

National Security Proposal #4

Disrupting the Taliban & al Qaeda in Pakistan

Since our invasion of Afghanistan, Osama bin Laden, al Qaeda and the Taliban have hidden in the border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan. This area, known as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), has become a safe haven for al Qaeda and the Taliban. They are using this base to reverse our gains in Afghanistan and plan attacks in the United States. It is vital to America's national security that we take decisive actions to disrupt this safe haven.

THE PROBLEM

Al Qaeda, bin Laden and the Taliban have created a new safe haven

President Bush and Senator McCain are recklessly consumed with Iraq, but in truth, Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda remain the greatest threat to America and its allies. Seven years after 9/11, al Qaeda has established a safe haven from which it is actively preparing to attack America. The Taliban is also using this region to launch attacks against American troops in Afghanistan. This region, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), is the most dangerous place in the world for the United States.

Taliban opium fields are funding the insurgency in Afghanistan.

Despite the presence of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, production of opium there doubled from 2005 to 2007. In 2007, Afghanistan produced 93% of the world's supply.¹ While there was a decrease in production in 2008, the Taliban still collected between \$200 and \$400 million from opium cultivation this year.² When the Taliban can buy an AK-47 for about \$400³ and pay an insurgent \$1,200 a year,⁴ it is clear that opium provides more than enough to fund an insurgency.

Al Qaeda has reestablished a base in the FATA and is organizing attacks against the United States.

In March 2008, CIA Director Michael Hayden told reporters that if there was a terrorist attack on the U.S., it would come from the Pakistan-Afghanistan border region.⁵ Three thwarted terrorist attacks in Germany, Scotland and England since 2005 were traced to the FATA.⁶ According to a leading terrorism expert, 'virtually every major al-Qaeda attack or plot of the past four years emanated from the region.'⁷

In April 2008, the bipartisan U.S. Government Accountability Office stated, "The United States has not met its national security goals to destroy the terrorist

threat... al Qaeda has regenerated its ability to attack [us] and succeeded in establishing a safe haven in Pakistan... al Qaeda is now using the Pakistani safe haven to put the last element necessary to launch another attack against America into place.⁸ A former CIA officer estimates that al Qaeda is training as many as 2,000 fighters in Pakistan.⁹

The Taliban is using its safe haven in Pakistan to attack U.S. and NATO troops.

After 9/11, the United States military routed the Taliban, and they fled with their al Qaeda allies to the FATA and slowly rebuilt their force. Now, Taliban forces sneak across the border to attack American and NATO troops and destroy infrastructure, and they run back across the border, which U.S. forces usually don't cross. (The U.S. reportedly did conduct at least one Special Forces raid into the FATA in early September 2008.) This summer has seen a 40 percent increase in violent attacks against allied forces in Afghanistan.¹⁰ May, June and July saw higher death totals in Afghanistan than in Iraq.¹¹ The insurgency is increasing dramatically. The American commander of the International Security Forces, David McKiernan, said that the main factor in this increase is that these are "sanctuary areas to militant groups that are across the border in FATA."¹²

THE SOLUTION

Decisive American action to prevent a crisis

The long-term solution to the problem in the FATA requires a stable Pakistani government and increased U.S. assistance to improve the lives of Pakistanis in the FATA. But we face a serious short term problem—if an attack against America is successfully organized in the FATA, we might be forced to invade a putative ally armed with nuclear weapons, in a region that is very hostile. We therefore need decisive action now to prevent a larger crisis later.

Eliminate the Taliban's revenue from opium

As long as the Taliban can collect huge revenues from the sale of opium, it can fund attacks against American troops and the Afghan government. New efforts by the Bush administration have finally begun to somewhat reduce production of opium in Afghanistan, but not in the critical southern region where the Taliban has influence and where 98 percent of the opium is produced.¹³

The United States should begin a real, focused program to destroy opium harvests manually and with aerial spraying of glyphosate, a common weed killer. In exchange, the United States should guarantee the current high prices for wheat to encourage Afghani farmers to convert to that crop.

Tie military aid to Pakistan to their efforts to combat al Qaeda in the FATA

Since 9/11, Pakistan has received more than \$8 billion from the United States in

military aid¹⁴ and is set to receive \$300 million this year.¹⁵ Much of this money has been spent on weapons not designed for counterterrorism—such as the Bush administration’s plan to allow Pakistan to spend \$230 million to upgrade their F-16 fleet.¹⁶ These planes may help Pakistan deter or fight India, an American ally, but they are almost useless in fighting insurgents in the FATA. Congress should pass legislation that requires that U.S. military funding for Pakistan be used exclusively to eliminate al Qaeda and Taliban safe havens.

Reserve the right to strike in Pakistan to confront threats to America

We cannot allow Pakistan’s inaction in the FATA to threaten the United States. As Barack Obama has said: “If we have actionable intelligence about high-value terrorist targets and [Pakistan] won’t act, we will.”¹⁷ While we would prefer that Pakistan police its own territory, the U.S. should not stand by and allow the danger to grow.

THE ROLLOUT

Ideas for launching and publicizing steps to confront the danger in Pakistan

- **Press conference on Oct. 7th with OEF Veterans**
October 7th will mark the seventh anniversary of Operation Enduring Freedom, the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. Have returned OEF veteran talk about how al Qaeda and the Taliban are hiding on the border and attacking American troops in Afghanistan. Call for decisive action in the FATA to prevent an attack against the United States.
- **Press conference with the family of a servicemember serving in Afghanistan**
Hold a press conference with the family of someone currently serving in Afghanistan. Have them describe the challenges of fighting an enemy that strikes and then retreats across a border where the U.S. military does not follow. Call for decisive action in the FATA to prevent an attack against the United States.

CRITIQUES & RESPONSES

Why are you calling for an attack on Pakistan? Isn’t this saber-rattling like we saw in Iraq?

This situation is nearly the opposite of Iraq. In the FATA, we face the terrorists responsible for the 9/11 attacks and who are publicly committed to attacking us again. The Taliban crosses the border into Afghanistan and attacks U.S. troops on a regular basis. This is a dangerous enemy with whom we are already at war.

Furthermore, no one is calling for regime change, or for an invasion or occupation of Pakistan. Having a secure, democratic Pakistan is in the best interest

of the United States, and we should provide funding to increase the security and well-being of the Pakistani people—largely through aid programs for public health and education. However, we face a serious threat to American national security in the FATA. If the Pakistani government is unwilling or unable, the United States must take limited actions to disrupt and defeat al Qaeda and Taliban forces seeking protection there.

If there is a successful attack against the United States, and we discover that it originated in the FATA, we might be forced to invade a mountainous, treacherous region, which could be enormously difficult and undermine the Pakistani government. While the best option is to have Pakistan police its own territory, if they cannot, targeted military strikes by the United States could prevent a much larger crisis.

We should not withhold military aid from an important ally in the war on terror.

While Pakistan was initially a strong ally in the war in Afghanistan, they have often played both sides of the conflict. Members of the Pakistani Intelligence agency, the ISI, have maintained close links to groups connected to al Qaeda. In July, the Deputy Director of the CIA traveled to Pakistan to express the U.S. belief that members of the ISI were involved in a suicide bombing of the Indian embassy in Afghanistan.¹⁸ In 2006, then-President Musharraf cut a public deal with the Taliban, giving them total liberty in the mountainous border regions between Pakistan and Afghanistan.¹⁹ The newly elected leaders of Pakistan have also signed a ceasefire with Taliban forces, allowing them time to rebuild their strength.²⁰ It makes no sense to continue to help build Pakistan's military for a war with our ally India when we need them to step up and deal with the threats emerging from their own country.

Eliminating opium cultivation and spraying herbicides to kill the plants will push poor farmers into the hands of the Taliban.

While poor farmers in Afghanistan were initially responsible for much of the cultivation of opium, that is largely no longer the case. The UN has said that "opium cultivation in Afghanistan is no longer associated with poverty—quite the opposite." In fact, in northern Afghanistan, which is the poorest part of the country, crop exchange programs have been very successful and farmers have moved away from opium and towards traditional crops.²¹ Even Afghanistan's former minister for counternarcotics, Habibullah Qaderi, admitted that "Poverty is not the main reason people are growing poppy."²²

As to aerial eradication, glyphosate is a common weed-killer used in the U.S. and Europe; it is the main ingredient in Round-Up, which is used in home gardens. It is relatively harmless to human beings, though it can cause allergic reactions.²³

Endnotes

¹ Afghanistan Opium Survey 2007, *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, Aug. 2007.

² Colum Lynch, "Afghan Opium Production Falls, U.N. Reports," *Washington Post*, Aug. 26, 2007.

³ "Disarmament Stalls in Northern Afghanistan," *Associated Press*, Feb. 27, 2007.

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⁵ Hope Yen, "CIA Director calls Afghan-Pakistan border region 'clear and present danger'," *Associated Press*, Mar. 30, 2008, <http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/03/30/cia.director.ap/>

⁶ Center for American Progress, "Our Pakistan Problem: Turmoil Requires a Shift in U.S. Policy", January 11, 2008, by Brian Katulis and Caroline Wadhams, available at http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2008/01/pakistan_problem.html

⁷ Bruce Hoffman and Seth G. Jones, "Cell Phones in the Hindu Kush," *The National Interest*, June 24, 2008

⁸ U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Combating Terrorism: U.S. Lacks Comprehensive Plan to Destroy Terrorist Threat and Close Safe Haven in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas", GAO-08-622, April 17, 2008, available at: <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d08622.pdf>, page 9-10

⁹ Mark Mazzetti and David Rohde, "Amid U.S. Policy Disputes, Qaeda Grows in Pakistan," *New York Times*, June 30, 2008.

¹⁰ Stewart Powell, "U.S. May Conduct Raids into Pakistan," *Houston Chronicle*, July 8, 2008.

¹¹ U.S. and Coalition Casualties, CNN.com available at <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2003/iraq/forces/casualties/2008.08.html>

¹² Army Staff Sgt. Michael Carden, "U.S., Army Forces Focus on Pakistani Border," *American Forces Press Service*, July 10, 2008.

¹³ Colum Lynch, "Afghan Opium Production Falls, U.N. Reports," *Washington Post*, Aug. 26, 2007.

¹⁴ Xenia Dormandy, "The Path Through Pakistan to a Shorter War on Terror," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 30, 2008.

¹⁵ Eric Schmitt, "Plan Would Use Antiterror Aid in Pakistan on Attack Jets," *New York Times*, July 24, 2008.

¹⁶ Eric Schmitt, "Plan Would Use Antiterror Aid in Pakistan on Attack Jets," *New York Times*, July 24, 2008.

¹⁷ "Obama Warns Pakistan on al Qaeda," *BBC News*, Aug. 1, 2007.

¹⁸ Mark Mazzetti and Eric Schmitt, "C.I.A. Outlines Pakistan Links with Militants," *New York Times*, July 30, 2008.

¹⁹ Tarique Niazi, "Pakistan's Peace Deal with Taliban Militants," *The Jamestown Foundation, Terrorism Monitor, Volume 4, Issue 19*, Oct. 5, 2006.

²⁰ "Pakistan and pro-Taliban Militants Reach Cease-Fire Agreement," *Associated Press*, May 9, 2008.

²¹ Afghanistan Opium Survey 2007, *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, Aug. 2007.

²² Thomas Schweich, "Is Afghanistan a Narco-State?" *New York Times*, July 27, 2008.

²³ EPA factsheet, <http://www.epa.gov/oppsrrd1/REDS/factsheets/0178fact.pdf>