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## **A line not to be crossed**

### **American-led war on terror cannot be allowed to spread into Pakistan's Pashtun tribal area**

**By Eric Margolis**

The killing of 11 Pakistani soldiers by U.S. air and artillery strikes last week shows just how quickly the American-led war in Afghanistan is spreading into neighbouring 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 U.S. aid, later softened its protests.

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

This latest U.S. 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 U.S., 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 U.S. aircraft, Predator hunter-killer drones, U.S. 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% 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, U.S. 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 U.S. 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 U.S. is using this same tactic in Iraq and Afghanistan.

This week's deadly U.S. attacks again illustrate the fact that the 60,000 U.S. 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. U.S. air power is almost always called in when there are clashes.

In fact, the main function for U.S. and NATO infantries is to draw the Taliban into battle so the Afghan "mujahidin" can be bombed from the air. Without 24/7 U.S. 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 U.S. Air Force and Navy pilots. They kill more civilians than Taliban fighters. Mighty U.S. 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.

#### **OPEN WARFARE**

The U.S. 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, U.S. 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 U.S.-led war in Afghanistan and their nation's subjugation to U.S. 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 U.S.-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.