish a channel of dialogue with the movements that are involved in order to calm the revolt. The report warns that the conflict could intensify. "With the killing of Bugti President the credibility of President Musharraf and of the military has sunk to an all-time low not only in Baluchistan, but throughout all the states that make up the federation" of Pakistan, the report reads. An opposition leader has claimed: "There is no doubt that the entire federation has been seriously weakened". *Only with free and correct elections, which are scheduled for 2007 and which will bring the victory, at present the inevitable victory, of local nationalists, can the situation in Baluchistan return to some sort of normality.*