

# PAKISTAN: PROBLEM OR PARTNER IN AFGHANISTAN

Hugh Segal

Any discussion about containing the Taliban insurgency in Kandahar province inevitably leads to a debate on Pakistan, and the safe haven it provides for terrorists, presumably including Osama bin Laden himself. Reinforcements for al-Qaeda and the Taliban are trained in Pakistan, where Islamist religious schools are a breeding ground for terror. Is the government of Pervez Musharraf a real, or simply a nominal, ally in the war on terror? Does Pakistan have its own interests in play in Afghanistan? Is Pakistan a problem or a partner, or both, in the nation-building effort across the porous border in Afghanistan? Former IRPP president Hugh Segal, now chair of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, confronts these complex questions.

Toute discussion sur la lutte contre les talibans dans la province de Kandahar conduit inévitablement à débattre de la question du Pakistan, qui sert d'asile aux terroristes et sans doute à Ben Laden lui-même. Les renforts d'Al-Qaïda et des talibans sont entraînés dans ce pays, dont les écoles islamistes sont un vivier de la terreur. Le gouvernement de Pervez Musharraf est-il un véritable allié de la guerre au terrorisme ? Le Pakistan a-t-il des intérêts cachés en Afghanistan ? Ce pays est-il un partenaire ou un frein — ou les deux à la fois — à la reconstruction de l'Afghanistan, dont il est séparé par une frontière des plus poreuses ? Trois questions très complexes abordées par le sénateur Hugh Segal, ancien président de l'IRPP et actuel président du Comité du Sénat des Affaires étrangères.



The government of Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf has been much criticized for its apparent inaction and/or lack of control of the border that it shares with Afghanistan. It has been charged by Pakistan's allies and by the NATO forces in Afghanistan that the problems of the Taliban insurgency and the al-Qaeda resurgence are actually a Pakistani problem, not an Afghan one. The 2,400-kilometre border shared by these two countries, controlled by tribal leaders who do not recognize the imaginary line separating them, is an impossible battlefield for NATO forces when the rules of combat state that these forces are forbidden from following the enemy into the allied territories of Pakistan.

This porous and mountainous terrain has been home to tribes who have inhabited the area for centuries and is easily travelled by them. Family, marriage and liaisons know no borders for these mountainous people, and the lands on both sides of the border have become an education ground for jihadists and a launch pad for attacks against Afghanistan. But are the charges of ineptitude or disregard levelled at Pakistan justified? Is President Musharraf turning a blind eye to the harbouring of the Taliban forces on his side of the border, and is he incapable of taking control of the situation and dismantling the organizational infrastruc-

ture of the terrorism training that has sprung up since 9/11? Or is it possible that Musharraf is legitimately sincere in his efforts but the political reality of the Pakistani parliament and the limited public support for overthrowing the Taliban and throwing out al-Qaeda and its sympathizers are hindering whatever inroads he makes?

It is a given that the efforts to rebuild Afghanistan and eradicate the extreme Islamist terror cells will be a long struggle without the concerted efforts of Pakistan. Some *madrassas* are Islamic religious schools teaching a particular brand of Islam, interpreting the religion in a violent way, and have become the breeding ground for recruitment by al-Qaeda and the Taliban. It is estimated that there may be thousands of these schools existing along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border; their students are often recruited from the lower classes, children from the Pashtun tribes, peasant children and Pakistani children who do not have access to any other schooling. The extreme ideology that would be viewed by many Muslims and Pakistanis as fanaticism and that is taught in *madrassas* is likely shaping the philosophies of these young minds. It takes very little to connect the dots and determine where this ideology will lead.

NATO forces — and these include Canadian forces — are valiant in their attempts to rebuild and reshape Afghanistan in part by defeating the renewed Taliban forces and breaking their ever-increasing stranglehold on the areas in the northwest and at the border near Kandahar. But the *madrassas* continue to take in, mould and finally produce the young minds needed by the Taliban and al-Qaeda. The interpretation of Islam in the *madrassas* generates the future suicide bombers who will kill as many innocent Afghan civilians and fellow Muslims as they will harm NATO forces in the region.

Only with Pakistan's intervention can the tide be stemmed. To be fair to the Musharraf administration, long before the events of September 2001, his government and military moved against extremist elements in the regions with arrests, curfews, raids and imprisonment. And it is important to understand that in the collective war against the Soviets when they invaded Afghanistan in 1979, Pakistan was an ally of the West helping the mujahedeen and other resistance groups encouraged and armed by the West. Pakistan had an interest in the way Afghan geography and politics got sorted out, and while borders on maps are important, many tribal and family linkages span centuries and territories not limited by map lines drawn elsewhere by other people.

When one considers that one-fifth of Pakistan's parliament comprises Islamic purists and, according to a recent poll, only 30 percent of Pakistan's population supports the US-led war on terror, it is not hard to understand that western-inspired "fast food" instant solutions to the challenges of the border regions are both unlikely and a little naive.

The goal of rebuilding and renewing Afghanistan is laudable, and all allied forces, including Canada's,

involved in the NATO-led mission are literally putting life and limb on the line in order to further the cause and improve the current situation for Afghans. The over 140 kilometres of road built, the schools opened and wells dug under Canadian protection, combined with activities in areas less vulnerable to Taliban attack in other Afghan provinces speak to the only lifeline the democratically elected government in Kabul, however imperfect, actually has. To abdicate now would be to hand Afghanistan over to endless tribal and warlord violence, making the return of a Taliban-

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al-Qaeda junta almost inevitable. There would be no greater dishonour to the Canadian and other allied lives, not to mention to those Afghans who died, lost in defence of a new beginning, then for this to occur.

But hard realism relative to the task ahead is also called for. Canada and the allies understand that Pakistan is the key to advancing the regional development and stability goals because of its proximity to Afghanistan, understanding of the region and sincere desire for its people to live in peace and without fear. Canada's purpose in Afghanistan is threefold: to defend our national interests; to support universal values of humanitarian, democratic and basic human rights and laws; and to help

Afghanistan stabilize, strengthen its governance and, in the most basic terms, improve the lives of the Afghan people. But these objectives cannot be accomplished without cooperation with and by Pakistan.

This is essential to routing out the Taliban forces on the border and to securing the region for the safety of all fighters and peacekeepers. This ultimate collaboration is crucial and requires participation from all involved in all aspects of the conflict. Canada must be prepared to engage with Pakistan on all fronts — militarily, developmentally and economically. The efforts of our men and women in Afghanistan, dozens of whom have given the ultimate sacrifice, should not, in the end, be discounted as a result of a lack of engagement with the ally most able to understand and counter the enemy.

The recent suicide attack on the Pakistani military in the country's north, killing 42 soldiers, ostensibly in retaliation for the October bombing of a *madrassa* by the Pakistani Armed Forces, is proof that the militant al-Qaeda-linked jihadists are putting their strength on public display and making it clear that they are prepared and ready to attack Pakistan's military. While

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Is Canada able to do more in assisting Pakistan in its efforts? More to the point, should Canada do more?

There is a depth in the relationship here that we should embrace. Pakistan is a serious partner in the Commonwealth.



Reuters

**Uneasy allies: Afghan President Hamid Karzai and Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf with President Bush at the White House on September 27. Each side blames the other for not doing enough to combat terrorism on the border between their two countries.**

While Islamist parties who are pro-Taliban are important coalition players in the Pakistani parliament, the Pakistani administration has been stepping up its activities of a forward anti-terrorist nature in the region. And if it is true, as was suggested during a recent visit to Canada of senior Pakistani parliamentarians, that Pakistan offered to fence and mine its side of the border regions many months ago, and neither NATO nor Afghanistan has responded formally, then clearly Pakistan has a case to make against any one-sided view of its comportment on the issue.

It is hard to overestimate the gap between Pakistan's view of its own efforts and that of the allied forces in Afghanistan. Pakistan's government faces a difficult and easily destabilized political context of massive poverty, a

perception of broad corruption at the bureaucratic level and the radicalization and marginalization of large parts of its population. Its demographic pyramid, with over half its population under 35, and half also illiterate, represents a huge challenge for economic and social development. Recent numbers in economic growth and some progress on infrastructure suggest some credit is due the Pakistani government — but the demand for resources far outstrips those available.

Moreover, with both the unstable regions in the border area and the fear of hostilities in Kashmir, Pakistan has far too much of its overall GDP committed to defence complement and hardware. But, in the face of the larger Indian neighbour and hostilities in the

past, it is not hard to understand why. While India's democratic government and the Pakistani administration have worked diligently on reconciliation, progress has been slow — making any major diversion of capital pools to social and economic development difficult. Hence, the parts of the instability tied to poverty and illiteracy are hard to diminish. All the more reason for Canada, which now has a strategic and tactical interest in the region, to engage more fully. A case has been made by some experts that with Pakistan and India, a more compelling investment by Canada in cooperation, economic and trade networks and military and strategic cooperation would generate more mutual benefit than any endless and marginal China engagement; China is less interested in democracy, the normative rule

of law or trade relations that benefit anyone other than itself.

There are many links between Canada and Pakistan. Senior military officers often have exchanged training visits between our two countries. There has been a rapid growth of the Canadian communities of Pakistani origin. There are important economic industrial and academic ties. Our political cultures and economic circumstances are very different, but our parliamentary political structures bear some similarity.

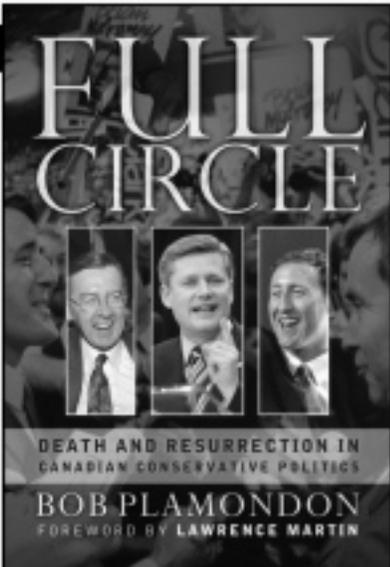
In order to address clear evidence that parts of the Pakistani border regions are being used by the Taliban for recovery, resupply and planning of redeployments against Canadian, Afghan and other coalition forces in Afghanistan, we need a more intense engagement by Canadian diplomatic, political and military leadership and a more open dialogue and calling to account on both sides. While there may very well be two sides to the argument, the truth is that as long as Pakistani and Canadian soldiers are dying at the hands of linked-up terrorists

on both sides of the border, the present level of practical cooperation and problem-solving is simply not working.

Certainly, whether the deployment is diplomatic, whether it is a mix of economic, development or trade missions, or whether there are other formal and more informal preventive measures that can be jointly and severally considered or put into effect, we have reached a point where the broader definition of success by the Canadian Forces in the regions will be hypothecated in some considerable measure on the capacity for normalization and stabilization on the Pakistani side of the border. In this, Pakistani officials — military, police and intelligence — must be engaged. If they are prevented by internal political or security exigencies from being overt allies, and if other less overt options are neither suggested nor put into play in defence of stability in the region and to prevent incursions into Afghan territory by rearmed and rested Taliban forces and other fellow travellers, Canada has some broader decisions to embrace about the Canada-Pakistan relationship.

The fact that the Pakistani border is not the only one over which forces of darkness infiltrate Afghan territory is no excuse for failing to raise the priority of Canada-Pakistan cooperation. Pakistan has been an ally and collaborator with Canada in the past — and can be an important partner in the region and in the larger Commonwealth family to which we belong. But it cannot happen with wishful thinking, Foreign Affairs officials' avoidance of the tough issues or an insensitivity to Pakistan's legitimate concerns and domestic and regional fears and aspirations. We are now dealing with the lives of Canadians deployed to the region in defence of our own national security and core values. If this is not a justification for a fundamental focus from various perspectives on the Canada-Pakistan relationship, opportunities and warts included, then there will never be any such justification at all.

*Hugh Segal, who was president of the IRPP from 1999 to 2006, is chair of the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade and a senior fellow at the Queen's School of Policy Studies.*



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