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CounterPunch

Return of the Ugly American

The Pakistan Mess

By SAUL LANDAU

May 21-23, 2010

Washington's national security elite seethe and fume with resentment and frustration. Pakistan receives billions of U.S. aid dollars and remains a training ground for terrorists targeting the United States.

On May 1, Faisal Shahzad tried unsuccessfully to detonate his explosive-ridden car in Times Square. He subsequently revealed his Taliban training roots.

Washington complained that Pakistani governors in the militant's operations areas have not cooperated in eliminating terrorists.

On May 6, General Stanley McChrystal, U.S. commander in Afghanistan, urged Pakistan's General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani in Islamabad to rapidly begin an offensive in North Waziristan, Al Qaeda and Taliban strongholds.

After all, U.S. diplomats whined, after Congress has authorized more than \$11 billion to Pakistan, that ungrateful President Asif Zardar dared grumble about Pakistan not receiving its proper share of the money. Is this extortion? An insider Muslim joke on Christians?

According to Pakistani writer Pervez Hoodbhoy, President Zardar gets approval for anti-American posturing. Even the attempted Times Square terrorist attack received substantial support from the Pakistani public because it represented a prevailing notion: “the U.S. is responsible for all ills, both in Pakistan and the world of Islam.”

Routine U.S. drone bombings of “suspected militants” have not won wide approval. Instead, the droning assassinations of supposed Taliban or Al Qaeda leaders have killed lots of civilians. This has led some Pakistanis and Muslims elsewhere to hear more credibly the jihad-preaching Imams calling for revenge.

Take the media portrait of Faisal Shahzad, the accused Times Square perp: a man with an MBA hugging his wife. What would drive him to terrorism?

His early education and upbringing in Karachi, wrote Professor Hoodbhoy, one that “typifies the young Pakistani who grew up in the shadow of Zia-ul-Haq's (President of Pakistan from 1977-88 who emphasized Muslim values to U.S.-backed Jihadist fighting Soviet occupiers of Afghanistan.) hate-based education curriculum.” Current media and school curriculum offer the public photos of dead Palestinian kids alongside Washington's pro Israel and anti-Palestinian statements.

Two recent western pollsters in Pakistan reinforced Hoodbhoy's conclusion. According to Gallup, hired by Al Jazeera, 59 percent of Pakistanis believed the United States was Pakistan's greatest threat. An August Pew Research Center study found 64 percent of Pakistanis consider the U.S. “as an enemy;” 9 percent thought of Washington as a partner.

One partner (Pakistan) provides access; the other (USA) uses Pakistani territory to kill its enemies, including innocent Pakistani citizens. Pakistan also permits U.S. forces (military and CIA) to fly spy planes over targets of “suspected militants,” -- or whoever.

The opposition to this trade-off reaches beyond jihadist mosques. Negative response filled the media when, in early May, the McClatchy newspapers revealed a \$1 billion plan “to greatly increase the size of the American embassy in Islamabad.” This revelation “brought home to Pakistanis that the United States plans an extensive and long-term presence in the country.”

Pakistan military and Inter Service Intelligence (ISI) officials know the U.S. has sided with India (its buffer against China) in its struggle to control Kashmir, the key issue in Pakistani foreign policy.

The U.S., however, has maintained its hold over elite sectors for decades by backing (buying?) undemocratic and often corrupt heads of state. Ambassador Anne W. Patterson asked a large newspaper group to block a weekly column by a prominent academic and critic of U.S. policies. For a decade, Dr. Shireen Mazari had often used her column in *The News International* (one of Pakistan's largest English-language dailies) to criticize U.S. policies. Her Pakistani readers were shocked by the act of censorship thanks to the U.S. ambassador's “private” letter to the publication's management. (*Pakistan Daily*, Sept 3, 2009)

“The Ugly American of the sixties is back in Pakistan, and this time with a vengeance,” wrote the censored Mazari. “It's an alliance (U.S.-Pakistan) forced on the country by its corrupt leadership. It's delivering chaos. We should distance ourselves. You can't just hand over the country.” (*Pittsburgh Tribune Review*, Sept 8, 2009)

The rising numbers of civilian casualties and U.S. refusal to help Pakistan in its conflict with India over Kashmir have now given Pakistani politicians an easy pretext to criticize Washington for infringing on Pakistani territory -- for spy planes and drones.

Weary Pakistanis see the U.S. buildup beyond the air attacks and it has created anti-U.S. sentiment in a nuclear-armed nation. Worse, U.S. enemies have multiplied. Al Qaeda brazenly attacked New York and Washington. Now, Taliban – in Afghanistan or Pakistan? – attack the Big Apple again.

On May 9, AP reported: “*Suspected U.S. missiles killed 10 people in a militant-controlled region close to the Afghan border Sunday, the first such strike since an alleged Pakistani-trained extremist was accused of a failed Times Square attack.*” (RasoolDawar)

Is Obama playing tit for tat? It might be more prudent to change Middle East policies and win a few hearts and minds. It seems off that idea-laden Obama sticks with explosive-laden drones.