

Policy Analysis Paper

UNDERSTANDING PAKISTAN'S NEW COUNTER-TERROR STRATEGY

SHEHZAD H. QAZI

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INTRODUCTION:

Shortly after their election as the two largest parties in the National Assembly, heads of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), announced that changes would be made in the counter-insurgency strategy Pakistan was executing in the Federally Administered Tribal Agencies (FATA) along the Pak-Afghan border. Nawaz Sharif (PML-N) asked for a redefinition of the "War on Terror". Asif Zardari (PPP) said that Musharraf's reliance on hard-power and military strategies had produced failure in the last eight years, and it was now time to engage in dialogue and negotiations with the militants. Finally, Premier Raza Gilani said emphasis would now be placed on economic and infrastructural development.

This new policy triggered opposition in the U.S. A number of articles appeared in the New York Times and USA-Today criticizing this new approach. An editorial in the NYT argued that this policy was a result of Pakistanis seeing the war against terror as an American war and since Pakistan did not see its own interests in defeating terrorism, Washington would have to convince Pakistan of it. The Bush administration was skeptical of the new policy as well. During March the Bush administration constantly reminded Pakistan of Musharraf's failed attempts to have peace deals with Al-Qaeda in 2006. During April the level of support was increased: Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher in two separate interviews said that the U.S supported dialogue with reconcilable elements of the tribal areas. David Miliband, the U.K. Foreign Minister, and Afghan President Hamid Karzai also voiced support for Pakistan's new policy. However, the month of May is now witnessing a complete reversal of U.S. policy. On May 19 the Pentagon press Secretary Geoff Morrell said that he wanted to be sure that the deal between Islamabad and the militants was "worth more than the paper it's written on." Finally on May 19 John Negroponte, the Deputy Secretary of State, lodged the U.S.'s opposition to the peace deals in a written testimony to the U.S. Senate's Foreign Relations Committee. Kabul, towing the same line as the U.S., has also protested against "the new policy of 'appeasement'".

While the politics continues, the fact is that Pakistan has not only created but is implementing its new counter-terror policies. Therefore, at this point it would be more appropriate to turn our attention to understanding this new strategy. In order to understand Pakistan's new counter-terror strategy one must understand the four basic points explained below.

COUNTER-TERROR STRATEGY:

First, why is there a new strategy? The answer: any popularly elected government has greater accountability than a military dictatorship. The Democratic Peace thesis says that one of the reasons democracies are peaceful is because a democratically elected government needs the consent of its masses before going to war. Since public opinion tends to vote against conflict, peace results. This thesis holds for the current Pakistani government as well. The current war being fought against militants in Pakistan's northern border is grossly unpopular at home—seen as a civil war in which the Pakistan army is killing fellow Pakistanis on the command of a foreign country. Over the last seven years this war has contributed considerably to Musharraf's unpopularity. The election of the PPP and PML-N symbolized the rejection of Musharraf's dictatorship and his policies, including his counter-terror policy in FATA. Thus, it should not be surprising that the new government would pursue a strategy which would be less like Musharraf's and more in line with their constituents' demands. The new government, unlike the previous one, needs the people's consent before engaging in war.

Second, truces and peace deals are not uncommon. History is laden with examples of “forces of order”, such as governments or occupation forces trying to control a region, entering into peace deals with insurgents. In the early 1980s when Ahmad Shah Massoud, an incredible guerilla fighter and diplomat in his own right, was putting the Soviet forces through trying times in Afghanistan’s Panjshir Valley, there were periods when Soviet commanders and Massoud’s militia entered into truces. Israeli forces and Palestine’s Hamas have also entered into “ceasefires” several times in order to promote negotiations. When the British were fighting the Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland it too had cease-fires and truces with the Irish insurgents. As explained below, peace deals and truces have been employed numerous times by counterinsurgents because they serve as landmarks in the larger framework of ceasing hostilities and establishing peace.

Third, the track record of occupation forces winning guerilla wars is pretty weak and political approaches are a central part of counterinsurgencies. The failure of the French against Algeria’s National Liberation Front in the early 1950s, the Americans’ against the Viet-Cong in the 1960s, and the Soviet’s against Afghani “mujahidin” in the 1980s are but a few contemporary examples of powerful occupiers being defeated by local guerilla movements. A wealth of literature explains how knowledge of the domestic geography, ability to blend within the local population, support and sustenance from that population, and the demoralization of the occupying forces all contribute to small and relatively weakly trained groups of insurgents inflicting heavy losses on militaries with advanced trainings and weapons technology.

Since conflict ultimately results in failure, it is only natural that the warring factions (in this case Pakistan) would opt to enter into negotiations. After all, these militants are not “religious crazies”, but rational and intelligent strategists with calculated political demands. These actors use violence in the same manner states do: when no other option will produce the desired results. As Mahmud al-Zahar, a Hamas leader, said in a speech in October 1995, militants see “Violence as a means, not a goal”. It is for this reason that even the U.S Marines Counter-insurgency manual says that “tactical success guarantees nothing”, placing immense emphasis on using political means for resolving insurgencies. It goes to explain that military force is just one element of counterinsurgency strategies and that the political aspect plays the largest role in ending an insurgency.

Fourth, long term counter-terror strategy includes economic and infrastructural development and increased use of policing methods. The Pakistani Premier, Raza Gilani, told John Negroponte and Richard Boucher during their March visit that Pakistan would now expand its counter-terror strategy to include economic development in the regions where militancy and extremism existed. Lack of employment and environmental stresses such as lack of access to freshwater and agricultural degradation all contribute to declining living standards and increased frustration, thus providing fertile ground for flourishing of extremist ideology and recruitment of militants. If the government begins to invest in economic and infrastructural development, it will bring stability to the region and restore normalcy in the life of the people. By offering basic services of life, providing employment and developing local institutions, the government can then offer an alternative to the current hegemony exercised by the militants in these lawless areas.

As mentioned, the PPP co-chairman announced that the new strategy would include increased use of the police force. This aspect of the counter-terror strategy is reminiscent of the British example from its days of fighting against the IRA. As Martin Van Creveld explains in his book, *The Changing Face of War*, one of the policy measures which contributed to the success of the British forces was

not declaring war on the IRA, using the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), a locally recruited police force, to manage the day-to-day work of maintaining and enforcing order, and treating the insurgency like a criminal problem. There are several benefits of using local police forces: they have greater familiarity with the terrain compared to outsiders; they will be sharper at identifying the different factions waging the insurgency, as well as recognizing insurgents from the general public; they can be more adept at collecting intelligence information about militant hideouts, travel routes and plans.

Furthermore, using police in the past has actually produced positive results. The arrests of two top Al-Qaeda operatives, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and Abu Zubeydah, came through the Pakistani police and not the Pakistan Army. Increased usage of police forces has the potential of reducing the sheer magnitude of violence, while restoring order, checking criminality, and denying sanctuaries to insurgents in these regions.

CONCLUSION:

As mentioned, Washington has displayed symptoms of borderline schizophrenia over Pakistan's new counter-terror policy. However, Pakistan has already begun implementing its new strategy and according to latest reports not asked Washington to stamp its approval on it. The changes made to Pakistan's strategy are concrete and real. The new American administration which takes office next year will inherit a Pakistan with a counterterrorism strategy much different from those of previous years. While State Department and other government officials lodge protests in Congressional testimonies and press briefings, the policy analysts of Washington need to prepare for a broad-based war, one not limited to intense and aggressive military campaigns.

Shehzad H. Qazi is a UROP Research Fellow at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis and can be reached at sqazi@iupui.edu.