

CRITICAL TO THE SUCCESS

By Michael Ventura

January 14, 2010

Pakistan, eh? Pakistan.

At West Point last Dec. 1 the president said: "I am convinced that our security is at stake in Afghanistan and Pakistan. ... In the past, there have been those in Pakistan who've argued that the struggle against extremism is not their fight, and that Pakistan is better off doing little or seeking accommodation with those who use violence. But in recent years... it has become clear that it is the Pakistani people who are the most endangered by extremism. Public opinion has turned."

Six days later *The New York Times* reported that Pakistani "public opinion runs strongly against the United States" (Dec. 6, 2009, p.WK1). Even before the speech it was well known that "[m]any Pakistanis blame the United States for the country's rising instability. ... A surge of anti-American sentiment [is evident] even among the elite... 'There is a general perception in the educated class that Pakistan is paying a very heavy price for fighting alongside the United States,'" said one "prominent" Pakistani (*The New York Times*, Oct. 27, 2009, p.6). Public opinion sure is turning, but not in the direction indicated by our president.

"The past" he referred to looks awfully like the present. "The head of Pakistan's chief spy agency... met with senior officials at the Central Intelligence Agency... in Washington, where he argued against sending more troops to Afghanistan" (*The New York Times*, Oct. 6, 2009, p.1). In fact, according to *The Economist* (Nov. 28, 2009, p.27), "Pakistani generals and diplomats argue... [that] America must seek a high-level political settlement with its Taliban enemies. ...[S]ome steps have already been taken. 'We've already been talking to the Taliban,'" said a "senior Pakistani official." The White House knows that Pakistanis high and low oppose its Afghan policy and seek to subvert it. Nevertheless, at West Point, the president said what he said.

He also said, "[W]e are committed to a partnership with Pakistan that is built on a foundation of mutual interest, mutual respect, and mutual trust," while Pakistan's president countered in a *New York Times* op-ed: "In both countries there is deep suspicion toward the other" (Dec. 10, 2009, p.43).

Then things got crazy. Crazier.

A page 1 *New York Times* headline, Dec. 17, 2009: "U.S. Diplomats Face Backlash In Islamabad." "Parts of the Pakistani military and intelligence services are mounting what American officials... describe as a campaign to harass American diplomats... The problems effected military attachés [and] C.I.A. officers... American helicopters used by Pakistan to fight militants can no longer be serviced because visas for 14 American mechanics have not been approved." Visa extensions have been refused for "at least 125 American diplomats." "Pakistani officials acknowledged the situation but said the menacing atmosphere resulted from American arrogance and provocations." What those officials "acknowledged" is that Pakistan does not want to play and does not have to if it does not want to.

They even refused to renew the visa of the American Embassy's one remaining accountant, so goes the report. This was the person empowered to pay them \$1 billion in "reimbursements." When they're turning down money, you know they're serious.

"Most diplomats and aid workers no longer venture out [on the streets of Islamabad] freely" (*The New York Times*, Jan. 1, p.6). Not what you want to hear if our president is correct and "our security is at stake" there.

He said at West Point that one of the "three core elements of our strategy" is "an effective partnership with Pakistan," but clearly that core element does not exist. Nor did the White House have any reason to suppose it exists, existed, or could exist – at least, not on terms this White House prefers.

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Do you think it's the water? Something in the pipes? Present and recent occupants of the west wing seem to contract serious reality deficiencies after drinking and showering in the stuff.

For instance, last November a White House national security adviser brought two messages to Islamabad. The first was "that the new American strategy would work only if Pakistan broadened its fight" (*The New York Times*, Nov. 16, 2009, p.1). (Only if!) The second message was a personal letter from our president to their president in which our president "expected" their president "to rally the nation's political and national security institutions in a united campaign against extremists."

But, according to *The Economist*, Pakistan's president "is one of the country's most discredited politicians" (Nov. 28, 2009, p.27). He is "fighting for his political life," agrees *The New York Times* (Dec. 16, 2009, p.8). As is widely known, this guy served 11 years in jail on charges of corruption and murder. Now he is barred from leaving his country by Pakistan's Supreme Court in order to face civil charges that could strip him of his presidency (*The New York Times*, Dec. 19, p.8). His interior and defense ministers are in even hotter water. In fact, the Court's ruling sent "senior government ministers [scurrying]... for bail before they were arrested" (*The Economist*, Jan. 2, p.33). As if that wasn't enough for a Marx Brothers script, "the government's lawyer" -- so goes this report -- "made the astonishing claim that [Pakistan] army headquarters and the CIA were conspiring against (the Pakistani president's) government."

Yet our president expects and exhorts their president to rally his people.

The Pakistani army has been fighting Taliban and Taliban-like forces in Pakistan, it is true, but the "army's impressive recent campaigns have been directed at terrorists active in Pakistan, not those who cross the border to attack... in Afghanistan" (*The Economist*, Dec. 5, 2009, p.14). They're not fighting the guys we want them to fight.

As for Pakistan "on the ground," these stats are from *The Economist*, Nov. 28, 2009, p.27: Only one third of Pakistanis think democracy is best for their country – "the same proportion as [advocate fundamentalist] *sharia* law." Sixty percent say the army is the most trusted Pakistan institution. Half trust religious authorities. (Only half.) Just 10% back the government. "Only a fifth of the [poll's] respondents have a full-time job. A quarter of them are illiterate." Half of Pakistan's 170 million people are under 20, and "40% of Pakistani children are out of school." In 2009 Pakistan's currency inflated at a rate of 20% (*The New York Times*, Jan. 3, p.WK9). When, at West Point, our president said that "America is... providing substantial resources to support Pakistan's

democracy,” he neglected to mention that two-thirds of Pakistanis don’t much want democracy.

What are Pakistanis to think when this White House warns “that if [Pakistan] does not act more aggressively the United States will use considerably more force on the Pakistani side of the border to shut down Taliban forces” (*The New York Times*, Dec. 8, 2009, p.1)? Over a year ago, the chief of Pakistan’s army “denounced” such attacks and “vowed to defend Pakistan’s territory ‘at all cost’” (*The Economist*, Sept. 20, 2008, p.55). Pakistan has nukes. When an army with nukes says “at all cost,” somebody should listen.

At West Point our president said, “[T]here is no doubt that the United States and Pakistan share a common enemy,” though he knew most Pakistanis doubt that a lot. He spoke as though no fact I’ve cited applies. And he did so after three months of deliberation during which Pakistanis told him, in no uncertain terms, that they were not on board.

American commanders “consider eliminating [Taliban and al Qaeda] sanctuaries in [Pakistan] to be critical to the success” of the president’s strategy (*The New York Times*, Jan. 2, p.1). If that’s true, then, considering the facts, what are you thinking, Mr. President? What, really, are you thinking?

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