

US and Pakistan restart talks on prosecuting AfPak War

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28 April 2012

Negotiations between Washington and Islamabad on Pakistan's role in the Afghan War and the perpetuation of the US-Pakistani strategic alliance have begun following the Pakistan Parliament's passage earlier this month of a resolution titled "Guidelines for revised terms of engagement with US/NATO/ISAF and general foreign policy."

On Wednesday, US Special Envoy Marc Grossman arrived in Pakistan to lead two days of high-level talks between senior US and Pakistani officials on a gamut of issues. These included the US's plans to intensify military operations in Afghanistan, while simultaneously seeking "peace talks" with the Taliban, and reopening the Pakistani land supply route to the US-NATO forces occupying Afghanistan.

Grossman had been scheduled to visit Pakistan months ago. But Islamabad had refused to accept his visit pending the completion of the parliamentary review, which was launched in response to a NATO air strike on two Pakistani military posts that killed two dozen Pakistani soldiers.

The parliamentary resolution has had a double purpose: to provide the government with political cover in defying popular sentiment and resuming full and open cooperation with the US in the neocolonial AfPak War; to pressure Washington to be more accommodating to the geopolitical and economic interests of the Pakistani elite.

The resolution demanded that the US give an official apology for the air strike and end its illegal drone missile attacks.

On neither of these issues was Grossman prepared to give Pakistani authorities any satisfaction. US President Barack Obama is reportedly reluctant to give a formal apology, to which the Pentagon is said to be opposed, during an election year.

On the question of the drone strikes, the US reaffirmed its intention to violate Pakistani sovereignty whenever it deems it in the "national interest" almost as soon as the resolution was passed. And Grossman delivered that message in person this week, prompting Pakistani Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar to tell Reuters, "I maintain the position [on

the drone strikes] that we'd told them categorically before. But they did not listen. I hope their listening will improve."

It appears that the US is banking on placating Pakistani authorities by offering economic and other inducements. Accompanying Grossman were representatives of several US departments, including Defence, State, and Treasury.

The long-delayed Pakistan Parliament's Afghan War and foreign policy resolution received unanimous support, including from opposition parties that for a time boycotted the review.

The fraudulent and hypocritical character of the resolution cannot be overstated. While the resolution calls for an end to US drone strikes on Pakistani territory, it proposes no mechanism to enforce such a ban.

The reality is the military and government have always been complicit in the drone attacks, even allowing the CIA to launch its drones strikes from a Pakistani military base. While publicly criticizing the strikes, especially those that have been shown to have caused widespread civilian casualties, behind the scenes Pakistani authorities have facilitated and even requested them.

The phony nature of the resolution was also demonstrated by Islamabad's stance on the issue of reopening the supply routes to NATO forces in Afghanistan. Since January, Pakistani authorities have repeatedly made clear that they plan to reopen the supply routes, but wanted parliament's approval to provide the decision with some semblance of popular legitimacy. In a cynical attempt to appear defiant, parliament imposed the condition that NATO materials passing through Pakistan cannot include weapons or ammunition, even though the NATO convoys have only been transporting non-lethal supplies.

The resolution did not explicitly say when the US can resume ferrying supplies to Afghanistan via land. (Pakistani air space has been open to US and NATO supply planes throughout the five-month diplomatic wrangle arising from the November air strike.) Instead, it leaves the issue up to President Asif Ali Zardari and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP)-led government. It is widely expected that the supply

routes will be opened soon, now that negotiations have officially resumed, although a possible obstacle could be Islamabad's request for sharply increased transit fees.

Over the past 16 months, the US's bullying and flagrant violations of Pakistani sovereignty have been a cause of increasing concern for the Pakistani elite.

Faced with mounting opposition to the war among the American working class, the US has been determined to make Pakistan accept more of the burden of fighting the AfPak War, regardless of its destabilizing impact on its Islamabad clients and the ruinous impact on the Pakistani people.

In addition to its concerns over the destabilizing impact of the war, the Pakistani elite has grown increasingly frustrated by Washington's aggressive courting of its archrival India as a major strategic partner. The US has encouraged New Delhi to play a key role in propping up the stooge regime of Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan, much to the dismay of the Pakistani bourgeoisie, which views its influence in Afghanistan as crucial to its strategy against India. The section of the resolution dealing with Islamabad's foreign policy specifically mentions the US-Indo nuclear accord, which further tilted the balance of power in the region in favor of India. "The US-Indo civil nuclear agreement has significantly altered the strategic balance in the region, therefore, Pakistan should seek from the US and others a similar treatment/facility," states the resolution.

The resolution also calls for deepening Islamabad's strategic partnership with China, strengthening Pakistan's relationship with Russia and the European Union, and pursuing a gas pipeline project with Iran. Washington has threatened to take economic reprisals against Pakistan if it proceeds with the gas pipeline project, which it opposes because it undermines its campaign to bully and destabilize Tehran through economic sanctions.

Following the passage of the resolution, Pakistani Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani claimed that it has "brought real and substantive oversight and democratic accountability to our foreign and security policy." The fact that such a statement had to be made at all demonstrates the neo-colonial character of the US-Pakistan relationship and the venal Pakistani elite's subservience to US imperialism. Resentments over US bullying and Washington's courting of India notwithstanding, the reactionary alliance with Washington remains central to the geopolitical and class strategy of the Pakistani bourgeoisie.

With the massive popular opposition to the war finding no expression on the ostensible "left" of Pakistani politics, Islamic fundamentalists and other right-wing forces are attempting to hijack and manipulate the opposition to the war and divert it along reactionary lines.

Along with the opposition Pakistan Muslim League (N), the Islamist Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F), led by Maulana Fazlur Rehman, initially boycotted the parliamentary review. Knowing full well that the Pakistani masses had no faith in the review, Fazlur Rehman and PML (N) leader Nawaz Sharif attempted to present themselves as opponents of US aggression and domination ahead of national elections which are to be held during the next year. Their respective boycotts delayed the review's completion for several weeks, but were clearly no more than posturing..

The fundamentalist Fazlur Rehman had vowed to lead a protest movement if Pakistan reopened supply routes to Afghanistan and threatened the response would be "worse than expected." However, after meeting with US Ambassador to Pakistan, Cameron Munter, he brought an end to the JUI-F's boycott of the review and backed the resolution. "The story of the past has gone and we are beginning a new journey," declared Fazlur Rehman at the time.

Former cricketer Imran Khan's conservative-nationalist Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) condemned the unanimous passage of the resolution. However, Imran Khan's criticisms are limited—he has repeatedly said he wants warm relations with Washington and Wall Street—and there is no indication the PTI plans to mobilize opposition to the resumption of full and open cooperation with the US in the Afghan war. What Khan seeks above all is to prevent the emergence of a working class-led movement against the war, the only kind of movement that can bring an end to the war, to the reactionary US-Pakistani alliance, and to imperialist oppression.



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