

“Defending our Nation against its enemies is the first and fundamental commitment of the Federal Government. Today, that task has changed dramatically. Enemies in the past needed great armies and great industrial capabilities to endanger America. Now, shadowy networks of individuals can bring great chaos and suffering to our shores for less than it costs to purchase a single tank. Terrorists are organized to penetrate open societies and to turn the power of modern technologies against us.”

President George W. Bush, 2002 National Security Strategy

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Terrorism

Pakistan’s War on Terrorism

A year after President Pervez Musharraf announced a ban on Muslim extremist groups—a move hailed in Washington as a turning point for Pakistan—several of the organizations have reconstituted under different names and are once again raising money and proselytizing for jihad against India and the West.

Pakistani authorities have released almost all of the hundreds of militants detained last year, and no effort has been made to disarm the groups. They say the government had no choice but to release the militant leaders and their followers because of insufficient evidence to continue to hold them. Pakistani officials deny that Musharraf has reneged on his commitment to curb extremists, noting that scores of Al Qaeda operatives have been rounded up, including the recent arrest of Khalid Shaikh Mohammed in Rawalpindi—the most significant capture to date in the war on terrorism.

The reemergence of jihadi groups, several of which have links to Al Qaeda and the Taliban, has caused deep concern among Western diplomats. They say it holds the potential for renewed confrontation between Pakistan and India and raises questions about the

depth of Musharraf’s commitment to the U.S.-led war on terrorism.

President Musharraf has been walking a tight rope since September 11, 2001, balancing the required steps against radical elements and domestic political pressures to support them. In this regard, the strong showing of hard-line religious parties opposed to Pakistan’s cooperation with the United States in national and provincial elections last fall has decreased the already limited room in which Musharraf can maneuver. Two of Pakistan’s four provinces, North West Frontier Province and Baluchistan, are now governed by a coalition of six anti-American politico-religious parties.

All signs indicate that the government still maintains a lenient attitude toward groups focused on the Kashmiri conflict, such as Lashkar-I-Taiba and Jaish-I-Muhammad. Trained and supported by Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency, these organizations have long been regarded as instruments of state policy. According to Sayeed, who founded Lashkar-I-Taiba and now runs Jamaat ul-Dawa, “India should believe me that it is beyond General Musharraf to blow a whistle and stop the jihad in Kashmir.” (*Combined dispatches*)

A New Alliance in Pashtunistan?

As the United States readies for war in Iraq, increased fighting in Afghanistan and the resurgence of Taliban and Al Qaeda activity is posing an increasing threat to the stability of the country. Security in the Pashtun-dominated south has deteriorated rapidly, with a string of attacks apparently inspired by Gulbuddin

Hekmatyar, who has forged an alliance with the remnants of the Taliban regime and the Al Qaeda network.

Hekmatyar—the fearsome former mujahideen commander, warlord, and leader of the extreme Sunni Hezb-I-Islami Party—has vowed to take down the Northern Alliance–dominated government and expel the foreign presence from Afghanistan. His fighters are believed to have taken on U.S. troops in fierce fighting around their cave complex outside Spin Boldak last month and later launched an offensive against Afghan government forces in the Kandahar province.

Catching those responsible for the largely hit-and-run attacks has proved tremendously difficult, especially in the last few months since the two border provinces of Pakistan, Baluchistan, and the North West Frontier Province came under the control of ultra-religious Islamic parties sympathetic to their cause. The region, including the Pashtun belt of Afghanistan, is increasingly resentful of the U.S. presence and angered by their apparent exclusion from the government in Kabul and the Northern Alliance (specifically Tajik) dominated Afghan military.

Reports describing terrorist training camps and the regrouping of the Taliban highlight the issues facing the 8,000 U.S. troops still in the region. More disturbing, however, are reports that Pakistan’s ISI and border guards are actively helping the extremists move back and forth between Afghanistan and Pakistan—borders sometimes impossible to monitor because they only exist on maps.

According to Hekmatyar, “They have fallen into a swamp from which it will be difficult for them to get out. They will face intolerable problems. The battle is with the Americans. The reason for what we are facing is the American presence in Afghanistan. We must end this presence, and its supporters will collapse.”

Samina Ahmed, a project director in Pakistan with the Brussels-based think tank—the International Crisis Group—said the new wave of attacks in Afghanistan had come as a wake-up call to western forces and

Kabul. A much stronger western peacekeeping presence was needed across Afghanistan—rather than only in Kabul as at present—to ensure a stable transition to elections next year.

Military planners are eager to shift efforts toward reconstruction, while others are more pessimistic. Major David Woods, operations commander at the Salerno Base where 1,000 men guard the border, notes: “They are patient, they will wear us down over time. It was time that beat the Russians.”

Dubai’s Cooperation with the War on Terrorism Called into Question

Dubai claims to be cooperating with U.S. authorities to shut down terrorist financing through the financial networks based on its soil, yet its conduct raises doubts. Dubai is one of the largest and most unregulated financial centers in the world, with a huge turnover in undocumented gemstones, gold, and cash. Not only has it been the financial hub for organized crime groups, it has served as a point of convergence for Islamist extremist groups and criminal networks.

On February 3, 2003, Dubai arrested and subsequently released a number of high-profile organized criminals linked to international terrorism, despite receiving detailed documents on some of these individuals from India just a few days before their arrests and despite their presence on the Interpol wanted list.

The 26 individuals arrested are a part of the notorious Dawood Ibrahim gang, known as the D-Company. Three of these detained gangsters—two of which are the gang leader’s brothers, Noora and Mustaqim—are accused of the 1993 Bombay Blasts involving a series of explosions in commercial centers that killed 257 persons and injured another 713. They are also believed to be a part of the network that provides operational support to terrorists in the region.

The individuals were released with instructions to “leave the country immediately.” Dubai provided no explanation for its actions and failed to respond to India’s requests for an official version of these events. The effort to prevent gang wars and blood baths, especially on the eve of the annual “Dubai shopping festival,” is probably the motive behind the actions of

Dubai authorities. Keeping their own backyard free of trouble seems to be their main concern.

The Dawood Ibrahim gang controls most of the contraband movement from and to South Asia as well as many hawala networks in the region. Hawala has long been used for terrorist financing as it leaves no evidence of transactions and is therefore considered a grave threat in the context of transnational terrorism. The authorities of the city-state have shown strong sympathies as well as direct commercial linkages to the terrorist and criminal underground.

Three Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) Cadres Aboard Arms-Laden Boat Commit Suicide

On February 7, 2003, the Sri Lanka Navy Fast Attack Craft was on routine patrol south of Delft Island (off the Jaffna peninsula) when it detected a trawler towing an LTTE boat. The Navy's attempts to search the boat were futile and permission for inspection was granted only after consultation with the LTTE naval commander. The following day, the ceasefire monitors found arms on the boat and moments later LTTE set fire to the vessel and blew themselves up. The incident is considered a serious violation of the ceasefire agreement. At the fifth round of peace talks between the Sri Lanka government and the LTTE in Berlin, held on February 7–8, 2003, the negotiators tried to establish safeguards to prevent this type of incident from happening again.

The agenda also focused on human rights issues. The LTTE agreed to work with the United Nations Children's Fund on an action plan for child soldiers. Tamil rebels agreed that the child soldiers would return home. Soldiers under the age of 18 would be trained for civilian jobs.

The first LTTE recruitment of child soldiers dates back to the early 1980s. Children undergo thorough training and indoctrination and serve in LTTE's protracted guerilla and terrorist campaigns. Estimates based on the fighters that have been killed in combat reveal that 40 percent of the LTTE fighting force are between the ages of 9 and 18. Numerous earlier pledges made by the LTTE regarding child soldiers have recently been violated, leading many to question the future psychological challenge of integrating them

back into society.

Sikh Terrorist Sentenced to Five-Year Imprisonment

Singh Reyat, a Sikh terrorist accused in the Air India aircraft bombing of 1985, was placed on trial in Vancouver, Canada. He was found guilty and sentenced to five-year imprisonment on February 11, 2003. A total of 329 persons were killed when the Air-India aircraft was blown up over the Atlantic Ocean on June 23, 1985. Reyat had already served 10 years in a British prison for his involvement in Tokyo's Narita Airport blast that occurred an hour before the Kanishka was blown up.

Drug Trafficking

Colombian Rebels Holding Three Americans

Three Americans were captured by rebels of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) on February 13, 2003, after their U.S. government plane crashed in southern Colombia while on an intelligence mission. The rebels executed two other crewmembers, an American and a Colombian. The FARC considers the three U.S. citizens prisoners of war who can only be freed, along with other hostages, if Colombia's government agrees to release jailed guerillas. The rebels made clear that they were not interested in negotiating with the United States, stressing that they sought to make a deal with Bogota.

The U.S. Department of State recently said that a "limited number of military personnel" would be sent to Colombia to support a search-and-rescue operation. The Congress has placed a cap of 400 military personnel for the operation. Colombian army commanders, equally eager to play down reports of increasing U.S. involvement, claim that only Colombian—and not U.S.—soldiers are conducting a search-and-rescue mission for the three Americans. Colombia's Constitution requires that the Senate authorize any U.S. deployment that involves offensive operations.

The State Department claims that the United States has not authorized any negotiations and that the search for the three hostages is proceeding.

The Americans were working under a Defense Department contract. This is the first time that U.S. citizens on official government business have been captured or killed by FARC rebels in Colombia. The FARC are holding more than 800 hostages, including a former presidential candidate, senators, governors and mayors, police, members of the armed forces, and the three Americans.

The capture comes at a time when officials are concerned about a possible increase of attacks against U.S. personnel and interests following a radical change in policy toward Colombia. Six months ago, what had been unimaginable for years was written into law: U.S. aid intended to fight drugs could be used to fight insurgents. Recognizing the complex issues surrounding the violent morass of anti-government leftist rebels and right-wing militias, U.S. policy has long been to focus on the war on drugs. Bush's recent budget proposal appears to be moving away from past policy to embrace a new relationship with the Colombian military, often associated with the brutal right-wing paramilitary groups.

Thailand's Disturbing Drug War

The ruthless Thai campaign to rid the country of drugs—began on February 1, 2003, by Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra—has left over 1,100 dead and more than 21,000 in jail.

Although Prime Minister Shinawatra recently acknowledged that the police might have committed some “mistakes” during this period, human rights activists describe the large number of killings as more or less summary executions. The police death squads are trying to fulfill a 25 percent reduction in drug dealers mandated by the government by February 28, 2003. Described as the first phase of the war on drugs, the list of 46,177 names has been widely questioned, citing cases of corrupt officials protecting themselves and bribes paid out to extend the list.

Thai officials say 5 percent of the population regularly abuses methamphetamines, making Thailand the largest consumer of the drug. Up to a million are considered to be addicted to the multi-colored pills known locally as yaba.

According to Thai officials, the three-month, anti-drug plan will have to be extended, but the second phase will begin shortly. Large traffickers and dealers will now be targeted. Prime Minister Shinawatra is riding a wave of public support in his efforts to combat drugs, but the tide is quickly shifting; “the Kingdom of Fear,” as some refer to Thailand, is increasingly under domestic and international pressure to crack down on the killings. When asked about a possible UN investigation, Prime Minister Shinawatra replied: “Do not worry about this. The UN is not my father. We as a member must follow international regulations. Do not ask too much. There is no problem. They can come and investigate.” (*The Straits Times*)

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