

Land of Trouble

It's not their war—'the war on terror'. Yet Pakistan, being a loyal client state of America for decades, had no option but to accept Bush's global anti-terror campaign directed against stateless Al Qaeda and Afghan militants—Taliban—as its own. Critics believed Pakistan's age-old strategic relationship with America would make it more powerful in the region. Not anymore. Because of this strategic relationship Pakistanis are now paying the price heavily, by losing their sovereignty bit by bit. America has been working independently to pursue its military operations in Pakistan's tribal areas along Pakistan-Afghan border for quite some time without bothering about even informing the Pakistani authorities. With the resurgence of Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan's reluctance to crush militancy as per Washington's prescription, America is now all set to deploy ground forces on Pakistani soil on a large scale to destroy Taliban and Al Qaeda sanctuaries in Pakistan, violating all diplomatic norms and showing no respect for Pakistan's sovereignty.

It is now an open secret that American president George W Bush secretly gave order in July to allow US military special forces for the first time, to mount ground assaults deep inside Pakistan territory against Afghan insurgents and their Pakistani hosts without prior approval of Islamabad. Maybe, it is too late for Pakistan's new military chief to 'defend Pakistan's sovereignty at any cost'. But Pakistan's military and political establishments, otherwise corrupt to the core, are unlikely to do much beyond 'hot rhetoric' as they look divided at the moment over the thorny question of how not to jeopardise their special relations with America because they have been the sole beneficiaries of American largesse since the creation of Pakistan in 1947. They were divided during Musharraf's regime also. But Musharraf's departure has not changed one very basic thing : Pakistan's precarious dependence on America-backed international financial institutions to arrest ever worsening economic situation. Pakistan's economy is in a severe crisis. At a time when most third world economies are declining to accept IMF loan because of its harsh anti-people conditionalities, forcing this notorious global body to downsize its business and staff in the absence of a client base, the balance of payment situation of Pakistan has deteriorated to such an alarming extent that *citigroup* recommends Pakistan as the IMF's next big customer. But IMF money won't come without Washington's nod.

No doubt American action is bound to create its opposite—anti-American swing among Pakistani people. Over the years there have been major changes in Pakistan society itself, and changes as well in the relation of vast masses to the economic, political and social structures in society. After invading Afghanistan the Soviets once thought to give a long chase to the militants inside Pakistan but finally they restrained themselves from pursuing a misadventure. In fact the very news of Russian forward move generated panic in India because in that event India would have a direct border with Russia, albeit the Indo-Soviet friendship treaty was still in place then. America-led coalition forces invaded Afghanistan in 2001 relying heavily on Pakistan, they have been relying on Pakistan for the last seven years only to see Pakistan army not doing enough to contain Taliban and Al-Qaeda, notwithstanding the presence of 120,000 Pakistani troops along Pak-

Afghan border. As violence sponsored by Taliban and Al Qaeda against coalition forces is on the rise—it has increased by 40 percent this year—America has finally decided to risk its strategic alienation in Pakistan.

But Afghanistan is no Iraq. There is no oil. And oil in adjacent Iran is the target. If Pakistan refuses to fall in line—the possibility of which seems remote despite anti-American noises from the authorities in Islamabad—in America's efforts to make Afghanistan a safe haven for coalition forces, it will have to face serious consequences, the impact of which will reverberate throughout the sub-continent.

The fact is that America is trying to leave Iraq, hopefully in phases. The emergence of Barack Obama as the Democratic Party candidate for President has moved this scenario closer to reality. But Obama wants to shift American troops from Iraq to Afghanistan. In other words Obama will follow the same old Bush policy of attacking Afghan rebels inside Pakistan, ignoring the sentiments of Pakistani people. And Kabul's rocky road to democracy and stability remains as treacherous as it was at the time of coalition forces' invasion of Afghanistan. If America's Afghan war intensifies by making a division within the Pakistan army and polity as well Kashmir imbroglio may get further complicated in the coming days, making it difficult for America's new strategic partner India to maintain peace and status quo in the Himalayas. The Taliban fighters are likely to extend their area of operation involving Kashmir theatre as well to foil Washington's plan to make Pakistan's Waziristan a secure corridor for coalition forces. Or America would like to outsource its war against Afghanistan to India. □□□ 22-09-2008