Terrorism

Stop blaming Pakistan

By Brian Cloughley

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WHOSE side is Washington on when it comes to Pakistan? The messages are confusing. On one hand the Pentagon submissions to Congress on June 28 concerning supply of F-16 combat aircraft to Pakistan state "Given its geo-strategic location and partnership in the Global War on Terrorism, Pakistan is a vital ally of the United States . . . This proposed sale will contribute to the foreign policy and national security of the United States . . .", but the State Department's coordinator for counter-terrorism, Henry Crumpton, declares that Pakistan hasn't "done enough" in the fight against terror.

I have to declare an interest because I lived in Pakistan for a long time and know President Pervez Musharraf to the extent of calling on him when visiting Islamabad, which I do regularly. I don't disguise the fact that I like the country and most of its peoples, although I write critically about various aspects of its governance, not least in the latest edition of my book about the Pakistan Army in which I criticise, among other things, the invasion of Indian-controlled Kashmir in 1999. But what confuses me are accusations and flat statements that Pakistan isn't serious about dealing with terrorists.

Pervez Musharraf has

reasonable sacrifice on the part of Pakistan in its support for the Bush crusade in Afghanistan. And I can state that the Pakistan Army and the Frontier Corps, whose soldiers have died in support of US objectives, are not altogether impressed by people like Mr Crumpton who deride their sacrifice and have no idea whatever of the complexities of life in the border region and no notion of how difficult it is to deal with the tribes.

Here is what I wrote elsewhere about the tribal areas:

Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) are an anachronistic holdover from the time of British India when they proved violently opposed to British rule. The population of about 6 million is largely illiterate but is generously subsidised by the central government (electricity is free, for example) to which no taxes are paid.

Only 7 percent of the land area (total, about the size of Belgium) is cultivable. Most income is generated by smuggling uncustomed goods from Afghanistan into Pakistan, by drug trafficking from Afghanistan, and general criminal mayhem.

Attempts by government to bring FATA into mainstream Pakistan, supported by educated tribals, have failed because of resistance on the part of their leaders and, especially, influential religious figures who seek continuance of an almost mediaeval society. The only law, the (British) Frontier Crimes Regulations of 1901, permits arrest of any tribal without public justification. This has worked adequately in the past, generally with the cooperation of the tribal elders and leaders, or maliks, but otherwise justice is meted out by tribal gatherings, or jirgas.

The tribal code of honour is sacrosanct and attempts by outsiders to interfere with it, and especially with the custom of Pashtunwali, the requirement to afford

humbug intended to mislead the American public into believing that the US invasion had created stability. In fact the country has rarely been so dangerous, even in the days when US-supported guerrillas were attacking Soviet forces in exactly the same way as present-day guerrillas attack US forces and their surrogates.

What has happened is that US air attacks on Afghan villages (and at least one tribal hamlet inside Pakistan, blitzed by a remotely piloted aircraft), together with Iraq-style military brutality by ground troops have led the majority of Afghans to detest Americans and, by association, all foreign troops in their country. There isn't anything Pakistan can do about that. And neither can Pakistan control those Afghans and Pakistanis who see the present Afghan war as yet another crusade against Muslims.

Nobody can claim that Afghanistan is an easy country to govern. It has never been stable and has for centuries been the playground of the strongest thugs with the most weapons. Tribals from Afghanistan and Pakistan have always moved freely across the border, mainly because those who live in that region have relatives on both sides. A partial solution might be a (vastly expensive) border fence, but the Afghan government formally rejected Pakistan's fencing proposal two weeks ago.

Many tribal chiefs, the 'warlords' as they are called by the media, who were bribed by the US to topple the Taliban and are now prospering through production of opium and heroin, are not in any way averse to the situation in Afghanistan as it helps them become richer. They have fooled the Americans into believing that they will help them fight against extremist Islamists, while laughing up their sleeves at the ingenuousness of the invader. It is absurd to imagine that Pakistan welcomes the massive flow of drugs across the border from Afghanistan,

dealing with terrorists.

Pervez Musharraf has narrowly escaped being killed in three attempts on his life by members of extremist Islamist groups. Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz was uninjured in a suicide attack while he was electioneering. It is unlikely that a person who has had survived assassination efforts by terrorists could be other than extremely serious about combating them. The religious loonies in Pakistan are virulently and violently anti-Musharraf and anti-Aziz because they seek to spread acceptance of "moderate Islam" in the spirit of the Quran. Musharraf would be extremely unwise to adopt other than an uncompromising attitude to the terrorist fanatics who are intent on killing him and taking over the country.

Musharraf very much wants to foil the ferocious bigots who want to make Pakistan a fundamentalist Islamic state like Saudi Arabia whose citizens (or at least the non-Royal ones) are at the mercy of religious police; where women have no right to vote or even drive a car; and which, according to the US State Department, is "governed on the basis of Islamic law" and has "no political parties or national elections". (Condoleezza Rice demanded last week that "There has to be, the world expects there to be, democratic, free and fair elections in Pakistan in 2007", which is a fair comment. But it would be even-handed to make similar demands about Saudi Arabia and other oil-producing Gulf monarchies.)

To claim that Musharraf is not doing as much as he can to rid his country of terrorists is to ignore the essentiality of doing just that, not only from a personal point of view (as he obviously wants to keep on living and is under threat from all sorts of barbaric Islamists), but from the aspect of his nation's very survival as a non-fundamentalist nation.

Here's a Reuters' report about the US official stance on Pakistan: "Most Al Qaeda and

custom of Pashtunwali, the requirement to afford protection and hospitality to any who seek it, meet resistance with an intensity incomprehensible to most foreigners and to very many Pakistanis who themselves are regarded as foreigners by the tribes.

Over to you, Mr Crumpton. Let's have your

solution as to how Pakistan can do more to meet your demands concerning anarchy along the Afghan border where Pakistan has lost five times as many soldiers killed in action as the US has in Afghanistan.

As to Mr Crumpton's statement that "insurgents [are] able to gather support and launch raids from the safety of Pakistani territory", he may not have included a major factor in his deeply intellectual analysis. This concerns Afghan citizens resident in Pakistan.

The UN High Commission for Refugees estimates that there are still over one and a half million Afghan refugees in camps in Pakistan. (Down from a total of some 2.5 million in the 1980s when the United States paid Afghans to fight against Soviet troops who occupied the country with the agreement of the Afghan leader of the time.)

Perhaps Mr Crumpton could explain exactly how Pakistan is expected to stop Afghans in Pakistan returning to their country should they wish to do so. There is nothing Pakistan would like more than to be rid of a million and a half

massive flow of drugs across the border from Afghanistan, and in all the years in which western troops have occupied Afghanistan the traffic has not diminished by even a tiny fraction. "Coalition" troops have not even tried to stop or control poppy growing and heroin production; this was simply not a priority. Drug money funds Afghan militias

Since 2004, Pakistan has lost 700 paramilitary and army soldiers killed in action in North West Frontier Province while combating Taliban fighters and the tribes which support the Taliban (which is almost all 5 million of them). By any definition of 'doing enough', this would appear to be a reasonable sacrifice on the part of Pakistan in its support for the Bush crusade in Afghanistan

who are determined to maintain the trade. There is nothing whatever that Pakistan can do about that.

During the four years of foreign occupation of Afghanistan in the 'global war on terror' Pakistan has experienced Islamic terrorism to the extent of dozens of bombings, one assassination attempt against its prime minister, and three assassination attempts on its president. There has been a resurgence of Taliban who detest the central government and regard it as un-Islamic and are prepared to fight to the death against it. The tribes on both sides of the border have been alienated, infuriated, and made even more violent by US-Pakistan military attacks on their homelands. A crisis has developed over angry Afghan refugees who refuse to go home because their country remains in chaos in spite of the west occupying it for years and, according to Bush, bringing it "democracy". The deaths of 700 Pakistani soldiers have caused even the loyal army to wonder what the cost of supporting America might eventually

all sorts of barbaric Islamists), but from the aspect of his nation's very survival as a non-fundamentalist nation.

Here's a Reuters' report about the US official stance on Pakistan: "Most Al Qaeda and Taliban leaders are in Pakistan, and while the United States did not know where Osama bin Laden was hiding, he was probably on the Pakistan side of the border, said Henry Crumpton, State Department coordinator for counter-terrorism . . . Afghan *officials* have complained insurgents were able to gather support and launch raids from the safety of Pakistani territory. Violence has intensified in parts of Afghanistan in recent months to its worst level since US and Afghan opposition forces ousted the Taliban in 2001. "Has Pakistan done enough? I think the answer is 'no'," Crumpton told a news briefing in the Afghan capital, Kabul [on May 6, 2006]. "Not only Al Qaeda, but Taliban leadership are primarily in Pakistan, and the Pakistanis know that," Crumpton added."

For the information of Mr Crumpton, since 2004 Pakistan has lost 700 paramilitary and army soldiers killed in action in North West Frontier Province while combating Taliban fighters and the tribes which support the Taliban (which is almost all 6 million of them). By any definition of "doing enough", this would appear to be a

Perhaps Mr Crumpton could explain exactly how Pakistan is expected to stop Afghans in Pakistan returning to their country should they wish to do so. There is nothing Pakistan would like more than to be rid of a million and a half Afghans who occupy so much of its land, soak up its depleting water, contribute nothing to Pakistan in taxes or any other dues expected from its own citizens, engage in bloodthirsty feuds and widespread criminal activity, and are the majority of those who make forays over the border to combat those whom they regard as invaders and illegal occupiers of their country, just as they did the Soviets. Any solutions, Mr Crumpton? If Musharraf tried to confine them to the camps or, as he would much prefer, make them return to Afghanistan, there would be a war in Pakistan that would make the present conflict in Afghanistan look positively tranquil.

In the three years of US and other western forces' occupation of Afghanistan there has been no improvement in social or economic conditions that would encourage refugees to return, in spite of all the efforts of Pakistan and the UN High Commission for Refugees, a saintly organisation that gets a lot of undeserved criticism. The announcement by Bush on May 27 that Afghanistan is now a "democracy" and an ally "in the cause of freedom and peace" was mendacious

the west occupying it for years and, according to Bush, bringing it "democracy". The deaths of 700 Pakistani soldiers have caused even the loyal army to wonder what the cost of supporting America might eventually entail. A growing domestic drug problem has caused enormous social problems and caused even more corruption. And there is criticism from the US State Department and other US officials that the government of Pakistan isn't "doing enough" to control Afghan and Pakistani guerrillas who say they regard the invasion of the region as a Christian Crusade against Islam.

The current edition of *The Economist* carries an excellent survey of Pakistan that ought to be read by those who want to understand its problems, and its observations about Islamic extremists are chilling. It is in the best interests of Pakistan to combat terrorism if its president and government are to survive, and it is untrue and indeed absurd to claim that Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz and President Pervez Musharraf, both modernist moderates, are not doing their utmost to counter terrorism in all its aspects. Their very lives depend on their success. They deserve support rather than carping criticism.
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Brian Cloughley writes on military and political affairs