

Stabilizing Pakistan's West

The news from Pakistan's FATA and Swat areas is good and bad. The good part is the successful Army operation in Swat that has pushed out the insurgents and brought normalcy to a violence wracked area. Also good is the success that the Law Enforcing Agencies (LEAs) have had in the urban areas in the Benazir investigation and in breaking up networks planning suicide and other attacks?

The bad part is the linkage now established between the 'Taliban Warlords' in FATA and individuals and organizations in our urban areas. Also bad is the discernible change in the militant pattern of activity through the recent raid on forts and other targets. We may see more of this in FATA and Swat. Successful, sporadic and dispersed actions suit the militant strategy of keeping their bases secure by moving the scene of activity away from them. The attacks in the urban areas act as leverage for the same purpose and in addition destabilize the country.

What do the militants want? They want the Army to cease operations in FATA and leave the area. In return they will stop all, insurgent activity against Pakistan and concentrate on their enemies in Afghanistan. If Pakistan were to agree to this then from being an ally on terror it would become a supporter of terror with disastrous consequences. Pakistan must also consider whether a destabilized Afghanistan is in its interest or will it lead to far bigger problems. Already there are indications that there is covert external meddling in the Baluchistan situation. Pakistan would be placing itself at the mercy of non state actors who can be manipulated to suit other and greater agendas.

The answer lies in a strategy that keeps military pressure to contain, restrict and eliminate militancy. In tandem with this there must be a blitz of economic, healthcare and education activity in FATA and Swat areas. These have to be urgently executed high impact projects under special arrangements. A bottom to top revamping of the administration must take place to bring expertise into the area and eliminate the deadwood that is thriving on corruption. If the LEAs in urban areas can deliver results when they are pushed then what stops them from being kept under

constant pressure to deliver results? This must be a part of the overall strategy and if there are elements that are dragging their feet then they should be removed. We must also ask our Afghan brothers why they are incapable of interdicting movement from and to FATA and within Afghanistan. Everyone has to produce results if there is to be success and one weak or unwilling or incapable link can cause strategic failure--- something that must not be allowed to happen.