

Major A.H. Amin on Balochistan and the NWFP

Major A.H. Amin (Pakistan Army, Retired) occasionally writes for us. Today he sent two notes. The first note says that 80% of the Taliban fighting in Afghanistan freely operates across the Pakistan-Balochistan border of 1500-kms, where no Pakistani troops are stationed to stop them. The Pakistan Army has deployed heavily in the NWFP, but there's only 20% of the Taliban operating from NWFP.

To say this information left us astounded is an understatement. We had absolutely no idea that most of the Taliban is NOT in the NWFP, because except for the occasional information we receive from India, Pakistan, or Afghanistan, we rely on US sources. And this is what we get from US sources: a complete set of lies, pretending that NWFP is the focal point of the Taliban. Why the US should do this, we have absolutely no idea.

A second note from Major Amin breaks the news that the Balochistan Frontier Corps, which is to be used for the Balochistan crackdown, is actually 90% composed of Pushtoons with an increasing recruitment of Punjabis. There are few Balochis even in the Baloch Frontier Corps groups. This means that Pakistan will be pitting one ethnic group against another, which is usually called genocide.

While we are curious to see what the US will say, if anything, a bigger point we'd like to make for our readers is that the more we look at Pakistan, the bigger a headache we get. It seems near impossible for outsiders to understand how Pakistan works. And Editor, at least, has the advantage of being South Asian, spending 20 years in India, and having many Pakistani friends.

All in all, it seems that not just the Pakistanis are playing games with the US - something we have been saying for years as has www.longwarjournal.org, but the US is playing games with the American public.

We are not happy campers. We accept the US Government, like any other, has to operate with a considerable degree of secrecy in matters of national security during wartime. But why has Washington not plainly told us where the threat to Afghanistan is coming from? Aside from the occasional grumble that the Taliban leadership has made itself comfortable in Quetta, we are told little else about the Taliban in Balochistan.

Now, of course you can say "But aren't there hundreds of US/Western media people in Pakistan, shouldn't they be telling us what is actually going on?"

Well, here's the problem. Major Amin tells us on August 5, 2010, Lyse Doucet of the BBC interviewed the Inspector General of the Frontier Corps. we cannot say how many days, weeks, or months the intrepid Ms. Doucet has spent in Pakistan, but we're willing to wager its a lot.

Yet apparently when the IG of the Frontier Corps responded to her aggressive questioning about what Pakistan was doing about North Waziristan, he asked Ms. Doucet how many troops did the US/NATO have on the Afghanistan side of North Waziristan border. She had no clue.

Okay, so we all know there are no NATO troops worth mentioning outside the Khost Air Base, because US/NATO have not bothered to interdict the border themselves, preferring to issue imperial firmans (edicts in Urdu) to their subjects in Pakistan, which Pakistan ignores. In Orbat.com we've often said unless NATO etc. ante up the troops to close the border - and several hundred thousand will be required - the Afghan war cannot be won.

But isn't it Ms. Doucet's job to know minor stuff like where US/NATO troops are stationed and where not? Isn't she a professional journalist who is paid to know this stuff?

So what what we're saying is: don't wait on the media to inform us what's going on in Pakistan and the Afghan war. They have less of a clue than you or me.

Selig Harrison on Chinese Troops in Pakistan

Pakistan denies: Letter from Pakistan press counselor in New York
Selig S. Harrison's article "China's discreet hold on Pakistan's Northern Borderlands" (Views, Aug. 27) has no basis in fact.

The facts are: The Karakoram Highway, which connects China's Xinjiang region with Pakistan's Gilgit-Baltistan region, was constructed by Chinese and Pakistani engineers over a long period of time and completed in 1986. This is a historical fact. Parts of the highway, the highest paved international road, were destroyed, as was most of Pakistan's infrastructure, by the recent deadly floods. Landslides at Attabad in the Hunza Valley cut off all links to Gilgit-Baltistan, making it difficult for the government to ensure timely provision of the people's needs.

Pakistan therefore sought urgent help from friendly countries, including China, whose engineers have the necessary experience, to repair the damage on this critically important highway. But Mr. Harrison chose to describe Chinese engineers as army troops. Why he has tried to mislead your readers, is something he must explain.

Mr. Harrison replies Western and regional intelligence sources say that there has been an influx of construction, engineering and communication units of the People's Liberation Army into Gilgit-Baltistan, under the command of the Xinjiang military district, totaling at least 7,000 military personnel. This is confirmed by local political groups opposed to both Pakistani military rule and to the Chinese influx whose credibility is verified by Pakistani journalists, such as the Balawaristan National Front, the Gilgit-Baltistan Democratic Alliance, the All-Party National Alliance and the Gilgit-Baltistan Thinkers Forum.

In addition, several thousand P.L.A. troops are said to be stationed in the Khunjerab Pass on the Xinjiang border to protect Karakoram Highway construction crews, with ready access to Gilgit-Baltistan.

True, the Chinese in Gilgit-Baltistan are not combat soldiers, and their work on flood relief and economic development has positive benefits. But the impact of such a large foreign presence in a thinly populated, undeveloped region has been profound. With large amounts of money to dispense for subcontracts and support services, P.L.A. officers have become powerful, striking alliances with Pakistan-sponsored local functionaries, Pakistani bureaucrats and Pakistani businessmen who are profiting from more than 200 mining and other Chinese-run projects.

To local political activists, this adds up to a creeping process of de facto Chinese control over a region where Islamabad claims nominal authority but lacks the infrastructure to exercise it.

Editor's comment Thanks to reader Vikhr Akula for the URL:

http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/09/opinion/09iht-edletters.html?_r=1

What Editor find most strange is that Pakistan did not say a word about this Chinese relief assistance. US relief assistance was widely reported in the Pakistan media, so why not the Chinese? Next, the troops Mr. Harrison refers to were in the Northern Areas before the floods.

Mr. Akula has his own question. Why have the Indian and US Governments commented publically on this development? Indians are reaching over backward not to provoke China. Pakistan is US's ally, so it avoids bringing attention to what Pakistan is doing unless its to say something positive.