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Pakistan Defies U.S. on Halting Afghanistan Raids

By [JANE PERLEZ](#)

PESHAWAR, [Pakistan](#) — Pakistani officials are making it increasingly clear that they have no interest in stopping cross-border attacks by militants into [Afghanistan](#), prompting a new level of frustration from Americans who see the infiltration as a crucial strategic priority in the war in Afghanistan.

On Wednesday night, the United States fired its fourth Predator missile strike since January, the most visible symbol of the American push for a freer hand to pursue militants from [Al Qaeda](#) and the [Taliban](#) who use Pakistan's tribal areas as a base to attack Afghanistan and plot terrorist attacks abroad. In Afghanistan, cross-border attacks have doubled over the same month last year and present an increasingly lethal challenge to American and [NATO](#) efforts to wind down the war and deny the Taliban and Al Qaeda a sanctuary.

In an unusual step during a visit to Pakistan in March, Adm. Eric T. Olson, the commander of United States Special Operations Command, held a round-table discussion with a group of civilian Pakistani leaders to sound them out on the possibility of cross-border raids by American forces. He was told in no uncertain terms that from the Pakistani point of view it was a bad idea, said one of the participants.

Instead, Pakistani officials are trying to restore calm to their country, which was rattled by a record number of suicide attacks last year. Within days, they are expected to strike a peace accord with Pakistan's own militants that makes no mention of stopping the infiltrations. In fact, Pakistani counterinsurgency operations have stopped during the new government's negotiations with the militants.

"Pakistan will take care of its own problems, you take care of Afghanistan on your side," said Owari Ghani, the governor of North-West Frontier Province, who is also President [Pervez Musharraf](#)'s representative in charge of the neighboring tribal areas.

Mr. Ghani, a key architect of the pending peace accord, believes along with many other Pakistani leaders that the United States is

floundering in the war in Afghanistan. Pakistan, he said, should not be saddled with America's mistakes, especially if a solution involved breaching Pakistan's sovereignty, a delicate matter in a nation where sentiment against the Bush administration runs high.

"Pakistan is a sovereign state," he said. "NATO is in Afghanistan; it's time they did some soldiering."

The pending accord, Pakistani officials said, is aimed at stopping suicide attacks in Pakistan, which became a focus of the militants' wrath last year as the Pakistani government pursued a more assertive policy against them at the urging of the United States.

American officials in Washington said the Predator strike on Wednesday killed a handful of Qaeda militants, including one they described as a "significant leader." The strike indicated that the [C.I.A.](#) retained some freedom to operate in the tribal areas. But as the gap between Pakistani and American policies widens, United States officials are pushing harder for still more latitude.

During his visit to North-West Frontier Province, Admiral Olson was taken to the military headquarters of the 14th Division of the Pakistani Army in Dera [Ismail Khan](#), an area just outside the tribal region, where he was struck by the extent of the anti-Taliban sentiment, Pakistani officials said.

Still, in the talks, which were organized by the United States Consulate here in late March, the civilian leaders said they advised the Americans against fighting in Pakistani territory populated by Pashtuns. Pakistan's government has long been wary of nationalist and separatist strains among the Pashtuns, whose population straddles the Pakistani-Afghan border.

"I said it would be extremely dangerous," Khalid Aziz, a former chief secretary of North-West Frontier Province, said he told Admiral Olson. "It would increase the number of militants, it would be a war of liberation for the Pashtuns. They would say: 'We are being slaughtered. Our enemy is the United States.' "

Officials from the Special Operations Command or those at the embassy here would not agree to interviews about the meetings.

Last week [John D. Negroponte](#), the deputy secretary of state, used perhaps the strongest language yet against Pakistan, saying that the United States found it "unacceptable" that extremists used the tribal areas to plan attacks against Afghanistan, the rest of the world and Pakistan itself.

"We will not be satisfied until the violent extremism emanating from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas is brought under control," Mr. Negroponte told the National Endowment for Democracy.

Earlier this month, Afrasiab Khattak and Asfandiyar Wali Khan, the leaders of the Awami National Party, which leads the government in the North-West Frontier Province, met with [Stephen J. Hadley](#), the national security adviser, and Mr. Negroponte in Washington.

In their meetings, Mr. Khattak said, it was hard to deter the Americans from the notion of launching their own operations into Pakistan. The topic came up "again and again," he said.

The Americans specifically mentioned their concern that Qaeda operatives in the tribal areas were preparing an attack on the United States, he said.

"We told them physical intervention into the tribal areas by the United States would be a blunder," Mr. Khattak said. "It would create an atmosphere in which the terrorists would rally" popular support.

NATO and the United States say cross-border attacks aimed at Afghan and NATO troops have risen from 20 a month in March 2007 to 53 last month. The United States is particularly concerned about the attacks because they appear to be aimed at Canadian and Dutch troops, whose governments are under pressure to withdraw from the NATO war effort. A new contingent of United States marines has arrived in southern Afghanistan, increasing the concern about attacks.

The pending peace accord with the militants shows where Pakistan and American interests diverge. The accord, between the Pakistani authorities and the strongest Pakistani militant leader, [Baitullah Mehsud](#), makes no mention of banning cross-border raids into Afghanistan.

The agreement with Mr. Mehsud, who is accused by the Pakistani government of having masterminded the assassination of [Benazir Bhutto](#), has also alarmed Washington because it fails to call for the rapid expulsion of foreign fighters from Arab countries, Uzbekistan and Chechnya, which make up the backbone of Al Qaeda and its allies in the region.

Mr. Ghani, the governor, said the accord covering the tribal agency of South Waziristan served Pakistan's interests because it gave space to restore the relative stability of pre-9/11, and to amicably break down the rule of the militants. But where Pakistan wants time, the United States wants action.

Mr. Ghani suggested that the NATO troops use "daisy cutter bombs when they go over to Afghanistan."

Although Mr. Aziz and Mr. Khattak criticized sending American forces into the tribal areas, both men also blamed the Pakistani Army, which was first sent to the tribal areas at American insistence in 2002.

Most of the 100,000 soldiers are from the Punjab, the largest and most sophisticated province of Pakistan. They feel like foreigners in the impoverished tribal areas, and are treated as such. Their training in conventional warfare has been a liability against the more limber militants. Under such conditions, Mr. Aziz said, the army had been reduced to a mass of "demoralized, quivering flesh." They had taken a "bad beating," and were just waiting to leave.

At the same time, he said, more than 200 tribal leaders, the men who provided the glue to keep the society together, had been killed by the militants over the last several years. A respected tribal leader known for his antimilitant views, Ahmad Khan Kukikhel, was killed Wednesday after his car was stopped by gunmen on the road in the Khyber agency. His friends said they were convinced the Taliban had attacked him.

Thus, the militants which until recently had been holed up in the two tribal agencies North Waziristan and South Waziristan are now arrayed across the tribal areas, and had spread into some pockets outside. "The agreement basically means appeasement," Mr. Aziz said. "It's a serious problem," he said.

The militant leader, Mr. Mehsud, who heads an alliance of groups known as Tehrik-e-Taliban, knew that the army would leave him alone to build up his strength, Mr. Aziz said.

A key to isolating the militants, Mr. Khattak said, is to allow Pakistan's major political parties to operate in the tribal areas. Under the complicated archaic rules of governing over the tribal areas, The parties are forbidden in the region, making it difficult to provide a viable alternative to the standoff between the government and the militants, he said. To ease that difficulty, his party, the Awami National Party, favors combining the North-West Frontier Province and the tribal areas into one entity, he said.

In a sign of how favorably the militants look upon the accord, a spokesman for Mr. Mehsud in Damadola, the town where on Wednesday the Predator drone killed 18 people, said Thursday that the deal should go ahead despite the attack. Government officials said that militants gathered in a house were among the dead. It was not clear whether well-known foreign militants were among those killed.

The town, about 100 miles from Peshawar, is the same place where a similar strike in 2006 was aimed at [Ayman al-Zawahri](#), the deputy to [Osama bin Laden](#).

Ismail Kahn contributed reporting from Peshawar, and Eric Schmitt from Washington.

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