



Written by on February 17, 2009

## Pakistan Agrees to Taliban Haven in Swat Valley

The United States has used unmanned drones to carry out retaliatory air strikes on suspected militant targets in the Pakistani border area of Kurram. One such strike on February 16 killed at least 15 people, Pakistani sources reported. Some analysts have expressed the belief that the U.S. air strikes may be pushing the Taliban farther away from the border into Swat, making the valley more important to the Taliban.



NWFP's chief minister, Amir Haider Hoti, said in a news conference that Islamic law is already being practiced in the Taliban-controlled area.

CNN quoted Khadim Hussain, a professor at Bahria University in Islamabad who studies Pakistani politics, who said that the government has effectively surrendered the areas to the Taliban, thereby setting the stage for two contradictory, parallel states in North West Frontier Province. "If you leave them like that and you give ... a semblance of peace in a particular area, what does that mean?" asked Hussain. "It means you're capitulating. It means you're surrendering the state to them. It means your submitting the state authority to them because they are running a parallel state."

The militants control about 70 percent of Malakand region, which is just 100 miles from Islamabad, Pakistan's capital. An estimated 3,000 Taliban militants have successfully held off 12,000 government troops as they have terrorized the local population. Last year, a majority of voters in Swat elected officials from the secular Awami National Party to office. However, Taliban terrorists have assassinated some elected officials with suicide bomb attacks and chased most of those who remained from the valley.

The *New York Times* reported that the Obama administration's special envoy to the region, Richard C. Holbrooke, while speaking in India on the last leg of his trip to Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India, did not address the truce directly but said the turmoil in Swat served as a reminder that the United States, Pakistan, and India faced an "enemy which poses direct threats to our leadership, our capitals, and our people."

A White House spokesman, Tommy Vietor, issued a very brief statement on February 16: "We have seen the press reports and are in touch with the government of Pakistan about the ongoing situation in Swat."

NWFP officials said the agreement between the central government and the Taliban was struck with one Maulana Sufi Muhammad, who in 2001 led thousands of young men across the border into Afghanistan to fight against U.S. troops.

Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari, whose late wife, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, was assassinated by militants believed to have been Pakistani Taliban, spoke in an interview with CBS correspondent Steve Kroft for the network's *60 Minutes* program broadcast on February 15.

Kroft asked Zardari: "Right now, you have a situation in the Swat area. It's only three hours from Islamabad where the Taliban is very strong there. How did that happen?"



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Zardari replied: "It's been happening over time. And it's happened out of denial. Everybody was in denial that they're weak and they won't be able to take over. That they won't be able to give us a challenge. And our forces weren't increased. And therefore we have weaknesses. And they are taking advantage of that weakness."

Shortly after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, President George W. Bush warned in a statement directed mainly at Taliban-controlled Afghanistan: "We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them."

"We will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism," said the former president in a nationally televised address to a joint session of Congress just months after the attacks. "Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime."

Since neither the Bush nor Obama administrations have announced a change in this policy, we must assume it is still in force. And yet, as Taliban-connected insurgents fight to regain control of Afghanistan, Pakistan vacillates. Though the country is officially our "ally" in the war against terrorism, events in recent days reveal exactly how useless this alliance is. Is not Pakistan now as guilty of harboring terrorism as Afghanistan once was?

But what alternatives does the United States have? With troops in Iraq, with a buildup of troops underway in Afghanistan, our military hardly has the resources to extend the war on terrorism into Pakistan, as well.

Maybe our only option is the constitutional one — to send no troops abroad without a congressional declaration of war. If combined with the foreign policies preferred by our early presidents, we might soon end the wasteful expenditure of billions of dollars and thousands of lives to hunt terrorists on their home turf. Our resources might then be better spent to rebuild our national security apparatus to prevent terrorists from entering our country in the first place.

As President John Quincy Adams once summarized the foreign policy favored by our early presidents: "America does not go abroad in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own."

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