

COMMENT: Jinnah Institute and USIP's research —Dr Mohammad Taqi

Amazing that while the Pakistani security establishment and its mouthpieces make a lot of fuss about the Indian consulate in Kandahar helping the Baloch resistance movement, the 'elite' chose to completely disregard the Baloch stance

"The information you get from think tanks is never going to be unbiased. But we can limit the harm by paying more attention to it" — Benjamin H Friedman in 'You gotta serve somebody' (January 4, 2011, The National Interest).

The Islamabad-based Jinnah Institute (JI) and the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Washington, DC, jointly published a report titled 'Pakistan, the United States and the End Game in Afghanistan: Perceptions of Pakistan's Foreign Policy Elite', in the last week of August. The president of the JI Ms Sherry Rehman and USIP's South Asia advisor Moeed Yusuf were the project directors of this paper, which was co-authored by the latter along with Huma Yusuf and Salman Zaidi.

In her column, 'Liberal face of religious bigotry' (Daily Times, September 3, 2011), my co-columnist and the author of the recently published book *Taliban and Anti-Taliban*, Farhat Taj has already played the built-in selection and projection biases in the said study. Her piece reminds one of the above-quoted article by Benjamin Friedman of the Cato Institute and specifically the lyrics of Bob Dylan's song he had alluded to:

"You may be an ambassador to England or France,

You may like to gamble, you might like to dance,

You may be the heavyweight champion of the world,

You may be a socialite with a long string of pearls,

But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed,

You're gonna have to serve somebody,

Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord,

But you're gonna have to serve somebody."

Given the public funding received by both the JI and USIP and their claim to an independent status, they ought to serve the goals of the civilian governments in Pakistan and the US. USIP's budget exceeding \$ 40 million is "funded entirely by Congress and transfers from government agencies". JI, on the other hand, had received a grant of Rs 50 million from the Pakistani government, announced on September 23, 2010 by Prime Minister Gilani.

The stated objective of the major political parties ruling at the federal and provincial levels in Pakistan is a peaceful coexistence with the country's eastern and western neighbours and a policy of non-interference in their affairs. Mian Nawaz Sharif had recently made a landmark speech giving a roadmap for peace with India and Afghanistan, while President Asif Zardari has spoken of a Eurasian (trade) corridor during his recent China and Central Asia visit. So who exactly are the JI and USIP serving through this report — is it the devil or is it the Lord?

The parade of the 53 characters — barring a few exceptions — whose input forms the basis of the JI-USIP's outdated and discredited formulations, leaves little doubt about whom the report intends to serve. The report calls this assortment of media persons, retired civil and military bureaucrats and a handful of political leaders the 'foreign policy elite' of Pakistan. But the real 'elite' within this group is essentially a clique of Cold War vestiges who were at the helm in the civil and military bureaucracy when Pakistan continued to bulldoze Afghanistan through its jihadist proxies in pursuit of so-called strategic depth.

I had noted in these pages last month about these foreign policy 'heavyweights':

"What is really fascinating is the coterie of retired brigadiers and ambassadors...writing about the Pak-US relationship, especially in the context of Afghanistan. Their writings echo the Pakistani security establishment's thought process and mysteriously precede the rolling out of the latter's plans..." ("Pakistan's foreign policy: grandeur of delusions — I", Daily Times, August 4, 2011).

Now consider the executive summary of the JI-USIP report, which states: "In terms of the end game, Pakistani policy elite see their state as having defined two overriding objectives:

-The 'settlement' in Afghanistan should not lead to a negative spillover such that it contributes to further instability in Pakistan or causes resentment among Pakistani Pashtuns; and

-The government in Kabul should not be antagonistic to Pakistan and should not allow its territory to be used against Pakistani state interests."

The fact of the matter is that, Younis al Mauritani-type arrests notwithstanding, Pakistan's military brass has been thoroughly discredited after the Osama bin Laden fiasco and lacks any 'political capital' to leverage the US to allow it a significant role in the future dispensation in Afghanistan. According to some US officials, even "if (General) Kayani kneeled", they would think twice before granting him anything. The elected government in Pakistan has its own flaws but it literally remains the last shred holding the US-Pakistan ties together. However, while representing Pakistan robustly in civilian and military matters, its current diplomatic corps in the western capitals is simply not the one to do the junta's bidding for its illegitimate and malicious designs on Afghanistan.

It is in this context that the JI has been apparently deployed to trot out the 'elite' to pressure the civilian government in Pakistan as well as to attempt gaining some traction with the US to get a seat at the negotiations table deciding the future of Kabul. The imaginary Pashtun 'resentment' is being used as a sandbag to project what merely is Rawalpindi's wish list vis-à-vis Afghanistan.

But despite invoking the Pashtun sentiment, the Pashtuns of FATA and Balochistan have been completely ignored by the JI-USIP. Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party, which has representation in the Senate, had no say in this report. The Awami National Party (ANP), which was represented by dear friend Senator Afrasiab Khattak, is not a monolith. Afzal Khan Lala of Swat and Latif Afridi are two stalwarts of the ANP who have disagreed with their party's leadership on record. Moreover, the report does not specifically mention the views expressed by Afrasiab Khattak or other likely dissenters.

And as is always the case with pro-establishment groups, this report has systematically excluded the Baloch perspective altogether. No Baloch parliamentarians, leaders, writers could make it to the chosen 53! Amazing that while the Pakistani security establishment and its mouthpieces make a lot of fuss about the Indian consulate in Kandahar helping the Baloch resistance movement, the 'elite' chose to completely disregard the Baloch stance.

The so-called research that this report is will become evident to its readers but the US and Pakistani lawmakers must question whether they should continue financing the Pakistani security establishment's viewpoint with the taxpayers' dime. The JI's advisory board, the potential dissenters who affixed their names on this report and the rest of us can limit the harm by paying more attention to determining whose interest this report really serves.

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[Home](#) | [Editorial](#)