

Pakistan: From religious politics to religious extremism Part-II

AIR CDRE ISHFAQ ILAHI CHAUDHURY, ndc, psc (Retd)

THE fall of Kabul to the CIA-ISI sponsored Mujahideen forces in 1992 after eleven years of civil war was considered a great victory of the religious forces and of the government of Pakistan.

ward to a titular government in Afghanistan that would not raise the Paktunistan issue. A pliable government in Kabul would mean Pakistan could then concentrate on Kashmir and the rest of India.



into their safe haven. They are using Pakistan as their rear areas to regroup, recuperate and rearm.

how terror network are using Pakistani heartland to launch their operations. Other top-level Al-Qaeda leaders arrested included Abu Zubaidda and Abu Faraj Al-Libbi, both connected with worldwide terror

operations. After early successes against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces in 2001-03, there was a let up both from the Afghan-NATO side as well from Pakistan. The Taliban and Al-Qaeda used the intervening

period to regroup and rearm. The formation of Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) government in NWFP in 2002 only helped the rehabilitation of Al-Qaeda and Taliban in Pakistani soil.

The Government's use of force since 2007 to dislodge the extremists from the border areas ran into trouble because the Army, equipped and trained to fight a conventional battle in the plains of Punjab and the desert of Sindh, was not battle ready to fight an insurgency in the rugged hills of Hindukush.

tance of extremist political parties and various militant organisations inside Pakistan have created a battlefield that has no frontiers.

Ironically, within the Pakistani ruling establishment, including the military, there is not enough realization of the grave and imminent danger. They are still preparing for the hypothetical war against India.

The last election ushered in new hopes for Pakistan. People voted out the religious parties and gave their verdict for a progressive, democratic Pakistan.

attack on leadership targets at short notice. It would be in the interest of Pakistan to cooperate with the partners. On the political front the religious parties must be isolated and not be allowed to ride on others' shoulders and re-enter the main stage.

Part I appeared on 18 Oct. 2008.

The author is a freelancer.

Smaller, lighter Mraps headed to Afghanistan

The Pentagon is speeding deliveries to Afghanistan of armoured vehicles designed to protect troops against roadside bomb attacks - smaller, lighter versions of what are known as MRAPs.

The MRAPs - the acronym stands for mine-resistant, ambush-protected - are being sent as U.S. forces report an increase in the number of roadside bombs being used by insurgents against coalition forces in Afghanistan.

There is a desire on the part of commanders there to get more MRAPs into theater, said Defense Department spokesman Geoff Morrell at a Pentagon news conference.

Morrell did not know how many more will be delivered, and the U.S. Transportation Command declined to discuss the numbers involved. But Morrell noted that an additional 822 new, lighter MRAPs being built by Navistar Defense will be fielded beginning in November.

There are now 1,122 MRAPs deployed in Afghanistan, Morrell said. He said he knew of no plans to transfer to Afghanistan any of the 9,341 MRAPs now in Iraq, where U.S. forces are slowing drawing down in size.

Since Afghanistan is landlocked and no "appropriately secure" route exists for overland delivery of the large vehicles, MRAPs must be airlifted into the country, said Army Lt. Col. Frederick Rice of TransCom. Some will be flown directly from the U.S., but others will be transported forward by ship and then transferred to cargo aircraft for delivery to Afghanistan, he said.

The Pentagon still plans to acquire a total of 15,800 MRAPs, Morrell said. So far, about 10,500 have been transported to the U.S. Central Command area of operations, according to Rice.

USAF laying out 4-decade UAV plan

The U.S. Air Force's Unmanned Aircraft Systems Task Force is set to brief the new service chief and Defense Secretary Robert Gates December 15 on the long-term future of UAVs. The task force is laying out a road map for UAVs all the way to 2047, the Air Force's centennial, said Colonel Eric Mathewson, director of the Air Force Unmanned Aircraft Systems Task Force at the CAISR Integration conference in Arlington, Va., October 17.

"ISR and intelligence missions are no longer support operations, they are the operations," Murray said. The service is still getting its collective brain around the domain-neutral demands of persistent global ISR, he said, but transformation and moves towards more joint ways of doing things are slowly but surely coming.

"Trust is what it really comes down to," Murray said: trust that the ISR assets any war fighter needs will be where they are supposed to be when they are supposed to be there.

US Marines to hold joint exercise in Ladakh

After the Royal Marines, the US marines will also be holding a joint military exercise with the Indian Army in Ladakh. US Army Chief General George Casey along with his Indian counterpart Deepak Kapoor visited Ladakh and its adjoining areas to select the location where the Indo-US military exercises would be held.

Navy diverts warship to fight Somali pirates

The Indian Navy has diverted a ship that was already in the west Asian region to the Gulf of Aden to carry out anti-piracy patrols, sources have confirmed. The ship has enough endurance to remain there and provide security to Indian flagships carrying cargo till another warship is sent there to replace it, a source said. The government on Thursday

had approved the deployment of an Indian naval warship with helicopters and marine commandos on board in the Gulf of Aden to carry out anti-piracy patrols of the route followed usually by Indian commercial ships between Salalah (Oman) and Aden (Yemen) in west Asia.

By arrangement with IPCS, New Delhi.

Indian Air Force with its own exercise

The Indian Air Force (IAF) is planning to host its own version of the US Air Force's (USAF's) Red Flag exercise, in which it recently participated for the first time. "We are working towards holding our own multinational war games with realistic war scenarios two to three years down the line, but they would be on a more modest scale," Vice Chief of Air Staff Marshal PV Naik said on 18 September.

Speaking in New Delhi after the return of the 247-strong IAF contingent from Nellis Air Base in Nevada, the venue for 'Red Flag', AM Naik said India had proved its ability to "project air power transcontinentally."

"These operations have aided in widening our horizons, provided necessary combat training with other advanced air forces of the world and prepared us for future overseas employment if required," he declared.

The IAF contingent included 91 officers operating eight Sukhoi Su-30MKI fighters, two Ilyushin Il-78 mid-air refuellers and one Il-76 transport aircraft.

Domestic defense planners are eager for India to be able to conduct 'out of area operations' in accordance with the country's rising global profile. In keeping with this goal, the IAF said it had "positively exposed" and integrated its combat and transport aircraft and personnel in a transcontinental environment.

"the experience of engaging in an entirely network-centric combat environment in limited airspace has contributed immensely to honing our capabilities," said Group Captain D Chaudhury, IAF team commander at 'Red Flag'.

The exercises, he added, had helped the IAF to network its assets to provide real-time data and to integrate 'seamlessly' with the USAF alongside those of the exercise's other participants, France and South Korea.

During the manoeuvres, the IAF's Su-30s flew 180 sorties alongside 28 support sorties by the Il-78s and the Il-76. Missions included the suppression of enemy air defenses, dynamic targeting and air-to-air and air-to-ground missions in 'real, war like scenarios'.

The IAF's special forces (Garuda) also participated in the exercises, neutralising an enemy radar site, capturing an airfield and conducting search-and-rescue operations.

Source: Janas Defense Weekly

New 'Typhoon' combat aircraft for RAF

The RAF has taken delivery of the first of 91 new Typhoon combat aircraft, ordered four years ago and delivered on time and to cost. The new Defence Equipment and Support Minister Quentin Davies was at RAF Coningsby to witness the arrival of the second generation Typhoons.

The two aircraft flew in from BAE Systems' Warton factory in Lancashire to RAF Coningsby in Lincolnshire, where they will shortly be released for flight trials, and are expected to join front line UK-based air defence squadrons in January 2009.

Minister for Defence Equipment and Support, Quentin Davies said, "Typhoon is delivering a world-class capability to the RAF and is the cornerstone of the UK's air defence capabilities. Today's arrival of the second Tranche is an important milestone delivering to the RAF an aircraft with more powerful computer systems and the ability to carry heavier weapons - the next generation of Typhoon."

"Typhoon directly employs some 16,000 aerospace and engineering staff in some of the UK's leading companies. Militarily and industrially this programme is successfully delivering the capabilities the country needs."

The production of Typhoon Tranche 2 will maintain 16,000 direct jobs within UK's defence industry, through its principal contractors BAE Systems on its sites in Warton and Sarnesbury in Lancashire and Rolls Royce in Bristol. Other key suppliers include Selex Galileo in Edinburgh.

The Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Glenn Torpy, said, "Maintaining the flow of these advanced aircraft to front line RAF squadrons is very important. Typhoon has now been operational in the air defence role for over a year and recently achieved its multi-role capability. I am confident that forthcoming exercises and deployments will provide further demonstration of its qualities."

The RAF expects to take delivery of 6 rising to 20 Typhoon aircraft every year for the next 7 years under the Typhoon Tranche 2 contract.

Source: www.defencetaalk.com

The Powell endorsement: Will it seal the deal for Obama?

M. SERAJUL ISLAM

IN a campaign not going well for Senator McCain, there was more bad news this week. Gallup Poll taken on October 20th gave Senator Barack Obama an 11% point lead in the presidential vote preference of all registered voters, 52% to 41%.

The endorsement was made all the more shocking for the Arizona Senator by the carefully chosen words in the endorsement. It was widely known that General Powell would be endorsing either of the candidates as he had met both in June and said that his endorsement would come after the conventions and the presidential debates.

"The Democrats are excited with the endorsement of Colin Powell for a number of reasons. Colin Powell is an elder statesman across the political divide of his country. A former Joint Chiefs of Staff during the first Gulf War, Colin Powell became the Secretary of State in the first Bush administration. General Powell was once widely considered as most likely to become the first black President of the USA but his association to the Bush administration came in the way of that possibility but still did not tarnish his image as an honest and powerful leader and a visionary. The fact that he crossed party line to endorse Senator Obama made his endorsement that much more potent."

There are a few more damaging elements of the Colin endorsement for the McCain camp. It has exposed a serious rift within the Republicans - one between the pragmatists and the

neo-conservatives. The pragmatists among the Republicans have viewed Iraq war and the execution of it a mistake. Colin Powell is among these pragmatists. According to close friends of the General, he has been disturbed to observe people in the McCain camp with deep ties to the neo-conservatives, people like Randy Scheuermann who is currently a key foreign policy adviser to the Senator from Alaska. Randy Scheuermann was earlier foreign policy adviser to Senator Trent Lott and Senator Dole, both with deep ties to the neo-conservatives. In addition, Randy Scheuermann was the founder of the hawkish Liberation of Iraq and a supporter of Chalabi, a Pentagon favourite during the beginning of the Iraq War and a Pentagon favourite but deeply detestable at the State Department when Powell was the Secretary there.

The impact of the endorsement on the election is being discussed everywhere in the USA now. The feedback coming out is depressing for the McCain camp. Analysts soft to the Obama candidature are calling it a bombshell, a nail in the coffin, a development that could seal the deal and the presidency. As it became evident that General Powell would endorse Obama, sources close to President Bush have said that the President himself called the General to request him not to make the endorsement knowing how damaging it would be to the McCain candidature. Those in the McCain camp, in an effort to downplay the damage, are saying that Powell is a discredited political figure for the part he played in the Iraq War and this endorsement is his way of hitting back.

On balance, though, this endorsement by Colin Powell has come for McCain at a very bad time. The general mood among most Americans is that the Republicans led by President Bush are responsible for USA's cur-

rent economic plight; that the Iraq war contributed more than its share to this economic downturn and that backing the McCain-Palin ticket would mean encouraging those who should be punished. Colin Powell brought home this point in his endorsement succinctly when he said that Obama has "fresh set of eyes" and "fresh set of ideas" and although Senator McCain is gifted, he is in the end going to execute the orthodoxy of the Republican agenda with a maverick face which is not enough for America. USA needs much more than that and Obama is the one who can do that.

The Powell endorsement and the words he used to give this endorsement to Obama have articulated the shortcomings of the McCain campaign in a manner that even the Obama Camp could not have done. First, General Powell has spelt out clearly and effectively that McCain is no different from President Bush despite his attempts to distance himself from President Bush. Second, he has underscored the fact that Senator McCain is also under the influence of the neo-conservatives who are responsible for the state of the economy and the Iraq War. Third, the former Secretary of State has exposed the negative campaign to link Obama with Ayers to suggest that he has links with terrorists as disgusting and detestable. Fourth, he has effectively explained in his endorsement the mistake of the McCain camp to include Governor Palin while underscoring the value of inclusion of Senator Biden as Obama's running mate. Finally, he has articulated the strengths of Senator Obama as a man of destiny who has the qualities and the vision to lead USA out of its current economic and political quagmire into which the country has fallen as a consequence of the failed leadership of President Bush and his neo-conservatives aides.

Coming from a Republican of the stature of Colin Powell, this endorsement in the ultimate analysis could prove to be the catalyst to help undecided voters make up their minds in favour of Senator Obama. As one analyst has written: "He's (meaning Powell) a Republican. He's a military man. He's backed both Bushes. And he has even donated money to McCain. That is why Powell's endorsement is so powerful." Senator McCain has already acknowledged that he is now the underdog. It is now up to the Obama camp to hold on to the great momentum that the Powell endorsement has given the Obama-Biden ticket and keep McCain where he lies at the moment. The Powell endorsement may also have taken the Bradley effect that suggests that on voting day white voters, who have earlier told pollsters that they would vote for a black candidate, may ultimately vote for a white candidate instead, out of the equation, thus easing the road of Senator Obama to the White House.

The writer is former Bangladesh Ambassador to Japan and Director of Centre for Foreign Affairs Studies and can be reached by email serajul@cfsonline.org.

