Pakistan "Election" Sham, Pakistani Taliban Terrorists supported by Military

By Asad Ismi

Region: Asia
Theme: Terrorism

The Pakistan election (both national and provincial) of May 2013 is being touted by the mainstream media as a historic achievement when for the first time in 66 years one elected government transferred power to another in a fair election. This is not the case. Imagine that, in the next Canadian federal election, the NDP, the Liberal Party and the Green Party were unable to campaign due to death threats from a terrorist group which had already killed 800 NDP members and that, as a result, the Conservative Party won the election. Would this be hailed as a fair election? Of course not. It would be a political disaster, which is precisely what the so-called elections in Pakistan were.

Because of the massive violence directed at them by the terrorist Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP — known as the Pakistani Taliban) during the elections and before, three major political parties were unable to campaign. These included the Pakistan People's Party which was ruling as the central government before the elections, the Awami National Party (ANP) which ruled Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (KPK), and the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), which politically dominated Karachi, Pakistan's largest city. More than 100 people were killed during the election campaigns, including several electoral candidates, and 350 injured mainly by the TTP.

The TTP, which calls itself Islamic fundamentalist, threatened to murder more of their activists if the parties campaigned. As a result, all three parties stopped organizing political rallies. Since the TTP was formed in 2007, it has killed an astounding 30,000 people in Pakistan in hundreds of bombings and shootings across the country. Up to a dozen people are killed by bombs daily in Pakistan.

The leader of the PPP, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, hardly campaigned due to the TTP threat. Since 2008, the TTP has killed more than 800 activists of the ANP, decimating the party. During the elections, the ANP announced that it would hold only small gatherings and shut down dozens of its election offices from fear of the TTP's violence. As Ejaz Khan, Professor of International Relations at Peshawer University (Peshawer is the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province), put it during the elections: "We will never know whether the ANP has lost or gained support because their supporters will be too frightened to vote. The elections cannot now be free and fair, and that means the result... will forever be suspect."

The beneficiary of the election violence has been, not surprisingly, the man who has won the contest, Nawaz Sharif, now the new Prime Minister. The TTP did not target Sharif's party, the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N), which, partly as a result, won a majority of

seats in the National Assembly and in the assembly of Punjab province where more than 60% of Pakistan's population resides. Punjab is the richest and most powerful province of Pakistan. Punjabis dominate the army, the civil bureaucracy, the business elite, and now the political system.

The TTP's explanation for not targeting Sharif is that his Party opposes the U.S. "war on terror" directed at the TTP with its deadly drone strikes that have devastated the people of Pakistan's northern frontier area that borders Afghanistan. This territory is known as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and this is where the TTP is based. Up to 6,000 civilians have been killed by U.S. drones in Pakistan. About 150,000 Pakistani troops occupy the FATA area. The three parties targeted by the TTP have admittedly backed the U.S. "war on terror" and the drone strikes.

  Nawaz Sharif is one of the richest men in Pakistan and is a right-wing, neoliberal, Punjabi businessman who first came to prominence as the protégé of General Zia-ul-Haq, a vicious military dictator and notorious U.S. puppet who overthrew the elected PPP government of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto in 1977 and hanged him in 1979. Zia proceeded to brutalize Pakistan for the next 11 years, killing, jailing, and torturing thousands of people and acting as a proxy for the U.S. war against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

Zia used a perverted form of Islam to justify his dictatorship and employed Islamist parties such as the Jamaat-i-Islami as death squads to terrorize Pakistanis. To counter the PPP, Zia organized a coalition of right-wing parties, including Islamist ones, and made Sharif the leader of this group. This coalition's electoral strategy was crafted by the Pakistan Army's sinister Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). So it was the Pakistan Army that made Sharif into a politician and created his entire political machine.

Sharif has served as Prime Minister twice before, during 1990-93 and 1997-99. His rule was known for widespread corruption and incompetence, with state funds being looted and tariffs manipulated to benefit Sharif's enterprises. Ironically, Sharif was overthrown in 1999 by the same army that empowered him, when he disagreed with General Parvez Musharraf over the latter's disastrous invasion of India's Kargil area which borders Pakistan. Sharif opposed the invasion and tried to remove Musharraf, who toppled the Prime Minister instead and exiled him to Saudi Arabia. Sharif returned to Pakistan in 2007.

So who are the Pakistani Taliban and how did they become so powerful so quickly, to the extent of actually shaping Pakistan's political landscape, driving long-established parties out of power, and imposing their own preferred government? How did they do this in a country which has a million-soldier standing army, an intelligence agency (ISI) with close to 200,000 agents, both of which have totally dominated Pakistan since its formation? And how did the TTP, a relatively small terrorist force of only about 5,000, kill 30,000 people all over Pakistan in six years making the powerful army look like a helpless giant?

These are the most important questions raised by the farcical Pakistan elections — but they are not being asked by the mainstream media. It is impossible for a group of 5,000 to have the massive organization required to terrorize 180 million people; so obviously the Pakistani Taliban had a lot of help. And the only organization powerful enough to engage in and facilitate such large-scale terrorism is the Pakistan Army. This army has created and funded religious fundamentalist terrorist groups since the late 1960s, and precisely to prevent the emergence of a viable, secular democracy in Pakistan.

The task of these groups has been to serve as death squads of the army that killed secular politicians and the supporters of any political group that the army felt could weaken its domination of Pakistan — especially its stranglehold on the national budget. These groups include the Jamaat-i-Islami, which also has long-standing CIA links and is allied with Nawaz Sharif; the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi which also has been linked to Sharif (he has long been criticized for "suspected covert support" of it); the Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ), formerly the Sipah-i-Sahaba (SSP), which similarly is linked to Nawaz Sharif; and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), which is accused of organizing the terrorist attacks on Mumbai (India) that killed 166 people in 2008. The army's ISI helped create LeT.

During the election, Sharif's party made a seat adjustment deal with the ASWJ because of which, according to Pakistani journalist Amir Mir, he is "unlikely to launch a crackdown against Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and ASWJ." So here we see a pattern emerging: the terrorist groups supported by the army are also linked to Sharif's party.

And what of the Pakistani Taliban? Here we have to look at a sixth and critical terrorist group that is also supported by the army (in this case for decades). It is known as the Haqqani Network (HN). HN is based in Pakistan's North Waziristan area (part of FATA) which borders Afghanistan. HN launches attacks into Afghanistan that target U.S. and Afghan forces.

 Admiral Mike Mullen, who until September 2011 was Washington's most senior military officer, told the U.S. Senate that "the Haqqani network... acts as a 'veritable arm' of the ISI." He said that, "With ISI support, Haqqani operatives planned and conducted a truck bomb attack [on Sept. 11, 2011], as well as the assault on our [Kabul] embassy [on Sept. 13]. We also have credible intelligence that they were behind the 28th of June attack against the Inter-Continental Hotel in Kabul and a host of other smaller but effective operations." And guess who is allied to and partnered with the Haqqani Network, the "veritable arm of the ISI"? The Pakistani Taliban, of course.

 So there we have a more complete picture of the state of Pakistani politics. The Pakistani Taliban are part of the terrorist network created by the Pakistan army, which helps it inflict horrendous violence on the country to destabilize it, politically and economically, so that no strong political counterforce to the army can emerge. The violence also delegitimizes civilian governments, as they are unable to deal with it, thus making the army look like the only possible saviour of the nation. The more violence there is, the more indispensable the army seems to become. The more ruinous the condition of Pakistan, the stronger the army gets.

Nawaz Sharif is linked to and benefits from the army's terrorist network, whose crucial aid has enabled his coming to power, so the military's message to him is clear: "We brought you to power. If you do something we don't like, the Pakistani Taliban or some other terrorist group will turn its guns and bombs on you." Sharif is unlikely to step out of line. In this sense, the recent "election" was no such thing, but rather a successful covert operation of the ISI.

Of course, this strategy is a rather dangerous one. Such machinations have already resulted in the Pakistan Army losing half the country. The army, always a U.S. vassal, has run Pakistan as its personal fiefdom since its formation in 1947, and lost the eastern half of its territory in 1971 rather than lose its domination of the rest of the country. In that year, the army slaughtered up to three million people in East Pakistan after refusing to accept the

results of a national election won by the leader of the Bengalis, Sheikh Mujibur Rehman. Because of this horrific genocide, East Pakistan, the majority of whose residents belonged to the Bengali ethnic group, seceded from Pakistan and became the independent nation of Bangladesh. It was the only time in modern history when the majority of a country's people seceded from it.

Refusing to learn from the East Pakistan debacle, the army attacked another Pakistani province, Baluchistan, only two years later in 1973, killing 5,000 Baluchis and starting another civil war. Today, Baluchistan is once again embroiled in a civil war with a widespread armed insurgency raging across the province and the army murdering and torturing thousands of Baluchis.

Not only is Pakistan ripped apart by its own army's war of terrorism, but its economy has also collapsed, with an electricity crisis plunging large cities into a power blackout for 10 hours a day so that factories are unable to function. The official treasury is almost empty.

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