

MMU: Terrorism help for Pakistan, 23 June 2008

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FEATURE STORY

Terrorism help for Pakistan

Sydney Morning Herald, Australia

Jonathan Pearlman Foreign Affairs Correspondent

June 23, 2008

AUSTRALIAN counter-terrorism experts could be sent to Pakistan under a far-reaching plan by the Federal Government to help that country promote stability, slow the spread of Islamic extremism and stem the flow of insurgents into Afghanistan.

The plan would mark a significant deepening of Australian-Pakistani relations and could result in the two countries working together on the types of extensive counter-terrorism programs that have been extended to Indonesia, the Philippines and elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific. Senior Government sources told the Herald the measures would extend beyond security and include plans to develop an extradition treaty, formalise dialogues between senior officials and ministers, deal with food security, assist with security training and extend aid and development assistance.

Government sources said closer engagement with Pakistan could help promote stability - including the protection of the country's nuclear arsenal - and prevent the flow of insurgents from sanctuaries in the western tribal areas, who have been attacking NATO-led and Afghan forces in Afghanistan. It could also allay any Pakistani concerns about Australia's expanding ties with India.

It is understood the plan is being drafted by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade with input from agencies including the federal police, the Defence Force, the Immigration Department and the Attorney-General's Department. It would build on a counter-terrorism memorandum Australia and Pakistan signed in 2005.

The Rudd Government has shifted its focus from the war on Iraq - from which the last Australian combat troops returned yesterday - to the war in Afghanistan, where Australia's 1100 troops operate in some of the most dangerous provinces, including Oruzgan, which is close to Pakistan.

Government sources said Australia was well placed to provide counter-terrorism support to Pakistan because Australia was free of the baggage that beset other key allies, such as Britain, a former colonial power, and the US, which is widely disliked for its perceived intrusiveness and the fallout from military incursions such as a recent air strike that killed 11 Pakistani soldiers.

Pakistan's high commissioner to Australia, Jalil Jilani, told the Herald the Pakistani Government and public saw Australia as a "very friendly country" and would be receptive to greater co-operation.

"The Government and people of Pakistan would desire a strengthening of relations in almost every area," he said.

"I do not think there are issues involved in co-operating on counter-terrorism activities as long as it does not impinge on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Pakistan."

Mr Jilani said Australia was praised in Pakistan after the Howard government's swift provision of aid after the devastating earthquake in 2005.

Western governments have become increasingly vocal about the need for Pakistan to tackle Islamic radicalism. The chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Michael Mullen, predicted two weeks ago that any future al-Qaeda attack on the US would originate in Pakistan's tribal areas, where Osama Bin Laden is believed to have been hiding since the fall of the Taliban.

The Foreign Affairs Minister, Stephen Smith, has called for international action to help and encourage Pakistan to crack down on the flow of insurgents.

"We have got to start looking at the border between Afghanistan not just as a bilateral issue between those two nations but a regional issue" he said this month.

Mr Smith will meet the Indian Minister for External Affairs, Pranab Mukherjee, in Canberra today. It is understood that the Pakistani Prime Minister, Yousuf Raza Gilani, has been invited to Australia and is likely to visit within the next 12 months.

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BUSINESS

Iran opens port to Afghan business

<http://www.quqnoos.com/>

Written by PAN

Sunday, 22 June 2008

Businessmen to get special permits to use Iranian sea port

IRAN has agreed to let Afghan businessmen use the Iranian sea port of Chabahar to import and export goods into and

out of their country.

The historic deal will weaken Afghanistan's reliance on Pakistan as a transit route for goods travelling into and out of the country.

The head of Afghanistan's Chamber of Industry and Commerce, Mohammad Qurban Haqjo, said the deal, signed on June 19, will boost trade and create business opportunities for the country's private sector.

The port is located on the Oman Gulf, about 700km from the Afghan province of Nimroz, and serves as a jumping off point to the Indian Ocean through the Arabian Sea.

The nearest sea port Afghanistan is currently allowed to use is in Karachi, Pakistan, 1,200km from Afghanistan's eastern province of Nangarhar.

Haqjo said the route through Pakistan was fraught with problems for Afghan businessmen: goods are often seized by customs officials or delayed for months.

Businessmen have also complained in the past of the deteriorating security situation along the Afghan-Pakistani border.

The port at Chabahar will allow Afghan goods to reach the international market far quicker, he said.

The Iranian government will rent 50 hectares of the port's land to Afghan businessmen for the next 99 years as part of the landmark deal.

The Iranian government's representative in Chabahar, Dr Baqer Zada, said Afghans will be allowed to start up construction companies, hotels and tourism businesses in the port

"We are neighbours. We share the same religion. We want to encourage Afghan private sector development," he said.

Businessmen will be able to obtain a special permit to travel to Chabahar without having to apply for a visa.

Malaysia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and China all use the port.

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NATION

Pakistani rockets kill four civilians - officials

Written by <http://www.quqnoos.com/>

Sunday, 22 June 2008

Spate of rocket attacks on NATO bases leave woman and children dead

ROCKETS fired from Pakistan at NATO army bases in Khost province have killed one woman and three children, according to Afghan officials.

The NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said only three civilians were killed when the rockets, launched from 300m inside Pakistan, landed in a residential area.

But Khost governor Arsala Jamal said three children and one women were killed and a further eight civilians were wounded in the attack on Sunday, most of them women.

In a separate attack, 13 rockets were launched at NATO bases from inside Afghanistan earlier in the night, killing one civilian, ISAF said.

On Saturday evening, a rocket fired from Pakistan hit a hospital in the north-eastern Afghan province of Kunar, killing one man and wounding another man and woman, the provincial governor said.

Also on Saturday, three artillery shells fired from Pakistan landed in an Afghan army camp in Paktika and three others landed close to a NATO base in the province.

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Washington Post - Asia/Pacific

By Candace Rondeaux

Washington Post Foreign Service

Monday, June 23, 2008

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan

A tense quiet has settled here in Afghanistan's second-largest city, a little more than a week after hundreds of Taliban fighters mounted a dramatic prison break, then briefly took control of several villages in the area.

One of the city's main traffic circles, Chowk-e Shahidan, was nearly empty, except for a cluster of armored vehicles manned by Afghan and Canadian soldiers. Just a few shoppers roamed nearby Herat Bazaar, Kandahar's largest market, and a couple of dusty green pickup trucks full of Afghan police ranged the empty streets, past carts brimming with mangoes.

At Sarposa Prison, a few miles from Herat Bazaar, Afghan police and soldiers cleared debris from the suicide bomb attack on June 13 that blew apart the walls at the main gate. The carcasses of two dozen cars and minivans still littered the area just outside the entrance, where at least 20 Afghan soldiers and police officers were killed in the explosion and a hail of rocket and gunfire. Afghan officials say many of the 350 to 400 Taliban fighters freed in the attack remain at large.

In the lush fruit-growing district of Arghandab, about 12 miles northwest of Kandahar, NATO and Afghan troops patrol the villages that fell under Taliban control when insurgents launched an offensive there last Monday after the prison attack. The troops have largely rid the district of insurgents, but hundreds of residents remain with relatives and friends in Kandahar while soldiers remove mines laid by the insurgents.

NATO and Afghan military officials quickly claimed victory in Kandahar after more than 1,000 foreign troops were deployed to help beat back the insurgents in Arghandab. But security concerns continue to rattle many in the region, which has long been the heart of the Taliban insurgency.

And even as Afghan officials reported that about 94 Taliban fighters were killed and 29 captured as insurgents fled the area, NATO and Afghan casualties linked to the counteroffensive mounted over the weekend.

On Saturday, four foreign soldiers were killed and two were injured when a NATO convoy was ambushed after hitting a roadside bomb in Kandahar, according to Lt. Col. Paul Fanning, a U.S. military spokesman. Insurgents opened fire on the convoy after the explosion, which damaged several vehicles, Fanning said.

In all, eight foreign troops have been killed in the fighting since the counteroffensive in Kandahar was launched; their names and nationalities have been withheld pending notification of their families.

Despite the swift military response in Arghandab, confidence in the nascent Afghan security forces and NATO troops is waning in the region.

Hayatullah Alokhori, a tribal elder from the village of Loytabil in Arghandab, said he and his family fled their homes when hundreds of Taliban fighters began appearing in the district after the prison attack.

Alokhori, a member of the local district council, said he and other council members had warned Afghan, Canadian and U.S. soldiers of a growing Taliban presence in the nearby district of Kharkrez during a council meeting two weeks before the prison break.

"I told the American and Canadian soldiers that the Taliban was regrouping. I told them that the security situation was getting worse in Kharkrez," Alokhori said. "They said they would tell their superiors, but then nothing happened."

Security in districts west of Kandahar has deteriorated so rapidly that many tribal elders are considering forming their own militias to fight the insurgents, Alokhori said. "The police will not be able to bring security to the area. They are too new at this and they don't have the proper training," he said.

Kandahar -- the capital of Afghanistan's most populous southern province, also called Kandahar -- has been a center of Afghan political power for centuries. It has also been the nerve center of the Taliban insurgency, which has run like a river through the heart of the conflict in Afghanistan since the mid-1990s under the leadership of its founder, Mohammad Omar.

Afghan security officials have repeatedly blamed the resurgent Taliban activity in Kandahar on an influx of foreign fighters who have crossed into southern Afghanistan from Pakistan. Many of the inmates freed in last week's prison break are from Pakistan's lawless tribal areas on Afghanistan's eastern border, which have become a hotbed of training for suicide bombers and Islamist fighters, according to Afghan officials in Kandahar.

Kandahar's provincial police chief, Sayed Agha Saqib, said about 20 mid-level Pakistani Taliban commanders -- many of them key strategists in the insurgency's suicide attack networks -- were among those freed in the prison attack.

Saqib said that investigators believe the prison raid was planned by Taliban leaders "inside and outside Afghanistan" and that it bore the hallmarks of al-Qaeda tactics. He accused Pakistan's powerful Inter-Services Intelligence agency of having a hand in the attack.

"There is absolutely no doubt that this was an al-Qaeda-led attack, and there is no difference here between the Taliban, the ISI and al-Qaeda."

Pakistan has denied that its intelligence agencies, which funded and supported the Taliban during the Soviet incursion in Afghanistan in the 1980s, continue to harbor links with the Taliban.

Ahmed Wali Karzai, brother of Afghan President Hamid Karzai and the influential head of the Kandahar provincial council, expressed doubt about the Taliban's staying power, saying that the Arghandab offensive and the prison raid were meant to do little more than send a message that the insurgency is still alive.

"The Taliban is no longer a movement that can take over a city or a province," he said. "The Taliban is now the kind of movement that can say, 'We can still create problems for you.'" More than 8,000 people were killed in Taliban-led attacks last year, and more than 1,700 have been killed this year in insurgent attacks.

Meanwhile, confidence in the NATO mission in Afghanistan has fallen to an all-time low. Western donor countries agreed two weeks ago in Paris to give about \$21 billion in aid to Afghanistan, but that amount is less than half that requested by the beleaguered Afghan government. And as NATO casualties rise -- particularly among the Canadians, who lead NATO forces in the south -- coalition partners are facing domestic pressure to withdraw from the mission.

Ahmed Wali Karzai attributed the success of the most recent anti-Taliban operation to Afghan coordination with foreign troops in the region and a more rapid response from NATO's headquarters in Kabul, the capital.

But he added that the region, and the country, desperately needed to better prepare for the next wave of attacks. "We need a quick-action force so we can go after them," Karzai said. "We shouldn't be in a position of defending the city. We should go after the Taliban instead."

Special correspondent Javed Hamdard contributed to this report.

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NATO says 6,000 troops urgently needed in Afghanistan

International Herald Tribune, France

Reuters

Published: June 22, 2008

BERLIN

Up to 6,000 additional troops are urgently needed in Afghanistan and a failure to deploy them will only prolong the presence of Western forces in the country, a German NATO general said on Sunday.

Egon Ramms told public radio station Deutschlandfunk that alliance members would end up paying a price later if they did not boost troop numbers now.

"We are talking about a total of 5,000, 6,000 soldiers," Ramms said. "We need these soldiers now, very soon, because we need to hold specific areas, we need to win over Afghanistan's citizens and because at some point, in 2010, 2011 or 2012 we will want to hand over responsibility to Afghan forces."

Roughly 60,000 foreign troops are in Afghanistan, most of them part of the NATO-led International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF), but security has deteriorated over the past two years.

Some 6,000 people were killed in 2007, the deadliest year since U.S.-led and Afghan forces toppled the Taliban in 2001.

"The troops that I don't have now could lead to delays in the withdrawal of NATO and ISAF," Ramms said. "In other words, the costs that are not being paid now will have a negative impact on the bottom line at some point."

Ramms declined to say how many additional German troops he thought were necessary, but said Germany should increase the number of troops it can send to Afghanistan from a fixed ceiling of 3,500.

The parliamentary mandate for German troops operating in Afghanistan is due to expire in October and Defence Minister Franz Josef Jung is expected to request an increase of at least 1,000 in the troop limit.

(Writing by Noah Barkin)

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UK uses lung-shredder to kill rebels

Written by <http://www.quqnoos.com/> foreign desk

Sunday, 22 June 2008

Britain's defence ministry admits use of 'brutal' missile to London paper

BRITISH troops have used missiles in Afghanistan which suck the air out of human targets, shred their internal organs and crush their bodies, according to a leading British newspaper.

The Hellfire missiles, also known as vacuum bombs, are condemned by human rights groups as "brutal".

Britain's Ministry of Defence (MoD) admitted to the London Times newspaper that its soldiers had fired the controversial thermobaric weapons, used to kill fighters in buildings and caves, from Apache attack helicopters in Afghanistan.

The MoD said the Hellfire AGM-114N, which creates a human-crushing vacuum with a second explosion, had proved so successful that the missile will now be fired from unmanned predator drones.

The Soviet Union's forces in Afghanistan were the first to test thermobaric weapons on the enemy.

The world condemned Russia's use of the weapon during its fight against Chechnyan rebels in the 1980s.

"We no longer accept the term thermobaric [for the AGM-114N] as there is no internationally agreed definition," said an MoD spokesman talking to the London Times. "We call it an enhanced blast weapon."

Human Rights Watch says the weapons are "brutal" and that their blast "makes it virtually impossible for civilians to take shelter".

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From Afghanistan, NATO Shells Militants in Pakistan

The New York Times - World

By ABDUL WAHEED WAFI and DEXTER FILKINS

Published: June 23, 2008

KABUL, Afghanistan

NATO forces in Afghanistan shelled guerrillas in Pakistan in two separate episodes on Sunday, as escalating insurgent violence appeared to be eroding the alliance's restraint along the border.

NATO officials said they had retaliated against rocket and artillery attacks launched by militants from sanctuaries across the border in Pakistan, where they operate freely. The insurgents' attacks, launched into Khost and Paktika Provinces, killed four Afghan civilians, at least two of them children, Afghan and NATO officials said. Casualty figures for Pakistan were not available.

The firing by NATO forces into Pakistani territory followed an American airstrike on a Pakistani border post earlier this month that killed 11 Pakistani soldiers. The Pakistani government denounced the strike, and the American government expressed regret, but it is still not entirely clear what happened.

Relations between the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan were already extraordinarily tense. American and Afghan officials say the surging violence in Afghanistan is in large part caused by the sanctuaries that militants enjoy in Pakistan. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, have assembled in Pakistan, most of them in the area along the remote and mountainous frontier where the government exercises no authority.

In those sanctuaries, the militants are free to train, regroup and plan new attacks in Afghanistan. American and NATO commanders have expressed frustration at the violence caused by the militants who cross from Pakistan, but they have so far been refused permission to conduct military operations there.

Last week, President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan threatened to send troops across the border to attack the militants if the Pakistani government did not prevent them from crossing the border. The Pakistani government has never exercised more than nominal control over long stretches of its border with Afghanistan, and Pakistani leaders say they do not have enough troops to secure the area.

The first attack came shortly after midnight in Khost Province, where militants inside Afghanistan fired 13 rockets, apparently at a base for the International Security Assistance Force, the NATO force charged with maintaining order in Afghanistan. One rocket hit the base, causing no casualties, but another killed an Afghan civilian, officials said.

Later, in a second volley, five rockets sailed in from Pakistan, striking the village of Kundai, where a woman and her two children were killed, officials said. The security forces there located the militants' firing battery several hundred yards inside Pakistan and returned fire.

Officials from the security force gave no details of their own artillery barrage, except to say that Pakistani officials were immediately informed of the shelling. Maj. Gen. Athar Abbas of the Pakistani military said he knew nothing about any incidents along the border.

"We need to defend ourselves," said Gen. Carlos Branco, a spokesman for the security force.

In the second episode, an Afghan Army post in Paktika Province came under artillery fire from Pakistan. The international security forces located the firing battery on the other side of the border and returned fire. Officials provided no other details.

Also on Sunday, the governor of Kunar Province in Afghanistan reported that a rocket from Pakistan struck a hospital on Saturday in the town of Asadabad in Kunar. The same day, an American bomb landed on the border near a Pakistani post in North Waziristan during fighting with militants, General Abbas said.

Abdul Waheed Wafa reported from Kabul, and Dexter Filkins from Islamabad, Pakistan.

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10 troops killed in attacks in Afghanistan

Los Angeles Times, CA

From Times Wire Services

June 22, 2008

KABUL, AFGHANISTAN

Five foreign troops and five Afghan soldiers were killed in roadside bombings Saturday, military officials said.

In the deadliest incident, a coalition convoy was struck by a roadside bomb west of the main southern city of Kandahar, killing four troops and wounding two.

U.S. coalition spokesman Lt. Col. Paul Fanning said gunmen opened fire on the damaged vehicles and three Afghans also were hurt. He declined to release the nationality of the troops, who were involved in training Afghans.

In a separate incident, attackers detonated bombs and opened fire on vehicles carrying Afghan troops in Zabol and Kunar provinces, killing five soldiers and wounding three.

A Polish soldier with the separate NATO-led force died when a bomb hit his patrol after midnight in Paktika province. Jacek Poplawski, a military spokesman in Warsaw, said four soldiers were wounded.

Shells fired from Pakistan landed in an Afghan army compound and close to an international military base in Paktika province, and North Atlantic Treaty Organization forces returned fire, officials said. No casualties were reported.

A rocket hit a hospital in the northeastern town of Asadabad close to the Pakistan border, killing one man and wounding a man and a woman.

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Green officials want eco-court to punish polluters

Written by <http://www.quqnoos.com/>

Sunday, 22 June 2008

Rising pollution must be curbed, government department says

ECO-minded officials in the government want to set up a special court to punish companies and government organisations that harm the environment.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) will also face trial if they are suspected of breaking the country's green laws, a spokesman for the department of environmental protection said.

The department accused the government of failing to protect the environment, which it said was suffering from a rise in pollution.

The increased use of inefficient and unclean fuel and the continued use of old vehicles in the country's major cities threaten people's lives, the department said.

It believes a court set up to punish offenders will curb the rise in pollution.

The use of plastics, old cars, generators and inefficient oil, the increase in city dirt, the lack of proper sewers, the lack of green spaces in the cities and the lack of asphalt roads are among the main reasons for the increase in pollution, the department said.

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Rice terms Afghan threats 'not wise'

Dawn

June 22, 2008

WASHINGTON

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said in an interview aired on Sunday that threats by Afghanistan to pursue Taliban insurgents across the border into Pakistan were "not wise."

Rice instead called for cooperation between the two nations after Afghan President Hamid Karzai had angered Pakistan when he threatened cross-border action as a right of "self-defence" against Taliban forces.

"I think it's probably not wise to talk about Afghan cross-border operations," Rice said in the interview with CNN.

"I think it's better that Pakistan and Afghanistan cooperate on their respective sides of the border," she said.

"There are Taliban operating in Afghanistan who have to be defeated. And there are Taliban who are operating in Pakistan, and they have to be defeated, too.

But I think it's probably better that the respective governments deal with their own problems."

-AFP

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Governor lashes out at Iran over 'water theft'

Written by <http://www.quqnoos.com/>

Sunday, 22 June 2008

Nimroz head accuses Iran of digging tunnels to steal province's water

THE GOVERNOR of Nimroz has accused Iran of intensifying the drought in his province by siphoning off more than its quota of water from the Hiromand River.

The recent lack of rain in the province, which shares its border and the Hiromand River with Iran, has triggered a lack of clean drinking water in the area.

Governor Ghullam Dastager Azad said the Iranian government were digging illegal tunnels to reach the river's water supply.

In Nimroz, residents receive water in tankers but, across the border, Iran has built water towers to ensure resident have enough water.

Iran refused to comment about the allegations.

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Pakistan's Pashtun tribal area A line not to be crossed

The Star - Opinion

By Eric Margolis

22/06/2008

The killing of 11 Pakistani soldiers by US air and artillery strikes last week shows just how quickly the American-led war in Afghanistan is spreading into neighboring Pakistan.

Pakistan's military branded the air attack "unprovoked and cowardly." There was outrage across Pakistan. However, the unstable government in Islamabad, which depends on large infusions of US aid, later softened its protests.

The US, which used a B-1 heavy bomber and F-15 strike aircraft in the attacks, called its action, "self-defense."

This latest US attack on Pakistan could not come at a worse time. Supreme Court justices ousted by the Pervez Musharraf dictatorship staged national protests this week, underscoring the illegality of Musharraf's continuing presidency and its unseemly support by the US, Britain, Canada and France. Asif Zardari, head of the ruling

Pakistan People's Party, shamefully joined Musharraf in opposing restoration of the justice system out of fear the reinstated judges would reopen long-festering corruption charges against him

Attacks by US aircraft, Predator hunter-killer drones, US Special Forces and CIA teams have been rising steadily inside Pakistan's autonomous Pashtun tribal area known by the acronym, FATA. The Pashtun, who make up half Afghanistan's population and 15 percent of Pakistan's, straddle the border, which they reject as a leftover of Imperial Britain's divide and rule policies.

Instead of intimidating the pro-Taliban Pakistani Pashtun, US air and artillery strikes have ignited a firestorm of anti-western fury among FATA's warlike tribesmen and increased their support for the Taliban.

The US is emulating Britain's colonial divide and rule tactics by offering up to \$500,000 to local Pashtun tribal leaders to get them to fight pro-Taliban elements, causing more chaos in the already turbulent region, and stoking tribal rivalries. The US is using this same tactic in Iraq and Afghanistan.

This week's deadly US attacks again illustrate the fact that the 60,000 US and NATO ground troops in Afghanistan are incapable of holding off the Taliban and its allies, even though the Afghan resistance has nothing but small arms to battle the West's hi-tech arsenal. US air power is almost always called in when there are clashes.

In fact, the main function for US and NATO infantries is to draw the Taliban into battle so the Afghan "mujahidin" can be bombed from the air. Without 24/7 US airpower, which can respond in minutes, western forces in Afghanistan would be quickly isolated, cut off from supplies, and defeated.

But these air strikes, as we saw this week, are blunt instruments in spite of all the remarkable skill of the US Air Force and Navy pilots. They kill more civilians than Taliban fighters. Mighty US B-1 bombers are not going to win the hearts and minds of Afghans. Each bombed village and massacred caravan wins new recruits to the Taliban and its allies.

The US and its allies are edging into open warfare against Pakistan. The western occupation army in Afghanistan is unable to defeat Taliban fighters due to its lack of combat troops. The outgoing supreme commander, US Gen. Dan McNeill, recently admitted he would need 400,000 soldiers to pacify Afghanistan.

Unable to win in Afghanistan, the frustrated western powers are turning on Pakistan, a nation of 165 million. Pakistanis are bitterly opposed to the US-led war in Afghanistan and their nation's subjugation to US policy under dictator Musharraf.

"We just need to occupy Pakistan's tribal territory," insists the Pentagon, "to stop its Pashtun tribes from supporting and sheltering Taliban." But a US-led invasion of FATA simply will push pro-Taliban Pashtun militants deeper into Pakistan's Northwest Frontier province, drawing western troops ever deeper into Pakistan. Already overextended, western forces will be stretched even thinner and clashes with Pakistan's tough regular army may be inevitable.

Widening the Afghan War into Pakistan is military stupidity on a grand scale, and political madness. But Washington and its obedient allies seem hell-bent on charging into a wider regional war that no number of heavy bombers will win.

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War villagers return to mines and dead bodies

<http://www.quqnoos.com/>

Written by Gullam Mohammad Masoomi

Sunday, 22 June 2008

Hundreds forced to flee fighting between the Taliban and Afghan troops

HUNDREDS of families forced to leave their villages in Kandahar province following the recent Taliban-linked violence face roadside mines and rotting bodies on their return home.

The Ministry of Defence has promised families they can return home on Monday, six days after NATO-led and Afghan forces stormed the district of Arghandab to rid a number of villages of 400 Taliban militants.

Spokesman for the ministry, General Zahir Azimi, said on Saturday: "We are making our best efforts to clean up the mines from the area in two days."

The exact number of those forced to flee the fighting is unclear although it is thought as many as 2,000 people were turfed out of their homes.

NATO helicopters dropped leaflets warning residents of the imminent battle.

Reporters in the area who visited the villages on Saturday after the Taliban were routed from the area said rotting bodies were lying in the sun in piles among the houses.

Our reporter, Farhad Balkhi, said he counted 120 dead bodies in the villages.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said it had sent a delegation to the district to investigate the needs of the displaced people.

A spokesman for UNHCR, Nadir Farhad, said: "We hope that our representatives will prepare the lists of these families soon, so we can start delivering aid to the vulnerable families in Arghandab."

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Afghanistan and Iraq are all about energy

Gulf Times - Home

By Eric S Margolis

Published: Monday, 23 June, 2008

PARIS

The ugly truth behind the Iraq and Afghanistan wars finally emerged into full view last week.

Four major Western oil companies, ExxonMobil, Shell, BP and Total, are about to sign US-brokered no-bid contracts to begin exploiting Iraq's oil fields. Saddam Hussain had kicked these firms out three decades ago when he nationalised Iraq's foreign-owned oil industry for the benefit of Iraq's national development. The US-installed Baghdad regime is turning back the clock.

The same oil companies that used to exploit Iraq when it was a British colony are now returning. As former US Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan recently admitted, the Iraq war was all about oil. Vice President Dick Cheney stated in 2003 that the invasion of Iraq was about oil and for the sake of Israel.

Afghanistan just signed a major deal to launch a long-planned, 1,680 km long pipeline project expected to cost \$8bn. If completed, the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline (TAPI) will export gas and, later, oil from the Caspian Basin to Pakistan's coast where tankers will transport it to the West.

The Caspian Basin located under the Central Asian states of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakkstan, holds an estimated 300tn cubic feet of gas and 100-200bn barrels of oil. Securing the world's last remaining known energy Eldorado is a strategic priority for the western powers. China can only look on with envy.

But there are only two practical ways to get gas and oil out of land-locked Central Asia to the sea: through Iran, or through Afghanistan to Pakistan. The US Israel lobby has blocked any dealings with Iran. That leaves Pakistan, but to get there, the planned pipeline must cross western Afghanistan, including the cities of Herat and Kandahar.

In 1998, the Afghan anti-Communist movement Taliban and a Western oil consortium led by the US firm Unocal signed a major pipeline deal. Unocal lavished money and attention on Taliban, flew a senior delegation to Texas, and also hired a minor Afghan official, one Hamid Karzai.

Enter Osama bin Laden. He advised the unworldly Taliban leaders to reject the US deal and got them to accept a better offer from an Argentine consortium, Bidas. Washington was furious and, according to some accounts, threatened Taliban with war.

In early 2001, six or seven months before 9/11, Washington made the decision to invade Afghanistan, overthrow Taliban, and install a client regime that would build the energy pipelines. But Washington still kept up sending money to Taliban until four months before 9/11 in an effort to keep it 'on side' for possible use in a war against Iran.

The 9/11 attacks, about which Taliban knew nothing, supplied the pretext to invade Afghanistan. The initial US operation had the legitimate objective of wiping out bin Laden's Al Qaeda. But after its 300 members fled to Pakistan, the US stayed on, built bases - which just happened to be adjacent to the planned pipeline route - and installed former Unocal 'consultant' Hamid Karzai as leader.

Washington disguised its energy geopolitics by claiming the Afghan occupation was to fight 'terrorism', liberate women, build schools, and promote democracy. Ironically, the Soviets made exactly the same claims when they occupied Afghanistan from 1979-1989. The cover story for Iraq was weapons of mass destruction, Saddam's supposed links to 9/11, and democracy.

Work will begin on the TAPI once Taliban forces are cleared from the pipeline route by US, Canadian and Nato forces. As American analyst Kevin Phillips writes, the US military and its allies have become an 'energy protection force' .

From Washington's viewpoint, the TAPI deal has the added benefit of scuttling another proposed pipeline project that would have delivered Iranian gas and oil to Pakistan and India.

India's energy needs are expected to triple over the next decade to 8bn barrels of oil and 80mn cubic meters of gas daily. New Delhi, which has its own designs on Afghanistan and has been stirring the pot there, is cock-a-hoop over the new pipeline plan. Russia, by contrast, is grumpy, having hoped to monopolise Central Asian energy exports.

Energy is more important than blood in our modern world. The US is a great power with massive energy needs. Domination of oil is a pillar of America's world power. Afghanistan and Iraq are all about oil. After last week's news, those who pretended otherwise looked like fools.

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Manley warns NATO could fail in Afghanistan

CTV.ca, Canada

Updated Sun. Jun. 22 2008

CTV.ca News Staff

Former Liberal deputy prime minister John Manley said Sunday that unless NATO makes a more "serious" troop commitment in Afghanistan, its mission in the war-torn country could fail.

Manley, who led a government-appointed panel that outlined conditions for Canada's continued military commitment in Afghanistan, said the mission is a real test for NATO's credibility.

"When you just look at the commitment, it's about 50,000 troops in Afghanistan. NATO sent 50,000 troops to Bosnia (in the 1990s), which is a country of about 1.8 million. Afghanistan's (population) is over 30 million," he told CTV's Question Period.

Bosnia is a tiny place, while Afghanistan is the size of France, he added.

"They just aren't taking it seriously enough, in my view. The risk of (the mission) coming out without a very satisfactory outcome is a real one."

The Manley panel recommended that NATO find a 1,000-soldier battle group to assist Canada's 2,500 troops in Kandahar province -- one of the most insurgency-wracked parts of Afghanistan. It also said Canada's soldiers should be supplied with helicopters and aerial drones.

NATO has indicated that it will provide the additional troops and equipment. Poland has said it will make two Mi-17 helicopters available to transport hard-pressed Canadian troops around the battlefield in Kandahar province. That should happen later this summer.

A German NATO general said in radio interview Sunday the Western military alliance needs to send as many as 6,000 troops to the region immediately. Egon Ramms told public radio station Deutschlandfunk that the troops are needed to hold on to key areas, win over Afghan citizens, and to allow NATO to eventually handover security control to the Afghan government.

Ramms said NATO's presence in Afghanistan will need to be extended, unless NATO sends more troops now.

Manley said the outcome of events in Afghanistan is important as NATO carries out its first mission outside of Europe.

"The consequences for NATO failing will be very serious," he said.

The prison break

Manley said this month's prison break in Kandahar -- which freed almost 400 Taliban prisoners -- indicates just how quickly the situation in Afghanistan could turn for Canadian and NATO forces.

"It's an indication that (insurgents) are capable of accomplishing something that clearly required not an insignificant degree of coordination," Manley said.

Manley said he was "very dismayed" by news of the prison break, which he said indicates "a break down in our intelligence."

"Information on something like that is something we should have been able to obtain," he said.

CTV Middle East Bureau Chief Janis Mackey Frayer told Question Period that about 30 prison escapees from Sarposa Prison been recaptured. Afghan authorities have said the men are being kept at a secret location, she said.

Officials are now trying to find out how to better co-ordinate Afghan security needs with NATO, she said. Beyond the official investigations into the matter, she said. Frayer said the incident has raised serious questions in the Afghan public.

She said people are wondering how Taliban fighters "can file into town with a tanker bomb, roll up to the front gates of the prison, blow them up, and have mini-buses waiting for the prisoners as they ran out."

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Water tankers sent to relieve drought victims

<http://www.quqnoos.com/>

Written by Mukhtar Soar

Sunday, 22 June 2008

Officials say the tankers will not be enough to end the suffering

THE GOVERNMENT has sent 63 water tankers equipped with water pumps and generators to the drought struck provinces of Badghis, Jowzjan, Balkh, Samangan, Faryab, Sari Pul and Khost.

The deputy minister of energy and water, Muhammad Akbar Barikzai, said Badghis, Jowzjan and Balkh each got three

water tankers, four each were sent to Samangan and Faryab and two each for Sari Pul and Khost.

He said China had sent the tankers to Afghanistan three months ago.

The tankers will provide water to about 30% of the residents living in the provinces, he said.

But officials in some of the government's provincial water departments say the tankers will do little to relieve the suffering of residents.

Head of the water department of Jowzjan province, Ghulam Sakhi Amini, said: "This aid is like a drop in the ocean."

He said most of the province's residents are fleeing to neighboring provinces, such as Baghlan and Kunduz, because of the lack of water.

Head of the water department in Samangan, engineer Rasool Ahamd, said more than 40,000 residents in the province had already been forced to leave the area by the severe drought.

Twenty days ago, 1,500 families fled to the Chintal district of Mazar-e-Sharif from the mountainous district of Alberz because of a lack of food and water.

Many live in tents and aid workers are worried about the spread of disease in the make-shift camp.

Two weeks ago, the head of the Human Rights Organisation in Herat, Ghulam Nabi Hakak, said drought in the province had sparked a rise in the number of street children roaming the city in search of money to feed their starving families.

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Afghanistan's curse

Khaleej Times - Editorial

23 June 2008

LATEST insurgent violence in Afghanistan's south, though tragic, plays according to the warning we shared in this space a few days ago as Nato and Afghan troops celebrated premature victory after removing Taleban forces from areas in and around Kandahar.

So, Karzai's regime and Nato allies vent frustration over the embarrassing and costly prison break in Kandahar, toss blame on across-the-border elements in Pakistan, initiate a spirited drive in the south, then wrongfoot themselves by falling into the age-old Afghan trap and play into recurring guerilla insurgency.

Ironically, the longer American occupation lingers in Afghanistan, the more it seems to resemble the ill-fated Soviet adventure of the '80s. Seven years into the takeover, it is clear to all that America is badly bleeding personnel, hardware and money over the hills of Afghanistan, in a fight that can in no way be won from here, chillingly reminiscent of Soviet fortunes around the time Gorbachev was stamping his ascent to power in Politburo politics. Just like Moscow in those days, Washington's power corridors are now echoing exit strategies. Even though Bush's lobby refuses to pay heed to such concerns, and there is little chance of changing course if Republicans keep the House, improvement in Obama's dream-run may well prompt the long overdue exit, signalling acceptance of a muted military mammoth in face of urban guerilla warfare. Another feather in Afghanistan's cap, another nail in a superpower coffin.

It is somewhat unfortunate that newspaper editorial comment can call it better than on-ground occupation forces at such a crucial time in the Afghan war. Nato is already tremendously strained because of this war, and it is becoming more apparent with time that the right lessons are not being learned. Watching from afar, at least, it is all but certain that just like the Soviets two decades ago, it is only a matter of time before Washington approves the go-ahead to "move 'em out".

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FACTBOX - Security developments in Afghanistan

Reuters

Sun Jun 22, 2008

Following are security developments in Afghanistan at 9 a.m. British time on Sunday:

KHOST - Rockets fired from Pakistan hit a residential area in eastern Afghanistan on Saturday killing one woman and three children, the Afghan provincial governor said on Sunday.

KUNAR - A suspected Taliban rocket fired from Pakistan hit a hospital in the northeastern town of Asadabad in Kunar province on Saturday, killing one man and wounding another man and a woman, provincial Governor Sayed Fazlullah Wahidi said.

PAKTIKA - Artillery shells fired from Pakistan landed in an Afghan army compound and close to an international military base in Afghanistan on Saturday and NATO forces returned fire, the alliance said. No casualties were reported.

GHAZNI - Afghan soldiers detained several militants, including one Pakistani national, in two separate districts in the province of Ghazni, south of Kabul, on Saturday, the Defence Ministry said.

ZABUL/KUNAR - Five Afghan soldiers were killed and three more wounded after coming under insurgent fire in two separate incidents in the northeastern province of Kunar and the southern province of Zabul on Saturday, the Defence Ministry said. (Compiled by Jonathon Burch; Editing by Valerie Lee)

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Taliban issue burqa warning

Daily Times

Monday, June 23, 2008

LAHORE

Taliban in the Mohmand Agency have warned women to either wear burqas or face punishment, a private TV channel reported on Sunday. The TTP has pasted posters announcing this in various parts of the agency, Express News reported. The posters ask women not to work in the fields and prohibit them from attending marriage ceremonies and visiting doctors and markets without a male escort. daily times monitor

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Reporters Say Networks Put Wars on Back Burner

New York Times, United States

By BRIAN STELTER

Published: June 23, 2008

Getting a story on the evening news isn't easy for any correspondent. And for reporters in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is especially hard, according to Lara Logan, the chief foreign correspondent for CBS News. So she has devised a solution when she is talking to the network.

"Generally what I say is, 'I'm holding the armor-piercing R.P.G.,' " she said last week in an appearance on "The Daily Show," referring to the initials for rocket-propelled grenade. " 'It's aimed at the bureau chief, and if you don't put my story on the air, I'm going to pull the trigger.' "

Ms. Logan let a sly just-kidding smile sneak through as she spoke, but her point was serious. Five years into the war in Iraq and nearly seven years into the war in Afghanistan, getting news of the conflicts onto television is harder than ever.

"If I were to watch the news that you hear here in the United States, I would just blow my brains out because it would drive me nuts," Ms. Logan said.

According to data compiled by Andrew Tyndall, a television consultant who monitors the three network evening newscasts, coverage of Iraq has been "massively scaled back this year." Almost halfway into 2008, the three newscasts have shown 181 weekday minutes of Iraq coverage, compared with 1,157 minutes for all of 2007. The "CBS Evening News" has devoted the fewest minutes to Iraq, 51, versus 55 minutes on ABC's "World News" and 74 minutes on "NBC Nightly News." (The average evening newscast is 22 minutes long.)

CBS News no longer stations a single full-time correspondent in Iraq, where some 150,000 United States troops are deployed.

Paul Friedman, a senior vice president at CBS News, said the news division does not get reports from Iraq on television

"with enough frequency to justify keeping a very, very large bureau in Baghdad." He said CBS correspondents can "get in there very quickly when a story merits it."

In a telephone interview last week, Ms. Logan said the CBS News bureau in Baghdad was "drastically downsized" in the spring. The network now keeps a producer in the country, making it less of a bureau and more of an office.

Interviews with executives and correspondents at television news networks suggested that while the CBS cutbacks are the most extensive to date in Baghdad, many journalists shared varying levels of frustration about placing war stories onto newscasts. "I've never met a journalist who hasn't been frustrated about getting his or her stories on the air," said Terry McCarthy, an ABC News correspondent in Baghdad.

By telephone from Baghdad, Mr. McCarthy said he was not as busy as he was a year ago. A decline in the relative amount of violence "is taking the urgency out" of some of the coverage, he said. Still, he gets on ABC's "World News" and other programs with stories, including one on Friday about American gains in northern Iraq.

Anita McNaught, a correspondent for the Fox News Channel, agreed. "The violence itself is not the story anymore," she said. She counted eight reports she had filed since arriving in Baghdad six weeks ago, noting that cable news channels like Fox News and CNN have considerably more time to fill with news than the networks. CNN and Fox each have two fulltime correspondents in Iraq.

Richard Engel, the chief foreign correspondent for NBC News, who splits his time between Iraq and other countries, said he found his producers "very receptive to stories about Iraq." He and other journalists noted that the heated presidential primary campaign put other news stories on the back burner earlier this year.

Ms. Logan said she begged for months to be embedded with a group of Navy Seals, and when she came back with the story, a CBS producer said to her, "One guy in uniform looks like any other guy in a uniform." In the follow-up phone interview, Ms. Logan said the producer no longer worked at CBS. And in both interviews, she emphasized that many journalists at CBS News are pushing for war coverage, specifically citing Jeff Fager, the executive producer of "60 Minutes." CBS News won a Peabody Award last week for a "60 Minutes" report about a Marine charged in the killings at Haditha.

On "The Daily Show," Ms. Logan echoed the comments of other journalists when she said that many Americans seem uninterested in the wars now. Mr. McCarthy said that when he is in the United States, bringing up Baghdad at a dinner party "is like a conversation killer."

Coverage of the war in Afghanistan has increased slightly this year, with 46 minutes of total coverage year-to-date compared with 83 minutes for all of 2007. NBC has spent 25 minutes covering Afghanistan, partly because the anchor Brian Williams visited the country earlier in the month. Through Wednesday, when an ABC correspondent was in the middle of a prolonged visit to the country, ABC had spent 13 minutes covering Afghanistan. CBS has spent eight minutes covering Afghanistan so far this year.

Both Ms. Logan and Mr. McCarthy noted that more coalition soldiers were killed in Afghanistan in May than in Iraq. No American television network has a full-time correspondent in Afghanistan, although CNN recently said it would open a bureau in Kabul.

"It's terrible," Ms. Logan said in the telephone interview. She called it a financial decision. "We can't afford to maintain operations in Iraq and Afghanistan at the same time," she said. "It's so expensive and the security risks are so great that it's prohibitive."

Mr. Friedman said coverage of Iraq is enormously expensive, mostly due to the security risks. He said meetings with other television networks about sharing the costs of coverage have faltered for logistical reasons.

Journalists at all three American television networks with evening newscasts expressed worries that their news organizations would withdraw from the Iraqi capital after the November presidential election. They spoke only on the condition of anonymity in order to avoid offending their employers.

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'Taliban advance only made possible by Al Qaeda's help'

Daily Times - National

By Khalid Hasan

Monday, June 23, 2008

WASHINGTON

The Taliban advance in Afghanistan could not have taken place without support from Al Qaeda, according to Pakistani journalist and author Ahmed Rashid.

He told CNN's Wolf Blitzer in an interview on Sunday that Al Qaeda has established a route to Iraq for the Taliban and "there is a lot of traffic" on it. He said Al Qaeda is also raking in vast amounts of money from the drugs trade, some of which it is siphoning off to the Taliban. The sophistication with which the Taliban carried out the recent jailbreak seems to have been carried out with the help of Al Qaeda. "Al Qaeda seems to be very much an organisational coup for the Taliban," he added.

Rashid, asked about Osama Bin Laden's capture, replied that President Bush would like to see him captured before the United States presidential elections but "we have no indication on the ground that anything dramatic is about to happen". He said the US has stepped up its attacks, including attacks by drones, on the Pakistani side of the border and if intelligence indicates that there is a gathering of Taliban or Al Qaeda, the US acts very, very fast and does not always seem to have asked the Pakistanis for permission. Asked if the new government in Islamabad was really going to move against the Taliban and Al Qaeda, he replied, "The problem is that the military has been engaging the Taliban in peace deals for quite some years and they have not been able to get very much out of it. I think what the civilian government wants to do is to have a more comprehensive plan - political reform in the Tribal Areas, where the Taliban and Al Qaeda are based, and economic development. But such plans have to be backed by a strong military position and the problem now is that the military is in a very static position. The military is not on the offensive, it is not showing a picture of strength to the extremists and this is going to stymie the whole effort by the civilian government."

Asked if the new government is going to take steps to go after the terrorists, Rashid answered that it would do so, provided the army and the new government were "speaking from the same page", which he believes they are not. What is needed is a mixture of social and economic development, plus military power, which only the army can provide, he argues. Asked whether there are elements in the Pakistani military sympathetic to the Taliban and Al Qaeda, Rashid replied: "I think there is enormous sympathy for the Taliban within the military establishment and there is no doubt that the Taliban do have sanctuaries in Pakistan where they are not affected by any kind of military action." He said 30-40 percent of the fighters coming into southern Afghanistan are coming from the Pakistani side of the border.

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Afghanistan in an Amorphous War

ukwatch.net

By Paul Rogers

June 22nd, 2008

Afghanistan iraq Pakistan taliban war on terror Paul Rogers From: Open Democracy An incident causing major loss of life in Iraq, and an enduring pattern of low-level violence in north Africa, have created concern that the cautious sense of progress in the campaign against al-Qaida in recent months may prove more apparent than real. Even these serious events, however, are overshadowed by evidence of a Taliban resurgence in Afghanistan. At the same time, all these theatres of the global "war on terror" share underlying affinities that United States strategy in this war is tending to reinforce.

The Iraqi incident was a car-bomb attack on a crowded Baghdad market on 17 June 2008 which killed sixty-three people and wounded seventy-eight. This, the most destructive explosion in the city since 6 March, was all the more painful for coming at a time when a certain optimism about Iraq's security and wider prospects was achieving traction (see "Iraq

starts to fix itself", Economist, 12 June 2008). A further aspect of this was the declining number of victims, both American (in May 2008, nineteen soldiers died, the lowest monthly total than in any month since the war began in March 2003) and Iraqi (civilian casualties were also at a relatively low level in May - although still in the hundreds).

These signs of improvements had done much to support the view - expressed most vocally on the American right, but shared by others too - that the war in Iraq was, or was becoming, winnable. Those sympathetic to John McCain in the presidential campaign suggest that he should make this theme (and his broader support for the war and the US's military "surge" strategy) a centrepiece of his contest with Barack Obama (see Charles Krauthammer, "McCain must make case for Iraq", Newsday, 19 Jun 2008). The implication here is that Iraq is and will remain what it has been - the pivot of the entire "war on terror", where the now-expected destruction of what is termed "al-Qaida in Iraq" is a sign of decisive progress in the war as a whole.

The Afghan landscape

The progress that has been made in increasing security for many Iraqi citizens - partly through the social division of much of the population by repeated bouts of fighting and expulsion, partly through the deals made with elements of the Sunni community against al-Qaida forces, partly through the exhaustions of war - is given as justification of this optimistic view. This approach, however, tends to ignore other, more uncomfortable pointers to the al-Qaida movement's condition - including the attack on 2 June on the Danish embassy in Pakistan's capital, Islamabad; and a series of bombings on 4-8 June in Algeria that killed a number of people (the precise total is in dispute). The most important of these trends is the upsurge in violence in Afghanistan. In May 2008, the deaths among coalition troops in that country exceeded those in Iraq for the first time; June has also been marked by numerous hits against British troops, which took the total killed in the war to 106.

There had earlier been a widespread anticipation that the summer months would see a renewed Taliban offensive in southern Afghanistan, although there was also some caution about the prospect of major attacks (see "Al-Qaida's afterlife", 29 May 2008). The fact that overwhelming firepower is available to Nato forces has made it all the more likely that Taliban and other militias would opt to diversify and "miniaturise" its tactics, including the use of roadside- and suicide-bombs.

The war in Afghanistan has been attracting less media attention in the United States than that in Iraq, and the evolving reportage of the presidential campaign may accentuate the contrast (see Jim Malone, "Iraq: The Defining Difference Between McCain, Obama", VOA, 13 June 2008). But inside the Pentagon it was becoming clear that the security problem there was rapidly developing, in part because many districts in western Pakistan had become safe havens for Taliban, al-Qaida and other militias.

The US response to this increased threat has been threefold:

increase troop levels in Afghanistan and seek to take overall responsibility for the counterinsurgency war, at least in the southern and southeastern parts of the country pressurise Pakistan to limit militia operations in its own western districts make a determined effort to capture or kill Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri. An announcement by Britain's ministry of defence series of incidents in which British troops were killed led the country's Britain's ministry of defence to announce a further increase of 230 in troop numbers, taking the total to around 8,030 by spring 2009 - though this was linked to a claim that the Taliban were in retreat rather than making gains. This bullish assessment contrasted with a

more cautious measure of the condition of security in Afghanistan from the senior US army commander in the country, General Dan K McNeill, at the end of his sixteen-month posting on 3 June (see Ann Scott Tyson, "A Sober Assessment of Afghanistan", Washington Post, 15 June 2008).

McNeill emphasised that the last three years had seen a gradual resurgence of Taliban activity. At the same time, the number of troops operating under Nato's International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) had risen over a three-year period to 53,000 from forty countries. But this was not enough, McNeill contended: a much larger troop deployment would be required if the Taliban militias were to be defeated.

The Taliban vision

Three major developments in Afghanistan and Pakistan that took place within days of McNeill's departure from the country both underpinned his judgment and gave an indication of the likely course of events in summer 2008.

The first was the killing on 10 June of eleven members of Pakistan's official Frontier Corps as a result of a US air-strike. Some reports say that the Pakistani troops were actually aiding a Taliban group under attack by US and Afghan troops close to the border. This has not been confirmed, but it would not be entirely surprising, given local sympathies for fellow-Pushtun Pakistani paramilitaries in some parts of the Pakistani army (see Anna Mulrine, "Pakistan's Border Badlands Are a Challenge for the Next President", US News & World Report, 13 June 2008).

More important, though, is the reaction within Pakistan to this event. The loss of life has intensified a deep-seated public antipathy to the United States and its conduct of its "war on terror". The killing of the Frontier Corps soldiers will make it difficult for a Pakistani government of any persuasion to work with Washington. Moreover, the incident comes at a time when the Pentagon's closest ally in Pakistan, Pervez Musharraf - still the country's president, though weakened after the elections of February 2008 - is facing severe political challenges to his authority, and may even be obliged to resign in the next few weeks (see Syed Saleem Shahzad, "US strike hits Pakistan's raw nerve", Asia Times, 12 June 2008).

The second development was the extraordinary break-out from Sarpoza prison in Kandahar, in an operation planned and executed by Taliban elements. In a coordinated assault where the explosion of a bomb hidden in a road-tanker was followed by a direct paramilitary invasion of the city's main prison, several hundred Taliban prisoners were released. The incident is all the more serious because (as is perhaps not fully appreciated in the western media) Kandahar is one of the main centres of coalition military resources in Afghanistan, host (for example) to its second-largest air base.

The third development compounded the Taliban attack on the jail. This was the deployment of at least 500 paramilitaries to overrun a number of villages close to Kandahar. At the same time, the combination of the jail attack and the subsequent offensive is unlikely to mark the start of a Taliban operation to take control of Kandahar, since Nato with all its firepower will not allow that to happen. What is more probable is that this operation is a show of strength, and the prelude to a Nato counter-offensive which the Taliban forces will respond to by melting away until the next opportunity is chosen.

The two actions show is that the Taliban militias do not have to limit their operations to small-scale guerrilla attacks; the

level of their support means that they are well beyond that and can engage in large-scale offensives too, at a time of their own choosing.

More generally, the Taliban strategists will see this as one part of the early stage of a decades-long war; they do not have to win in the conventional military sense, they merely have to outlast those foreign forces seen as the occupiers, especially in the face of divisions within Nato (see Anna Mulrine, "A Struggling Coalition of the Willing and the Not-So-Willing", US News & World Report, 16 June 2008).

The global horizon

These recent developments in Afghanistan confirm that the focus of the US "war on terror" may really be shifting eastwards. At the very moment when neo-conservative elements in Washington speak of winning the Iraq war, that very war is becoming less relevant in the context of the larger picture. The US insistence on maintaining a very large military presence there indicates that the Iraq war is far from reaching its endgame, but in one sense it has already served its purpose (see Tom Englehardt, "The Greatest Story Never Told: Finally, the US Mega-Bases in Iraq Make the News", TomDispatch.com, 15 June 2008).

More than five years of fighting in Iraq have given the wider al-Qaida / jihadist movement a new generation of paramilitaries trained against well-armed and equipped US soldiers and marines. Many of the tactics honed in Iraq are now being applied in Afghanistan, not least in the form of roadside bombs and the tactical nous employed to avoid Nato's air power (see Caroline Gammell & Tom Coghlan, "The increasing sophistication of Afghanistan's roadside bombs", Daily Telegraph, 18 June 2008). All this, combined with the persistent uncertainties in Iraq, and the significant and under-reported currents in north Africa, means that the "war on terror" has moved on.

Whether they are right or wrong, those who claim that Iraq is or is becoming a success fail to realise that the country's importance in the global arena of conflict is diminishing. This has been the recurrent story of the George W Bush administration's "war on terror". It is a further reason to argue that, in the absence of fundamental changes of approach, the world is still in the early stages of a decades-long confrontation.

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Amid Iraqi gains, Afghanistan stumbles

Tampabay.com, FL

By Susan Taylor Martin, Times senior correspondent

Monday, June 23, 2008

For John McCain, campaign issues involving foreign wars are like an old sofa - push the springs down in one place and they pop up in another.

For now at least, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee can boast that the troop surge in Iraq, which he supported, is having a positive effect. Iraqi deaths in May were at their lowest this year, and American deaths were the lowest since the 2003 invasion.

Unfortunately, there's also a war in Afghanistan. And that isn't going so well because - as presumptive Democratic nominee Barack Obama charges - the Bush administration shifted too much attention to Iraq when it should have stayed focused on eliminating al-Qaida and its Taliban supporters in Afghanistan.

For the first time in five years, more U.S. and other coalition soldiers died last month on Afghan soil than Iraqi. Despite \$16.5-billion in Pentagon aid, only two of 105 Afghan army units are "fully capable," according to the Government Accountability Office. And the Taliban is growing stronger in areas, to the point that fighters recently sprang 400 prisoners and threatened Kandahar, the country's second-largest city, before being repulsed by NATO forces last week.

"There's no question that the situation here is deteriorating," says Tim Lynch, head of Vigilant Strategic Services Afghanistan. "The problem is that the central government cannot exert influence or control into the provinces, and all kinds of people - Taliban, drug barons, warlords, petty criminals, military officers, etc. - are filling the power vacuum."

Lynch, son of a retired general who lives in Tampa, is a 49-year-old no-nonsense ex-Marine. I got to know him when I visited Kabul, the capital, in late 2006.

While thousands of Americans have come and gone, Lynch has remained in Afghanistan, where his company provides security for Japanese aid workers, among others. He has traveled all over Afghanistan, giving him a good feel for what is going wrong - and right - there.

As he suggests, a huge problem is the weakness of the Kabul-based central government. The leadership woes start with President Hamid Karzai, who has been unable or unwilling to crack down on rampant corruption and firmly deal with regional warlords who derive much of their power from the opium poppy trade.

Karzai, who speaks English and cuts a dashing figure, still has the support of the West. But he is increasingly unpopular among Afghans, who have seen only modest improvement in their lives since the brutally repressive Taliban government was overthrown in 2001.

That's a problem, but also an opportunity, Lynch says.

While dislike for Karzai is strong, "the average Afghan has no use for the Taliban and their very conservative religious views, even though they are a conservative, religious people," Lynch says. Much of Afghanistan "desperately wants our help and appreciates us being there."

The effectiveness of American aid efforts, though, has been hurt by the reluctance of U.S. contractors and aid workers to venture out unless they're in big armored SUVs with heavy security - security that, paradoxically, makes them highly visible targets.

The Japanese, by comparison, "spend a fraction what the U.S. does as far as security and operating expenses," Lynch says. "They are very, very effective in getting aid dollars to Afghanistan, and that's one area where I'm very critical of our government and its over-elaborate security precautions."

Lynch also thinks the United States is squandering resources and goodwill trying to eradicate opium poppies, source of 93 percent of the world's heroin but also the only livelihood for many Afghans.

"It's a ridiculous policy that is only targeting the poorest and most vulnerable farmers," he says. "All the nice fields held by wealthy, connected Afghans are never touched." Rather than being destroyed, the poppies could be used for opiate-based analgesics in poor countries, he suggests.

On the military front, U.S. Marines have employed massive firepower to rout the Taliban from some areas that the British had virtually ceded to insurgents. But unlike Iraq, where most coalition troops are Americans under the command of Gen. David Petraeus, the 60,000 troops in Afghanistan come from several countries and lack a single strategic vision for countering the insurgency.

"I think that's a problem," says Lynch's father, retired Maj. Gen. Jarvis Lynch Jr. "They have different rules of engagement and different levels of aggressiveness that they're allowed to undertake. I don't think there's any particular unity of command."

His son, though, remains optimistic that Afghanistan can be salvaged. He has expanded his business from Kabul - generally safe enough that his 22-year-old daughter did security checks at the airport - to the eastern city of Jalalabad. There he has a guesthouse and bar frequented by foreigners.

"I would say that 90 percent of the country is anything but a war zone," Lynch says. "All these people want is a little help to get a foot up. They're scratching their heads over how we've been here seven years and they still don't have electricity, but they are patient and willing to wait."

Susan Taylor Martin can be contacted at susan@sptimes.com.

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A sliver of hope

Despite his bleak, brilliant analysis of the Afghan region's descent into chaos, Pakistani author Ahmed Rashid hasn't abandoned all optimism

Ottawa Citizen, Canada

Janice Kennedy

Published: Sunday, June 22, 2008 [Descent into Chaos](#)

By Ahmed Rashid

Viking, \$31

Ahmed Rashid ends his bleak new book on a note of hope.

The respected Pakistani journalist, whose previous books have educated the western world in the ways and ramifications of Islamic extremism, concludes [Descent into Chaos](#) with the fervent wish that the global community learn from the mistakes it has made in Afghanistan and the nations surrounding that woefully failed state.

But it is a faint hope, almost a pro forma way of bringing to a close a 400-page tale of missed and bungled opportunities, lies and deception, tragically flawed decisions and unforgivable ignorance. For all its exhaustive scope, nuanced interpretation and analytical brilliance, [Descent into Chaos](#) (subtitled [The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia](#)) is both depressing and frightening.

But for Rashid, the prognosis is not completely dark.

"I am not without hope," he said by phone last week from New York, where he was on the American leg of his international book tour. The Lahore-based journalist, author of *Taliban* (2000) and *Jihad* (2002), visits Ottawa this week to participate in an invitation-only symposium on Parliament Hill on "Cosmopolitan Identity in the Islamic World," sponsored by the Centre for International Governance Innovation think-tank.

What gives him hope are the results of the February elections in Pakistan, where the late Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples Party won shared power with another former opposition party. "Those elections were positive," says Rashid, who contributes regularly to such publications as London's *Daily Telegraph* and the *International Herald Tribune*.

"In the long term, the people of Pakistan voted for a secular party."

That is reason for optimism, he says, despite the continuing problem of military influence and the Islamic extremists harboured up and down the country's border with Afghanistan.

And that is reason for optimism in Afghanistan itself, which continues to suffer from Pakistani-based Taliban incursions such as the recent Kandahar jailbreak that freed as many as 1,100 prisoners, nearly 400 of them Taliban militants. When the situation starts improving in Pakistan, it should have an impact on Afghanistan. But as Rashid makes clear, there is a vast distance to go.

Descent into Chaos is that rarest of literary creations, a crucial book -- necessary reading for any cogent understanding of how we have landed in this morass, and what we can do about it. But despite the penetratingly bright light it shines into the darkness, it is not a comforting book. Both hawks and doves on the question of Afghanistan will find much in it to enlighten, but little to support previously held views.

Rashid, who received a Pakistani award for courage in journalism and who is a consultant for Human Rights Watch, dissects the extraordinarily tangled geopolitical mess in his native part of the world with insight, warm sensitivity and surprising readability. This is a skilled analysis that, like all good journalism, never forgets the human element at the heart of the events. Readers are presented with as many empathetic, fleshed-out portraits of people and moving accounts of their role in unfolding history as they are with reportage that might otherwise seem dry.

Descriptions of children flocking to reopened schools, of Afghans scarred by war and hardship waiting in long lines on election day with patient good humour, of the energetic hope embodied by wise old peacemakers like UN representative Lakhdar Brahimi -- all put a memorable face on dusty facts.

Rashid, 60, writes with the benefit of decades of experience, uniquely informed by both his personal and professional life in Pakistan as well as his breathtaking wealth of connections. He has addressed both the United Nations General Assembly and NATO ambassadors on the situation in Afghanistan, and he counts Afghan president Hamid Karzai as his friend, though he is far from uncritical. "I'm able to be very blunt with him," he says, which may explain his characterization in the book of Karzai's leadership as weak, vacillating and impotent in the face of warlords and rampant corruption.

But *Descent into Chaos* is about so much more than the failure of Afghan leadership. At heart, it is about the catastrophic results of the failure of the U.S. and its global allies to do their duty -- to recognize the need for nation building and engage in it. What Rashid presents, based on vast intimate knowledge and experience, is a picture of an escalating global crisis that could have been avoided.

NATO's boasts that it has won all its battles are hollow, he writes, since it has no "overarching strategy ... for transforming military victories into development, reconstruction, good governance, and political strategies."

Because of such failures, along with those of the Karzai government to improve the lives of the Afghan people, the Taliban have been "winning by default."

Meticulously researched and documented (there are 48 pages of footnotes alone), his book follows the tortured path of events, since 9/11, in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the troubled surrounding region.

It considers the dangerous situation in Pakistan, where Islamic extremists have been not only harboured but nurtured, and looks at the repeated failings within Afghanistan of both the Karzai government and the various international powers that have left their heavy footprint.

It examines the needs of the area, and the determinedly deaf ear turned toward those needs by the administration of George W. Bush, as well as by NATO. It looks at the legacy of Bush and his henchmen Paul Wolfowitz and Donald Rumsfeld, zeroing in on the catastrophic results of their pathological obsession with Iraq, which meant an abandonment of Afghanistan.

Staring into the face of a thoroughly ravaged country, writes Rashid, "scholars and diplomats now argued for a Marshall Plan for Afghanistan." But, he continues, "the Bush neocons had simply no interest before or after the war in doing anything like this." And at home there was little genuine protest against such inaction as "the American public remained largely ignorant of the humanitarian crises escalating everywhere."

Descent into Chaos also explores the numerous ripe conditions that have contributed to the rise of Islamic extremism in the area, including not only an ill-waged battle for hearts and minds, but also such pragmatic realities as the rise in opium production in the "narco-state" of Afghanistan.

"The Taliban resurgence, al-Qaeda's reorganization and the restarting of its training camps for international terrorist groups after the U.S. invasion would have been impossible without the explosion in heroin production," writes Rashid, who notes that in Helmand province alone last year, for example, there was a staggering 45-per-cent increase in opium production.

Rashid also provides provocative tidbits. He describes, for example, the hugely expanding "cottage industry" in the manufacture of IEDs (improvised explosive devices) in the Taliban-heavy border areas. He details the blundering of U.S. Gen. Tommy Franks that essentially permitted the escape of Osama bin Laden. He lists the countries that help the U.S. out by providing secret detention facilities for rendered prisoners.

He also offers intriguing glimpses into the realities of a region deeply foreign to, and misunderstood by, most westerners. Rashid writes (in terms Canadians will certainly recognize) of young Pakistan's tenuous sense of national identity. He describes the calculatedly split political personality of Pervez Musharraf (known as "double-talk Musharraf"), contrasting his present with his past as a fun-loving young man and indifferent student. He tells the almost romantic tale of Karzai's return home to Afghanistan in October 2001 -- on the back of a motorbike, with an old satellite phone that he keeps today as a reminder of that incredible journey.

Canada figures into Rashid's book, but only marginally. He cites the Maher Arar case in "America Shows the Way," his chapter on torture, renditions and secret jails. But the country itself appears primarily as just another member -- albeit a fully contributing one -- of a NATO presence that has been confused and misguided. He also writes of Canada's ongoing public debate on its role in Afghanistan, a heated discussion echoed by other NATO members.

"The critical mistake Canada made," he said in last week's interview, "was that it had no policy toward Pakistan. It just went along with whatever the Americans were telling them." (And the American perspective, in Rashid's view, was spectacularly flawed.) This had its impact as Canada arrived in Kandahar, where it "didn't have a clue about what to expect. You can not look at Afghanistan without looking at the neighbouring countries. You need to have a strategic policy that looks at the entire region." Rashid is referring to the whole of Central Asia, republics like Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, with their poverty, unstable governments and exploding populations of Islamic militants. His book suggests that they constitute a far greater global threat than Iraq.

Rashid's recommended strategic policy would also address what he calls the "biggest conundrum," the vast and proliferating safe havens for Islamic terrorists along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

In the meantime, he says, Canada should probably wait and watch, along with the rest of the world, to see what happens next November in the U.S. presidential election.

Republican hopeful John McCain is not talking much about Afghanistan, says Rashid, because it has become an embarrassment to his party. But he is encouraged -- a little -- by the Democrats' Barack Obama, who, he says, has suggested he'll concentrate on Afghanistan, rather than Iraq. "He needs to put flesh on this policy," says Rashid, but it may be a good sign.

So no, he says, based on recent events, he is not entirely without hope. But in the disastrous narrative of that powder-keg world he knows so well and describes with such compelling authority in *Descent into Chaos*, it will be difficult for the average reader to share that sliver of optimism.

Janice Kennedy is an Ottawa writer and Sunday Citizen columnist.

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A nation as yet unbuilt

Afghanistan has never been a successful state. Our involvement there is based on a delusion

[guardian.co.uk](#), UK

Peter Preston

The Guardian

Monday June 23, 2008

Francis Fukuyama posed the basic Afghan dilemma as the supposed triumph of western invasion began to fall apart. Afghanistan has never been "modern", he observed, chillingly. "Under the monarchy that existed until the beginning of its political troubles in the 1970s, it largely remained a tribal confederation with minimal state penetration outside Kabul". And the subsequent years "of communist misrule and civil war eliminated everything that was left" of that feeble entity. History wasn't dead, in short; Afghans were dead.

And now, many killing fields later, we can put that even more starkly. Afghanistan isn't a "failed" state, because Afghanistan has never been a successful one. Afghanistan is a crossroads, a traffic island, a war zone, a drug den, an exotic doormat, and an eternal victim.

But it is not, in any coherent sense, a nation. We cannot see peace, harmony and freedom "restored" there, because such concepts have no roots in its essentially medieval past, or present. Afghanistan has always been a disaster waiting to happen, again and again.

Did John Reid, pausing briefly at the Ministry of Defence on his routemarch through Whitehall, know this when he vowed that we would "be perfectly happy to leave in three years without firing one shot, because our job is reconstruction"? One hundred body bags back at Brize Norton, that question answers itself. Of course, he didn't know. Nobody who ordered the troops in to flush out al-Qaida knew. Nobody dreamed that Kabul and Kandahar would be tougher nuts to crack than Baghdad and Basra. But they ought to realise it now.

Reid thought that the American mission was "chasing the terrorists who did so much to destroy the twin towers", while our happy boys could get by with a little roadbuilding. Which delusion seems greater today?

Osama bin Laden is still somewhere out there, chased but uncaught. Even Mullah Omar, leader of the Taliban government, hasn't been brought to book. And Helmand province, these past few days, has seen only roadside bombs blowing up our boys (and one natural front-page girl). You couldn't have a greater failure of intelligence, or expectation.

What's gone wrong? See the official excuses pour in. Of course the porous border with ungovernable Waziristan and Baluchistan doesn't help. Of course, Iran can be blamed for almost anything too. And, of course, corruption, both central and local, weighs everything down. (Guess which one world commodity crop isn't shrinking ...) But the crippling difficulty, nullifying all efforts, seldom breaks cover.

You'd suppose, from press and ministerial briefings, that the Taliban and al-Qaida were somehow synonymous - alien forces implanted among loyal, struggling Afghans. It's a convenient delusion, one that chimes with a similar yarn in Iraq (where bombings and kidnappings are blamed on stray Saudis or Egyptians, not indigenous Iraqis). But that's clearly rubbish as the suicide attacks proliferate. Taliban patrols do, indeed, pass back and forth across Pakistan's non-frontier. But they are also an Afghan presence with Afghan support. They are part of the Afghan scenery (just as they were when Mullah Omar ruled).

This isn't a war against invaders. This is a war pitting Afghan against Afghan, as usual, as ever: an uncivil conflict. Which is why it is a war we cannot win. If there is no structure, no authority beyond ad hoc tribalism, then there is no victory that can last. The past few decades here, like the centuries that went before as the Mongols and Genghis Khan stormed by, have been years of splitting and slaughtering: one tribe against another, one warlord against his neighbour, one communist against another, the peripheries against Kabul.

The irony is that, left alone to stew, the Taliban would have gone the way of the Parcham and the Khalq before. There was no need to try to destroy them: Afghan anarchy would have done that in time.

But because we persisted in thinking of al-Qaida as some disciplined "terrorist army" pitted against our armies, because we talked in conventional terms that seemed to turn this wreck of a non-state into a nation like any other, we thought that conventional tactics could work. They won't. They have no foundations.

Afghanistan is a nation yet unbuilt, a black hole of hope defying calculation. It kills outsiders; it kills the insiders who seek to rule it. Its great game, over generations, knows only failure; and the only way not to become a loser is to resolve - at last - not to play.

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Afghanistan: Legality Of 'Hot Pursuit' Into Pakistan Debated

Radio Free Europe

Radio Liberty

By Ron Synovitz

June 22, 2008

Afghan President Hamid Karzai's threat to send troops after Taliban militants in neighboring Pakistan has kindled debate about cross-border military incursions and international law.

Experts argue there are two claims under international law that might justify an operation inside Pakistan by the Afghan National Army. One is a country's "right of hot pursuit." Another justification is a country's right to self-defense.

Last week, Karzai insisted that his country has the right to chase Taliban fighters who flee into Pakistan's tribal regions after they carry out attacks in Afghanistan.

"Afghanistan has the right of self-defense. When [insurgents] cross the territory from Pakistan to come and kill Afghans and to kill coalition troops, it exactly gives us the right to go back and do the same," Karzai said.

Karzai said Afghan forces would kill specific Taliban leaders in Pakistan's tribal regions who are accused of planning and organizing cross-border attacks into Afghanistan.

Islamabad has condemned Karzai's remarks as "irresponsible," saying any incursion by Afghan forces would violate Pakistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi described Karzai's threat as "illegal" under international law, saying the only way to combat extremism in the border region is by noninterference in each others' internal affairs.

Kurdish Parallel

In Kabul, political analysts like Rashid Waziri are arguing that Afghanistan does have a legal right to attack and kill militants in the tribal regions if Pakistan fails to stop them.

"We have the right to strike our enemies inside Pakistan or its tribal territories. The Turkish government gave itself the right to bomb and target Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq and to eliminate their bases. So this is an international right. And everybody can benefit from it," Waziri said.

But Jim Denselow, an expert on defense issues at Kings College London, says there is no valid legal comparison between the Afghan-Pakistan crisis and Turkish incursions into northern Iraq.

"The key difference is that Turkey is justifying its actions in northern Iraq along the lines of previous agreements it had with Saddam Hussein's regime. [Those agreements were] in terms of the 'right of hot pursuit' of Kurdish rebels into Iraqi territory -- which, of course, hasn't been sovereign Iraqi territory since 1991 when the no-fly zones were created and the autonomous entity, which is the Kurdish Regional Government, was essentially born," Denselow said.

"So that's a very specific case. A very unique case of a bilateral agreement between two countries, one of which wasn't even totally sovereign. And, of course, [there is] the fact that Turkey is an incredibly strong power vis-a-vis a weakening Iraqi one."

In addition to Turkey, the right to "hot pursuit" has been raised by Colombia to justify air strikes against FARC rebels fleeing into neighboring Ecuador. Israel has used the same argument to justify military incursions into the Gaza Strip. And in 2000, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda approached the International Court of Justice over the issue when the Ugandan Army claimed the right of "hot pursuit" for its forces to go after militants in Congo.

Law Of 'Hot Pursuit'

Nick Grono, the deputy president of operations for the International Crisis Group, agrees that those cases differ from Afghanistan's situation and that the doctrine of "hot pursuit" probably isn't applicable for Afghan incursions into Pakistan.

Grono notes that "hot pursuit" is a concept under international law that originated out of the laws of the sea.

On land, he tells RFE/RL, the right to "hot pursuit" has evolved and been recognized under international law as the chasing of armed aggressors across international borders.

"I don't think this is a case of 'hot pursuit' that we are talking about [in Pakistan's tribal regions]. Historically, [it] means you are pursuing a fugitive. The doctrine of hot pursuit comes from the law of the sea. And it used to be chasing a fleeing ship, for instance, or chasing someone who retreated into another country," Grono said.

"The conditions applying to hot pursuit are pretty restrictive. That doesn't appear to be what Karzai was talking about. He was talking not so much about pursuing someone as going across the border to hit Taliban leaders who are enjoying safe haven in Pakistan. I suspect that what he was looking at was more a case of preemptive self-defense."

International law on a country's right to self-defense stems from Article 51 of the UN Charter and decisions made by the International Court of Justice.

"There is a provision under international law for self defense," Grono said. "The way it works under international law is that there is a right of preventive self-defense if there is a very immediate threat -- and it is an overwhelming threat -- and if the only possible response is to strike first."

Legal scholars in the U.S. military have had studies published by the U.S. Defense Department which explore the legalities of antiterrorism operations under both the doctrines of "hot pursuit" and self-defense.

Those studies note that other legal justifications for the use of cross-border military force include invitation, peace-time reprisals, protection of a country's own citizens, and humanitarian intervention.

Ultimately, military incursions must be consistent with international law -- as defined by the International Court of Justice. Otherwise, as one study published in 1989 by the U.S. Department of Defense concludes, "those acting to preserve the rule of law in the face of terrorist threats will become indistinguishable from the evils" they seek to prevent.

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UK Vacuum Bombs in Afghanistan

Islam Online, Qatar

Sun. Jun. 22, 2008

CAIRO

Britain has used and will continue to use one of the world's most brutal weapons, which creates a pressure wave that sucks the air out of victims, shreds their internal organs and crushes their bodies, in Afghanistan, The Sunday Times reported on June 22. "We are conscious of the controversial aspects [of this weapon] but it is being used sparingly and under strict circumstances where it is deemed appropriate by the commander on the ground," confirmed the Ministry of Defense (MoD).

It has decided to equip British helicopters in Afghanistan with the Hellfire AGM-114N missiles early 2008 after repeated complaints from pilots against the ineffectiveness of normal weapons in the fight against Taliban. The MoD admitted to using the thermobaric weapon, also known as vacuum bombs, on several occasions, including against a cave complex.

It has decided to extend the use of the weapon to be fired by unmanned drones, added the spokesman.

The laser-guided missile has a warhead packed with fluorinated aluminum powder surrounding a small charge.

When the missile hits the target, the charge disperses aluminum powder throughout the target building.

The cloud then ignites, causing a massive secondary blast that tears throughout any enclosed space.

The blast creates a vacuum which draws air and debris back in, creating pressure of up to 430lb per sq.

The cloud of burning aluminum powder means victims often die from asphyxiation before the pressure shreds their organs.

Thermobaric weapons were first combat-tested by the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s and used by Russian forces against Chechen civilians in the 1990s.

According to The Sunday Times, American Apache pilots used the thermobaric Hellfire in Iraq.

Hypocrisy

Human Rights Watch has condemned and called for a ban on using thermobaric weapons worldwide.

The New York-based group describes them as "particularly brutal" and that their blast "makes it virtually impossible for civilians to take shelter."

However, the British government decided to go around the ethical problem by secretly redefining them.

"We no longer accept the term thermobaric [for the AGM-114N] as there is no internationally agreed definition," said an MoD spokesman.

"We call it an enhanced blast weapon."

But British MPs denounced the government for its secret decision to use the lethal weapon.

"It is staggering the MoD has added these weapons to Britain's arsenal in cloak-and-dagger secrecy," said Nick Harvey, the Liberal Democrat defense spokesman.

"Parliament has never assented to their use," he said, accusing the government of hypocrisy.

"(Prime Minister) Gordon Brown claimed the moral high ground when Britain supported a ban on cluster munitions but leaving a loophole for these weapons casts a different picture on the true position."

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Lest we forget: the scars of war

The sight of coffins bearing the bodies of the fallen have become a familiar sight. But what of the comrades who survived? How have they coped with their loss? Terri Judd reports

Independent, UK

Monday, 23 June 2008

Ask Private Tom Wilde if he has suffered long term from the combat he lived through in Afghanistan and he brushes off the suggestion with a casual shrug. He speaks with the characteristic understatement of an infantryman who has witnessed horrors beyond the comprehension of civilians. But the words betray him.

"Nothing really sets me off - well, maybe the banging of doors but I'll get over it," said Pte Wilde, 23. "I don't really have nightmares, just the odd one or two. And every now and then, for some strange reason, I will cry."

Twelve months ago, Pte Wilde and comrades from the Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment were patrolling the streets of Lashkar Gah in Afghanistan when a roadside bomb ripped through their armoured Land Rover, killing Drummer Tom Wright, 21.

For those left behind - his brothers in arms - 24 June 2007 might as well be yesterday.

Sergeant Alan Dennis, who suffered leg wounds in the blast, said: "My first fear was of the vehicle exploding. There was a lot of ammunition going off [in the fire]. The worst thing I could hear was 'Shelly' [Drummer Aaron Shelton] screaming. That will stay with me for life."

Pte Wilde added: "The diesel; you could hear it trickling out like a tap. We had to get out of the vehicle." He subconsciously slid his hand down his back as if he could still feel the viscous liquid on his body.

Corporal Ethan Beardsley, 25, added: "The smell of diesel on a forecourt still makes us feel sick."

The grief families that suffer after such bereavements is often written about, but rarely does anyone stop to contemplate its effect on young soldiers who have trained together, lived alongside each other and forged immense bonds of trust and loyalty.

In the officers' mess, Captain Rob Agnew sits surrounded by silverware and paintings commemorating valour through the centuries. "It was Christmas and I was at a ball," he said. "I thought I was over it. I had had a whole lot of drink and suddenly I was in turbo-clip, crying."

It is a loss that still retains a subtle yet strong grip on the 2nd Battalion of the, now renamed, Mercian Regiment months after they have come home, something the men and women who fought alongside the 282 service personnel who have perished so far in Afghanistan and Iraq will recognise.

Sgt Dennis, 34, and Pte Wilde are fighting to recover physical fitness. Drummer Aaron Shelton, 24, may still need to have part of his leg amputated. Cpl Beardsley can still visualise his friends lying injured and dying. Drummer Cameron Jowett and Cpl Les Barker are also marked by the loss of a fellow member of their platoon.

Former pte Iain Melrose and ex-drummer Matt Clark, who have chosen to leave the Army for the sake of their young families and now work as a builder and on the railway, deal daily with the loneliness of being severed from the body of the regiment. Capt Agnew and Sgt Major Martyn Chatterley carry the burden of knowing they will have to take their men back to Afghanistan next year and, again, try to bring them all safely home.

At Palace Barracks, 2 Mercian's new home in Belfast, is a memorial to those who lost their lives in Northern Ireland. Among the names is Cpl Stephen McGonigle, 31, who was killed in 1989. When the regiment headed to Helmand last spring he was the last soldier they had lost in combat. Six months later, they had suffered nine deaths.

As these young soldiers talk, their faces and voices echo those of old veterans on Armistice Day, devoid of machismo or self-pity. "Anyone who says they don't have dreams about what we did out there is a liar," said Drummer Jowett, 22. "My father lost his best mate in Northern Ireland. He still cries. I can't talk to anyone else but him."

Tom Wright's friends still obviously miss the man they described as "mad as a box of frogs", but a brilliant soldier.

Nine months on, the slightest thing can trigger memories, grief or fear, the pop of a plastic bottle beneath a car tyre, a news item on another Afghanistan death, the whoosh of a firework reminiscent of a rocket-propelled grenade, or a toast to absent friends at weddings.

For former pte Melrose, 29, it is the church memorial he passes almost daily. Often, at night on his way home from the pub, he will stop for a few minutes to look at the spot where his friend's name is inscribed among the town's fallen.

On the wall of his living room in Ripley, Derbyshire, are two photographs, the first of a proud new recruit in dress uniform, the second of a crumpled, haunted-looking figure in desert kit, taken the day after Drummer Wright died. Pausing for what seemed an eternity, he said: "Every now and then, it will just hit you like a ton of bricks. It has got tougher because I am not in the fold. Without Jo, my wife, I would have completely and utterly lost it."

Drummer Jowett describes a familiar scenario, that of not realising how much his experiences had changed him. "I took my missus on holiday when we got back and we had a lot of arguments. I had gone from one extreme to another, from hell to heaven. You don't talk about your personal thoughts, you just man the fuck-up."

Some have had, in the discreet words of Sgt Major Chatterley, "a wobble". Across the ranks, soldiers have grown accustomed to watching for anything out of character, excessive drinking, mood swings or depression. New cases continue to present themselves.

"Some, you sit them down and they just break down," said Sgt Major Chatterley. "But as soon as you tell them the system is there to help them, within a week they are different." He added: "The fallout from Afghanistan and Iraq is going to continue for the next five, 10 years but we have programmes to highlight soldiers who have got problems."

Former drummer Clark, 25, recalled standing on the side in his new civilian clothes as the regiment paraded on their return, "When I first got out I really struggled," he said. "I felt really lonely, alone. It was horrible." Thousands turned out to watch the men march through their home towns, which has both surprised and thrilled the regiments, but coming home has been a double-edged sword. Months later, they still feel out of step with a society which can-not possibly comprehend what they have endured.

Ten thousand applauding people lined the streets of Nottingham yet the moment the crowds dispersed, a local bar refused to serve several soldiers drinks. In minutes they had gone from "hero to hindrance". Cpl Barker, 25, said: "I am never called a soldier; I am just a squaddie. A soldier is a World War One hero but we are squaddies. Sometimes it really winds me up."

But they have little time to debate whether the country is honouring its side of the military covenant. They are too busy training for their next Afghan tour. Many relish the prospect of returning to the front line but acknowledge that this time they are more fearful. Only the newest recruits are gung-ho.

Drummer Jowett, who was not only a close friend of Drummer Wright but also of L/Cpl Paul "Sandy" Sandford, 23, who was killed 18 days earlier, continued: "We have got a whole load of new lads. They are good lads but I just want to distance myself from them."

"I just don't want to make friends like that again because I was distraught. I can't help thinking that next year one of them might go."

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In Afghan police training, US aims to curb corruption

Boston.com - World

By David Zucchino

Los Angeles Times

June 23, 2008

FARAH, Afghanistan

There were two good reasons why Captain Dave Panian made a perilous journey across the desert to this dusty provincial capital.

He wanted to check on his close friend, a district police chief whose family had been threatened by the Taliban. He also wanted to pry loose salaries for the chief's police officers, who were owed two months' pay.

Panian, a lanky officer from San Diego, heads a small US Army team training local police near the village of Bala Buluk, 40 miles northeast of Farah in southwest Afghanistan, where his friend Haji Khudaydad is the chief. Training is the easy part. The hard part is cutting through threats, bureaucracy, cronyism, and corruption.

The effectiveness of police and other local officials is taking on growing importance as the Taliban move to regain territory in southern Afghanistan this summer. Afghan and North Atlantic Treaty Organization troops battled the Taliban last week for control of villages around the city of Kandahar, about 220 miles east of Farah.

Throughout the country, police often have been little more than hired guns who raise money for local warlords through illegal taxes, shakedowns, and corruption. Many police and district officials sell weapons and opium. Some collude with the Taliban. Since 2003, trainers such as Panian from the US military and its foreign partners have been working to reform the police.

Some units have fought effectively alongside US forces, but others remain mired in cronyism and Mafia-like criminal enterprises. With fighting picking up in southern Afghanistan, the role of police chiefs such as Khudaydad and the loyalty of their officers are crucial.

So Panian got into a shouting match with provincial officials who refused to release last month's pay for the police. He ended up storming over to the local bank and coming out with a plastic bag stuffed with the equivalent of \$14,000 in afghanis, the local currency. But first he warned the officials that there would be "hell to pay" if they didn't cough up this month's pay the next day.

Then Panian found out that even though the Taliban had placed a \$30,000 bounty on Khudaydad, officials had refused to help him move his wives and children outside the provincial capital, to where relatives and fellow tribesmen could protect them.

After a harrowing seven-hour drive across the desert at night in a convoy of police, US soldiers, and Marines, Khudaydad was delivered back to his Bala Buluk compound. He was relieved to be out of Farah.

"I don't trust those people," Khudaydad said of certain provincial officials.

In Bala Buluk, Panian's 14 trainers live in a spartan compound next to district police headquarters. They have run about 100 police officers through an eight-week police academy in Herat, about 140 miles to the north, and mentored Khudaydad's officers daily for six months.

"I won't deny there's still corruption, but it's at a much lower level," Panian said.

Panian and his trainers forced out two previous chiefs. One extorted cash from local shopkeepers and imposed taxes on passing vehicles. The other ran drugs and guns, according to US team members.

The trainers maneuvered Khudaydad into the chief's job, even though he is a sergeant major, not an officer. They consider him tough, fair, and honest.

"He's not blameless, but he's as good as they come based on what we've seen here," Panian said.

Khudaydad, who appears to be in his mid-40s, has a long face, a wispy, black beard, and expressive brown eyes. He seems to command respect from his men, who listen closely when he speaks.

He fought the Soviet occupation in the 1980s, and in 2001 turned against the Taliban, which he said has killed 38 of his

family members and fellow tribesmen, including four nephews and two sons.

Twelve of Khudaydad's officers have died since he took over as chief April 2. Some were killed in a vehicle accident, but others died in fighting against the Taliban in late May, in which a US trainer also was killed.

The Taliban control much of the countryside in Farah Province, where their fighters plant roadside bombs and mount occasional ambushes. A roadside bomb killed four Marines earlier this month.

"I waited a long time for the Americans to come," Khudaydad said, referring to training, weapons, and equipment US forces have provided.

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Afghanistan to get Pakistani wheat despite Karzai threats

The Earth Times

Posted : Mon, 23 Jun 2008

Author : DPA

Karachi

Pakistan is planning to export 50,000 tons of wheat to neighbouring Afghanistan despite recent saber-rattling threats by Afghan President Hamid Karzai, media reports said on Monday. The exports will be made from the stocks of state-owned Pakistan Agriculture Storage and Supplies Corporation (PASSCO) at subsidized rates, English-language daily Business Recorder said.

Last weekend Karzai threatened to invade Pakistan in pursuit of insurgent Taliban, triggering new tensions between the two countries and causing a 7 per cent decline in the country's main Karachi bourse.

But this did not impede Pakistan's willingness to supply wheat or flour at subsidized rates to cash-strapped and food-hungry Afghanistan. Fifty thousand tons of the staple will be sent in addition to the regular 600,000 tons annual export to the war-torn country.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has already sought bids from private transporters to dispatch the wheat.

Pakistan itself is going through a severe wheat shortage and has recently placed orders for importing 2.5 million tons.

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These wars are about oil, not democracy

Edmonton Sun (Canada)

By ERIC MARGOLIS COMMENTARY

June 22, 2008

PARIS

The ugly truth behind the Iraq and Afghanistan wars finally has emerged.

Four major western oil companies, Exxon Mobil, Shell, BP and Total are about to sign U.S.-brokered no-bid contracts to begin exploiting Iraq's oil fields. Saddam Hussein had kicked these firms out three decades ago when he nationalized Iraq's oil industry. The U.S.-installed Baghdad regime is welcoming them back.

Iraq is getting back the same oil companies that used to exploit it when it was a British colony.

As former fed chairman Alan Greenspan recently admitted, the Iraq war was all about oil. The invasion was about SUV's, not democracy.

Afghanistan just signed a major deal to launch a long-planned, 1,680-km pipeline project expected to cost \$8 billion. If completed, the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline (TAPI) will export gas and later oil from the Caspian basin to Pakistan's coast where tankers will transport it to the West.

The Caspian basin located under the Central Asian states of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakkstan, holds an estimated 300 trillion cubic feet of gas and 100-200 billion barrels of oil. Securing the world's last remaining known energy El Dorado is a strategic priority for the western powers.

But there are only two practical ways to get gas and oil out of land-locked Central Asia to the sea: Through Iran, or through Afghanistan to Pakistan. Iran is taboo for Washington. That leaves Pakistan, but to get there, the planned pipeline must cross western Afghanistan, including the cities of Herat and Kandahar.

PIPELINE DEAL

In 1998, the Afghan anti-Communist movement Taliban and a western oil consortium led by the U.S. firm Unocal signed a major pipeline deal. Unocal lavished money and attention on the Taliban, flew a senior delegation to Texas, and hired a minor Afghan official, Hamid Karzai.

Enter Osama bin Laden. He advised the unworldly Taliban leaders to reject the U.S. deal and got them to accept a better offer from an Argentine consortium. Washington was furious and, according to some accounts, threatened the Taliban with war.

In early 2001, six or seven months before 9/11, Washington made the decision to invade Afghanistan, overthrow the Taliban, and install a client regime that would build the energy pipelines. But Washington still kept sending money to the Taliban until four months before 9/11 in an effort to keep it "on side" for possible use in a war against China.

The 9/11 attacks, about which the Taliban knew nothing, supplied the pretext to invade Afghanistan. The initial U.S. operation had the legitimate objective of wiping out Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida. But after its 300 members fled to Pakistan, the U.S. stayed on, built bases -- which just happened to be adjacent to the planned pipeline route -- and installed former Unocal "consultant" Hamid Karzai as leader.

Washington disguised its energy geopolitics by claiming the Afghan occupation was to fight "Islamic terrorism," liberate women, build schools and promote democracy. Ironically, the Soviets made exactly the same claims when they occupied Afghanistan from 1979-1989. The Iraq cover story was weapons of mass destruction and democracy.

Work will begin on the TAPI once Taliban forces are cleared from the pipeline route by U.S., Canadian and NATO forces. As American analyst Kevin Phillips writes, the U.S. military and its allies have become an "energy protection force."

ADDED BENEFIT

From Washington's viewpoint, the TAPI deal has the added benefit of scuttling another proposed pipeline project that would have delivered Iranian gas and oil to Pakistan and India.

India's energy needs are expected to triple over the next decade. Delhi, which has its own designs on Afghanistan, is cock-a-hoop over the new pipeline plan.

Russia, by contrast, is grumpy, having hoped to monopolize Central Asian energy exports.

Energy is more important than blood in our modern world. The U.S. is a great power with massive energy needs. Domination of oil is a pillar of America's world power. Let's be realistic. Afghanistan and Iraq are about oil, nothing else.

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Rival militants battle in Pakistan's Khyber region

Reuters

By Ibrahim Shinwari

Sun Jun 22, 2008

LANDIKOTAL, Pakistan

Pakistani militant factions clashed in the Khyber region near the Afghan border on Sunday as the toll from two days of fighting rose to up to 15 dead and dozens wounded, a government official said.

The region, home to the Khyber Pass through which vital supplies for Western forces in Afghanistan pass, had been virtually free of militant violence until this year but security has deteriorated in recent months.

The latest violence began on Saturday when loyalists of one militant leader, Mangal Bagh, who is vying to control the area, attacked a stronghold of rivals led by Ustad Mehboob in the Teerah Valley.

The two sides were fighting with rifles, mortars and rocket-propelled grenades and there were conflicting accounts of casualties.

"There's a lot of speculation but we have reports of 12 to 15 dead, from both sides, and dozens wounded," said a government official in the region who declined to be identified.

Mehmoob's group, Ansar-ul-Islam, said over its FM radio station they had killed 18 members of Bagh's Lashkar-e-Islami and captured 10.

The fighting was not near the main road through the Khyber Pass to the Afghan border but residents said more militants had recently been using the road, adding to a sense of insecurity.

Pakistan's ambassador to Afghanistan was kidnapped in February while travelling along the road. He was freed in May.

Many supplies for the U.S. military and other foreign forces in landlocked Afghanistan go through two crossing points on the Afghan-Pakistani border, one at the top of the Khyber Pass and the other to the southwest, at the Afghan town of Spin Boldak.

Pakistan's top Interior Ministry official, Rehman Malik, said the government would restore order. "In next few days, you'll see action," Malik told reporters in Islamabad.

In a related development, members of Bagh's group freed 16 Christians on Sunday, a day after they abducted them on the outskirts of Peshawar city over a property dispute, police said.

(Additional reporting by Kamran Haider; Editing by Robert Birsal and Valerie Lee)

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(AFP)

June 21, 2008

WASHINGTON

A US federal appeals court has refused to review the case of Omar Khadr, a Canadian who faces trial by a special military tribunal in October at the "war on terror" camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

However, the court's decision on Friday applied only to a request for a review of a pre-trial procedure, and would not necessarily prevent the judges from taking up the matter upon the delivery of a verdict.

Khadr was arrested in Afghanistan in 2002, when he was 15 years old. He was suspected of belonging to Al-Qaeda and is on trial for allegedly throwing a hand grenade that killed a US soldier.

"Khadr seeks review of a preliminary procedural decision made in the course of the ongoing proceedings before the military commission. We dismiss the petition for lack of jurisdiction," said Judge David Sentelle of the Court of Appeals for the DC Circuit.

"The Military Commissions Act of 2006 limits our jurisdiction to review of 'final judgment[s] rendered by a military commission'. The preliminary pretrial decision that Khadr contests is not such a 'final judgment'."

The US Supreme Court ruled earlier this month that detainees being held without charge at Guantanamo enjoy the constitutional right of habeas corpus, in a landmark ruling that should now give the prisoners and their legal teams the right to demand to know on what basis they are being held.

For years the Congress and President George W. Bush have sought to deny them the key right on the grounds that they are "enemy combatants."

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