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Pakistan Cracks Down on Taliban

Agence France Presse (AFP) quoted government officials who said that military forces had attacked the Taliban strongholds of Malam Jabba, Matta, and Khawaza Khela. The strikes came one day after the deadliest fighting in the district since the February peace deal was reached.

“We have orders to target militants’ hideouts and the writ of the government is to be established at any cost,” the official told AFP on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak freely to the media.



Bloomberg News reported that Pakistani troops have killed more than 235 Taliban militants since April 26, as the government seeks to reassert control of the region. An army spokesman said on May 7 that “all elements of national power” should be deployed against the extremists. On the same day, the army announced that 10 more militants were killed in an exchange of gunfire in the lower Dir district.

“There is no hope of resuming peace talks,” Bloomberg quoted Rizwanullah Farooq, the brother of the pro-Taliban cleric Sufi Muhammad. “Nobody can talk when the operation is killing people and destroying houses.”

Sufi Muhammad was the primary negotiator for the Taliban in reaching the February peace deal, and he heads a group called Tehrik-e-Nifaaz Shariat Muhammadi. One of Mohammad’s 14 sons, Maulana Kifayatullah, was killed when mortar shells hit his house on May 7. Farooq is a spokesman for the pro-Taliban organization.

The more aggressive stance against the Taliban followed close on the heels of a Washington meeting hosted by President Obama with Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari and Afghan President Hamid Karzai in Washington on May 6. The leaders reportedly discussed a new U.S. strategy against Taliban, al-Qaeda, and other Islamist militants in the region.

“I’m pleased that these two men, elected leaders of Afghanistan and Pakistan, fully appreciate the seriousness of the threat that we face, and have reaffirmed their commitment to confronting it,” Obama said.

A statement from the Pakistani Ministry of Information & Broadcasting posted on the government of Pakistan’s website, dated May 6, quoted Pakistan’s President Asif Ali Zardari, who “thanked the United States for its support for democracy and security in Pakistan and said he looks forward to further support. ‘Afghanistan, Pakistan and the United States are all victims of terror, as is indeed the entire world. Our threat is common and our responsibilities should be shared. And for me the challenge of extremism and terrorism is personal as it is national.’ ”

Zardari also thanked the U.S. Congress for supporting emergency economic and security assistance for Pakistan. “I am here to assure our American partners that while we will need higher levels of support in the days to come, we will also be far more transparent in our actions,” he added. “Democracy will



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avenge the death of my wife [Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto] and thousands of other Pakistanis and citizens of the world.”

In the *New York Times* for May 8, following the meeting between President Obama and his two Middle Eastern counterparts, diplomatic correspondent Helene Cooper observed that “the one thing that no one seemed to be talking about publicly is the one thing that, privately, Obama officials acknowledge is the most important: how to get the Pakistani government and army to move the country’s troops from the east, where they are preoccupied with a possible war with India, which most American officials do not think they will have to fight, to the west, where the Islamist insurgents are taking over one town after another.”

One explanation advanced by Cooper for Pakistan’s reticence to attack the insurgents en masse is that “there is a real difference in the way that the two countries view the insurgency in the western part of Pakistan. While Americans see this as an existential threat to the Pakistani government, Pakistanis look at things differently.

““This situation has been going on for decades,’ one Pakistani official explained on Wednesday, speaking on condition of anonymity. “These people have always tried to impose Shariah law in the tribal areas.”

“Pakistan is more concerned, he said, with getting the American government to stop the unmanned Predator strikes in the western part of the country, which he characterized as far more damaging to the survivability of the Pakistani government than Islamist insurgents in the Swat valley.”

Cooper described the disparity of thought as “the disconnect between the two governments.”

While it may seem logical to Americans that Pakistanis should share our interest in defeating the Taliban, the “disconnect” apparently resolves around the fact that to us, the Taliban are the people who hosted Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, and are therefore culpable in the worst terrorist attack ever made against Americans. The statement from the Pakistani official, in contrast, indicates that Pakistanis regard the Taliban as merely one more sect in a long line of troublesome militant Islamic fundamentalist trying to impose their beliefs on rural peasants. Obviously, they assign a lower priority on defeating the Taliban than we do, a priority they have only recently raised after being promised \$1.5 billion annually in U.S. aid.

As our nation finds itself enmeshed in a long series of military operations in the Middle East, going back to the first Gulf War in 1991, the futility of intervention in this part of the world should long ago have become evident. Recall that the origins of al Qaeda go back even further — to the fight by Afghan mujahideen (freedom fighters) against their Soviet occupiers. Through a program called Operation Cyclone, the CIA channeled millions of dollars to the mujahideen from 1979 to 1989. Given the aggressive nature of the Soviet communists (the self-admitted enemies of the United States), and the worthiness of the cause of the Afghan freedom fighters to throw off their oppressors, the operation may have been deemed worthy by many. But here is where the advice prescribed by George Washington in his Farewell Address should have been heeded: “The great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is, in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little political connection as possible.”

When mujahideen veteran Osama bin Laden returned to Saudi Arabia and subsequently offered the services of al-Qaeda to Saudi King Fahd to protect Saudi Arabia from the Iraqi army that had invaded neighboring Kuwait, Fahd refused bin Laden’s offer. To add insult to injury, in bin Laden’s eyes, the Saudi king allowed U.S. and allied forces to deploy on Saudi territory. Bin Laden protested what he



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regarded as infidel profanation of sacred Muslim soil and had a falling out with both the Saudi government and his family. He was forced into exile.

When the Taliban (most of whom were also former mujahideen or war orphans) took control of Afghanistan in 1996, they rewarded their patron Osama bin Laden, who had served as a conduit for generous donations to the Darul Uloom Haqqania institute, of which several Taliban leaders were alumni. The Taliban warmly welcome their generous patron to Afghanistan, where he establish the infamous al Qaeda training camps.

In 1996, al-Qaeda announced its jihad (holy war) to expel foreign troops and other infidels from what they regarded as sacred Islamic lands. Bin Laden issued a fatwa (literally, a legal opinion, but, effectively, a declaration of war). In it, he decries “the iniquitous crusaders movement under the leadership of the USA” and castigates Saudi leaders for “ignoring the divine Shari’ah law; depriving people of their legitimate rights; allowing the Americans to occupy the land of the two Holy Places.”

Were U.S. intentions in helping the occupied Afghan and Kuwaiti people honorable? On the face, perhaps, though U.S. foreign policy of the past 75 years or so has been so antithetical even to our own interests, who can say what our Council on Foreign Relations-guided leaders’ motives really were.

From George Washington, to Thomas Jefferson, to present-day Rep. Ron Paul, U.S. leaders who respect the Constitution have advised using our military to defend America’s interests, not the world’s. For those who label such a foreign policy as “isolationist,” we might ask: did al-Qaeda operatives fly planes into buildings in Switzerland?

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