

## Islamabad's War?

With violence showing the symptoms of a civil war, someday the people of Pakistan would beg the military to come back. As the merchants of jihadi terror have made all attempts by America-backed civilian government in Islamabad to stabilise Pakistani polity futile, Generals are just waiting in the wings to make their presence felt. A jihadi cross-sectarian alliance, much of which has roots in America sponsored and funded anti-Soviet campaign in Afghanistan, is reaching for power. There is no stopping it. America can at best prolong its delay by standing in its way as the Iraqi experience suggests. After the recent attack on a police academy in Lahore and two more suicide attacks in a row Islamabad has no option but to integrate itself further with America's security establishment to manage its domestic affairs. It no more seems strange that Washington is now openly interfering in Pakistan's internal matters. Immediately after the Lahore carnage United States asked Pakistan's notorious Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to dissociate itself from ultras including al-Qaeda, the Taliban and LeT. The hard reality is that Pakistani society today lives at many levels and there are too many authorities that call the shots somewhat independently without bothering about federal government's mandate.

For all practical purposes ISI runs a parallel administration showing scant regard for what civilian leaders are saying—or not saying. Given the changed geo-political context the Zardaris will have to let the fever run its course. And America is responsible in the first place for Talibanisation of ISI and much of Pakistan's administrative apparatus. During the Taliban rule in Afghanistan ISI was the key player in furthering Pakistan's regional ambition. Also, the persons in authority in Islamabad, in uniform or without uniform, had always utilised ISI to continue proxy war in Jammu and Kashmir by way of training and funding jihadi groups and America looked the other way when its sophisticated arms reached extremist training camps based in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. Having failed to tame the menace of its own creation, Islamabad is now trying to rake up the unresolved Kashmir dispute and blame it on India—the over-used ploy—for the escalation of jihadi violence in Pakistani cities and villages in recent months.

One reason militants have stepped up their 'suicide-bombing' mission in Pakistan is increased military campaign by American and NATO forces in Afghanistan where they are trying to deny religious extremists the much-needed rear they have long been utilising for their assault on the Kabul regime, along Afghan-Pakistan border. President Obama is all set to increase the number of US troops in Afghanistan which in turn forces the Pakistani Taliban and their Afghan allies to open new fronts inside Pakistan to foil American game plan. And suicide bombers are doing precisely that job. After the Lahore tragedy even India is feeling the heat because all it happened just 12 km from Indian border. New Delhi is busy to calculate the pluses and minuses of spill-over effect.

The ruling elites of Pakistan need American money and weapons as well and an external enemy across its eastern border to keep the Pakistan project going. Those who thought creation of Bangladesh in 1971 on the popular wave of a nationalist revival movement would weaken Pakistan materially and

economically may have second thoughts now. America never allowed Pakistan to become a materially weak force in South Asian theatre because of its own strategic interests. The only difference this time is the presence of US troops on Pakistani soil will multiply in the coming months. After all America is not facing strong opposition from the nationalist and democratic forces of Pakistan. So long as anti-Americanism remains confined to jihadi intolerance, Pakistanis will lose their sovereignty further because the 'war on terror' trap seems all pervasive.

With a resurgent Iraqi nationalist movement which appears to be secular, much to the relief of progressive forces across the world, US troops are likely to stay in Iraq until the end of 2011. But they will not be sent back to American barracks. In all probability they will be redeployed in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In other words Obama's effort to create a long-lasting military presence in South Asia is a fait accompli.

As too many jihadi groups are operating in Pakistan, sometimes at cross purposes, the days of warlords are back in predominantly feudal regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan. If Islamabad is to retain its integrity and check disintegration, the Generals—the actual rulers of Pakistan—and the Zardaris will have to seek more help from America as they are afraid of mass upsurge. In any case they will have to tolerate unilateral military action by America inside Pakistan, for the sake of combating terrorists. Uncle Sam is in the advanced stage of re-designing Washington's Pakistan strategy and South Asian policy as well. It means the immediate future is not going to be peaceful in the sub-continent. □□□