

Pakistan seeks U.S. help to fight terrorism along Afghan border

By Sattar Khan
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TARIQ OUTPOST, Pakistan — By day, Pakistani troops stake out a hilltop shelter built of mud and stone, peering through binoculars at the narrow gulches and expanse of plain below.

At night, they climb into four-wheel-drive pickup trucks and patrol the unpaved tracks along the Afghan border — round-the-clock vigilance aimed at catching Taliban and al-Qaida militants.

Stung by accusations by the Afghan government that militants find a safe haven in this desolate region, the Pakistani military gave journalists a rare look Friday and Saturday at their border operations. Diplomats and officials from 17 countries were given a separate tour farther north.

The goal: To prove that Pakistan is using all available resources, including some help from the United States, to tighten this frustratingly porous border and to keep rebels from using its soil as a staging ground for attacks against Afghan President Hamid Karzai's fledgling government.

Pakistani officers say their extra effort is paying off.

In recent months, 62 foreign nationals have been arrested illegally crossing the border in the southwestern sector, said Maj. Gen. Sadaqat Ali Shah, the head of the Frontier Constabulary paramilitary troops in the province of Baluchistan.

"They were not Afghans. I cannot say who they were," said Shah. The detained men were

handed over to Pakistani intelligence agencies.

Maj. Gen. Shaukat Sultan, chief spokesman for the Pakistan army, added that tightened controls have stopped almost all free movement over parts of the border.

"We will not allow Pakistani soil to be used for terrorism in any neighboring country," he said.

Yet he also said the army needed more help from the Americans, who have provided five helicopters, vehicles and other equipment to bolster Pakistan's border crackdown.

"Whatever we got from the United States is just peanuts," Sultan said.

"We will not allow Pakistani soil to be used for terrorism in any neighboring country."

— Maj. Gen. Shaukat Sultan
spokesman for Pakistan army

Marked mostly by intermittent white-painted stones, the Pakistan-Afghan border runs 2,050 miles from the Himalayas in Pakistan's northern territories to the desert of Baluchistan.

Pakistani troops have not patrolled this border since their country gained independence from Britain in 1947. The area is largely undeveloped, and follows tribal law and enforced by tribal elders. Here, the federal government has little sway.

While Pakistan switched from supporting Afghanistan's Taliban regime to aiding the U.S. war on terrorism after Sept. 11, attacks, many Pakistani tribesmen still sympathize with the Islamic militants.

Though the surroundings look empty, there is a surprising amount of legal traffic across the border.

Maj. Mohammed Ashraf, a senior government official in the provincial capital of Quetta, said 207 checkpoints have been set up along the border, and a 25-mile embankment was being built in the area of Chaman, a border town about 85 miles northwest of Quetta.

Already, a towering gate stands in the middle of a desolate plane in Chaman, the main crossing point from southern Afghanistan. Up to 6,000 people cross the so-called Friendship Gate every day, Shah said.

Meanwhile, in the northern sector, commanders told the diplomats that 10 infantry battalions and three engineering battalions and a Special Services Group were now deployed, according to the Associated Press of Pakistan, a local news agency.

Three weeks ago, the army conducted a major operation in the area after an intelligence tip that al-Qaida fighters were hiding there. The army reported eight suspects killed and 18 captured in one day.

Corps Commander Lt. Gen. Ali Muhammad Jan Aurakzai was quoted as saying a total of 230 suspects have been rounded up and 10 killed in various operations in his sector.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Twin earthquakes hit northwestern China, nine dead

BEIJING (AP) — The central government sent cold-weather tents, seismological teams and cash Sunday to an earthquake-prone patch of remote northwestern China where powerful twin tremors, minutes apart, killed nine people and leveled houses in their wake.

The first quake in rural Gansu province, which hit at 8:41 p.m. Saturday and measured magnitude 6.1, sent people scurry-

ing into freezing temperatures. As some ventured back inside, the second tremor — almost as powerful at magnitude 5.8 — hit seven minutes later.

Another six people were seriously hurt and 37 more suffered minor injuries, the official Xinhua News Agency reported from Lanzhou, the provincial capital. More than 200 aftershocks were reported — several as strong as magnitude 4.0, the government said.

The hardest-hit areas were Minle, Sunan and Shandan counties near the city of Zhangye, roughly 850 miles

west of the capital, Beijing. Authorities said 143,000 people were affected, and government pictures from the scene showed stone houses collapsed into piles of rubble, residents in shelters and pigs wandering amid wreckage.

The three counties are located in an earthquake-prone region called the Qilian seismic zone, where a mountain range of the same name bumps up against flatlands. Government seismologists say a rupture in the range may be making the area more seismically active.

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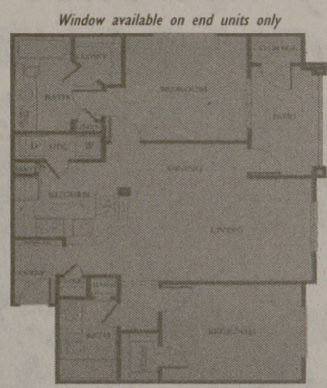
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