

Counterinsurgency (COIN) Strategy and Protracted Insurgency in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)

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Abstract

The Pakistani tribal areas attracted a worldwide attention after 9/11, because these are considered to house remnants of Al Qaeda, its affiliates and are the focus of NATO-ISAF operations. Back in 2001, Al Qaeda and their Taliban supporters could not survive the high-tech war machinery unleashed on them across the width and breadth of the country. It forced militia leaders to flee the Afghan cities and take refuge across the Durand Line in the Pakistani tribal territories.

The arrival of Taliban members and Al Qaeda activists re-activated the available jihadi infrastructures in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) with the support of tribal militants and some tribes – who believed that fighting against the US along with Taliban is a holy *jihad*.

More and more attacks on the American and Afghan forces were planned and launched from the region prompting the US government to pressurize Pakistan to stop the cross border infiltrations and destroy hideouts of Afghan militants and Al Qaeda.

Pakistan Military's actions against the insurgents led to the spread of militancy across the tribal regions. The carrot and stick policy adopted by the security forces failed to break the resolve of

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militants and rather seemed to increase their strength and influence over other areas.

This paper offers analyses of Pakistani counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy failures in the tribal belt against insurgents. The Government of Pakistan seemingly ignored its stated policy of "Three Ds" (dialogue, development and deterrence) and used the military option.

Introduction

Pakistan Military has been engaged in anti-militants offensives in the Tribal Areas for almost eleven years. Since 2004 - when military first entered the tribal territory - scores of operations have been conducted by the security forces against miscreants in almost each of the tribal agency of FATA.

Having 27,200 square kilometers area and consisting of seven tribal agencies and six-frontier regions- FATA got the worldwide attention post 9/11 when the US and fifty other nations moved their troops to the vast stretches of Afghanistan in search of Al-Qaeda and dislodging the Taliban regime in Kabul. The tribal territory has already served as a launching pad for the Afghan resistance against erstwhile Soviet forces and remained largely stable. They survived that turbulent decade of an international war just across the border, which some Afghans and a minority faction in Pakistan still consider unmarked.

The US military operations in Afghanistan forced some Al-Qaeda activists and Taliban members to cross into Pakistani tribal areas in search of safe hideouts. This afforded them the opportunity to rest and plan retaliatory attacks on the US, coalition forces and the Pakistani military that was trying to evict them from its territory.

Since the Soviet-Afghan war, the tribal regions have inherited a huge war infrastructure as a leftover in terms of recruits, weapons, and ideology and training centers. These were allegedly

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developed under the patronage of Pakistani establishment and financed by the CIA and some Arab states, especially Saudi Arabia.

The influx of Taliban members from Afghanistan led to the snowballing of militancy and extremism in vast tribal areas stretches from Waziristan in South to Bajaur Agency in northern parts of FATA.

Pakistan first sent its military to Tirah valley to stop the flow of Taliban and Al-Qaeda from across the Durand Line. However, two years later in 2004 it launched full-scale military offensives against tribal militants in Wana of South Waziristan. Since the launch of Wana anti-militant offensives, Pakistan's security forces have conducted scores of operations against local insurgents and their Al-Qaeda supporters in almost each of the agency.

Currently, active military engagements are going on in the Khyber, Orakzai and South Waziristan Agency against a band of militants gathered under the banner of Tehrik-e- Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

Except in Khyber agency where a local militant-group Lashkar-e-Islami (LI) of Mangal Bagh is giving tough time to the government forces for the last three years or so, all other Pakistani militants groups are operating in entire tribal belt under the banner of TTP - since its inception in December 2007.

Despite these continued military operations, the TTP and other militants groups are still offering a tough resistance to the government forces and are vying for control of areas to enforce their version of *sharia*. In the past militants proved the government wrong each time the government claimed that it has cleared the tribal agencies free of militants.

Even in the relatively softer and easily accessible Mohmand, Bajaur and Kurram agencies are not completely at peace and the militants have managed comebacks that are more forceful. The

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military is usually left with no options except re-doing the whole exercise of fighting the militants at a heavy cost of men and materials.

Today every tribal agency is as unsafe as it was before the military offensives against militants. The problem of militancy in the region is still as serious as during the last four months. About 878 people were killed and 391 injured in the 171 militants-related incidents including military operations, clashes with militants, drone, suicide, bombs and targeted attacks. Among these casualties, there were 625 militants, 479 civilians, 126 military personnel and 39 members of the peace committees.¹

Pakistan Military entered Wana in December 2004 with an intention of cleansing, what they claimed “few hundreds local and foreign militants.” Ironically, today the Pakistani forces are literally bogged down and the COIN operations are spread to the entire 27,200 square kilometers of FATA.

Hundreds of thousands of tribal people have been displaced and many others have been killed. The military itself suffers losing thousands of its men and officers in turn achieving little tangible on the ground.

Before launching operations in FATA, the military has been tasked to ‘clear, hold and transfer’ to civilian administration the territories under the control of militants. Eleven years down the line, military is still on the ‘hold position’ and not a single region has been handed over or transferred to the civilian administration after being declared as successfully cleansed of militancy.

Currently, government forces are engaged against militants in South Waziristan Agency for the last three years. Out of scores of internally displaced families only a handful have returned to their homes while the rest are still living in squalid camp conditions fearing revenge of TTP affiliated militants back in their villages.

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Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) explosions, ambushes, sniper attacks, target killings and kidnappings in the tribal areas is continuing unabated by the militants believing to be hiding in countryside and mountains valleys, while the military in the region is focused on guarding major population centers and main highways.

The entire Bara sub division and Tirah valley of Khyber Agency are unstable regions ruled by the militants despite several cleanup operations and remaining under curfew for more than three years. To facilitate the military in its cleanup operations, tribesmen and women have left Bara and Tirah valley and till date living in squalid IDPs camps or in rented houses.

Bara and Tirah regions aside, the government operations even failed to secure the capital city Peshawar from onslaughts of tribal militants who ambush the security forces, target police stations or checkpoints and kidnap people for ransom.

The sufferings of tribal people are immense both in terms of human and financial losses. Failures of the security forces do not imply that military is not putting its heart and mind in the fight against militancy. The fault seems with the very strategy of dealing with the insurgency solely militarily. The government seemed to have been fighting the insurgents on a single front and has done little on confronting the militancy phenomenon on ideological and political fronts. Thus, the whole strategy is flawed and needs revisiting.

Pakistan needs a strategic rethinking of its prevalent counterinsurgency approach and re-reformulating a holistic but practical strategy for resolving the conflict in FATA according to the emerging security and political environment in the region.

Pakistan must also remain abreast with the environment across the border with Afghanistan. A constant watch over the Kabul regime and US-led foreign nations approach towards Taliban would be valuable as it is taking a new shape, tailoring the

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political and security policy suitable to the post withdrawal period. The Afghan government, with the support of international community, is fast working on orchestrating a peace project with the opponents and has entrusted more power and authority to the High Peace Council for the purpose.

Conversely, in Pakistan, the focus appears to be merely on the military operations. The age-old system of governance in FATA has collapsed and the civilian administration and the tribal *Jirga* system have been weakened to a level of total collapse. In the absence of a responsive civilian administration and forums like tribal *Jirga*, the tribal people's sufferings have increased and are a source of anti-government and anti-state feelings. Militant organisations are the major beneficiary of this dismal situation.²

The tribal regions have been already facing stepmotherly treatment since creation of Pakistan - both in terms of social and political developments. During the last few decades, not a single developmental project worth mentioning has been initiated in the region. There is mass level of unemployment, illiteracy and acute shortage of health and educational facilities coupled with a non-existent legal system. Since decades, the government is satisfied with keeping its writ restricted only to the roads and official buildings.

A holistic strategy, which includes all the strategic, political and social developmental components are accommodated, is needed to deal with the militancy on permanent bases. On top of the government priority list shall be the projects to ameliorate lives of tribal people and bringing them at par with rest of their countrymen so that to wean them away from militants and insurgents.

Emergence of Militants' Networks in Tribal Areas:

During the last more than three decades a number of factors – both indigenous and non-indigenous- have contributed to the proliferation of militant networks and widespread religious

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extremism in the tribal regions. These factors are primarily ranging from the special but controversial status of the tribal territories to the warring nature and weapon culture of tribesmen; promotion of jihad during the long-decade of Soviet-Afghan war under the Pakistani state patronage and emergence of Taliban in Afghanistan after withdrawal of Soviet Union forces as result of ensuing civil war.

It is a fact that for centuries tribesmen in the region grew up carrying arms, but it is only the post 9/11 developments and subsequent attacks of US forces on Afghanistan and dislodging the Taliban regime that the militants tribesmen began to organize themselves around a Taliban-style Islamic ideology. They have started to pursue an agenda similar to that of the Afghan Taliban leading to the killing of approximately two hundred tribal leaders and thousands of civilians to establish them as an alternative force in the region.

Unable to face the wrath of the US, the members of Taliban regime fled the cities and cross to the Pakistani side of the border to recoup. Top leadership of Al Qaeda also managed to escape and found refuge in FATA. The tribes straddling on both sides of the border provided shelter and refuge to the fleeing Taliban and Al Qaeda members bringing them closer to each other.³

The tribal militants who joined the Afghans Taliban in cross border attacks on US-led international forces and Afghan national army were mostly those who fought against Soviet forces along the Afghans and have studied together in the Pakistani or Afghans religious schools.

With the increasing cross border incursions pressure started building on Pakistan from the US and international community to secure the border regions from militants. Following US pressure, Pakistan interfered militarily in the tribal belt thus annoying the tribesmen who were then considering the Taliban and Al- Qaeda members as holy warriors and this was the prevalent narrative after the US attacks on Afghanistan.

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Finding the tribesmen on their side, the tribal militants and their Afghan and Al Qaeda supporters – mostly Arabs and Central Asian nationals- turned their guns on Pakistani forces and challenged the authority of the government and tribal elders.

Prominent Wazir commanders Nek Muhammad Wazir, Noor-ul-Islam, Maulvi Muhammad Sharif, Maulvi Abbas and Abdul Aziz not only commanded Mahsud and Wazir militants against US and Pakistani forces but also harbored foreign fighters and Al-Qaeda activists in South Waziristan Agency. After the death of Nek Muhammad in a missile strikes in 2004, Taliban named Baitullah Mahsud as chief commander of the Waziristan agency. In the rest of the tribal agencies, different groups of militants were busy in launching cross border attacks on international and Afghan forces and continued resisting the Pakistani security forces that resorted to military activities from time to time against the militants' hideouts.

In December 2007, Baitullah succeeded in bringing more than a dozen militants organizations under the umbrella of TTP. According to some estimates, the TTP collectively has around thirty thousand to thirty-five thousand members. Among other objectives, they have announced a defensive *jihad* against Pakistan Army, enforcement of *Sharia*, and a plan to unite against NATO forces in Afghanistan.⁴

TTP has turned out to be the most potent and organized group and emerged as a new face of militants. TTP militants continued targeting security forces and carried others acts of terrorism including suicide bombings, and targeted killings of the civilians and security apparatus alike.⁵

Other Taliban militants operating in the tribal areas are the “Waziri Taliban” of Hafiz Gul Bahadur and Molvi Nazeer; and Shia Sect affiliated Haideri Taliban also known as Mehdi Militia and some other splinter groups of TTP, believed to be about forty, spread over the entire tribal region. Hafiz Gul Bahadur is based in

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Miramshah in North Waziristan agency, while Molvi Nazeer group is operating from Wana in South Waziristan agency. The Mehdi Militia or Haideri Taliban is mainly focused in Kurram agency based at Parachinar and is fighting other Taliban for protections of the Parachinar and other Shia areas.

Others like Lashkar-e-Islam (LI) of Mangal Bagh, Ansar-ul-Islam of Qazi Mehboob-ul-Haq, the Naamdar group and Tariq Afridi group of TTP are currently operating exclusively in the Khyber agency. The LI of Mangal Bagh is also currently in conflict with Tariq Afridi and Abdul Wali groups of TTP. In Mohmand, Bajaur and Malakand division militants groups affiliated with TTP, Sufi Muhammad's Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TSNM) are active against the government forces. In Bajaur where militants have a significant influence and the militants groups like TTP, Tehrik Jaish Islami Pakistan, Karawan Naimatullah group, Dr Ismail Group and Moulana Abdullah group were busy asserting themselves till date.⁶

Several foreign militants groups including the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, East Turkistan Islamic Movement and the Haqqani network are also using tribal regions as a launching pad for their activities in their respective countries. Al Qaeda is believed to have largely repositioned itself to Yemen, Somalia and countries in the Islamic *Maghreb*.⁷

Military operations

Once repositioning themselves in the border regions across the Pak-Afghan border and gaining the support of tribal people due to the popular narratives of fighting for Islam against the US, the militants - both local and foreigners - started infiltrations into Afghanistan, attacking the international forces and Afghan national army, besides killing important religious, political and social leaders and government officials.

As the militant attacks insides Afghanistan on the US and other militaries gained momentum, the Americans and other

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important nations of the world started exerting pressure on Pakistan asking for dismantling the miscreants' hideouts in the tribal regions and stopping them from launching attacks inside Afghanistan.

Pakistan military first launched a full-scale operation against militants in Wana region of the South Waziristan Agency in March 2004 against the tribal militants led by Nek Muhammad – a Waziri tribesman and veteran of Afghan Taliban movement. Militants and military both claimed victories against each other however, the operation ended in an unwritten deal, known as *Shakai* agreement, struck between the militants led by Nek Muhammad and Pakistan government represented by the political administration.⁸

In July 2004, the military resorted to retaliatory action when a number of soldiers were ambushed and mercilessly killed at Sarwakai and launched strong anti-militants offensives in the Mahsud territory of the South Waziristan Agency such as Karwan Manze, Kaniguram, Makeen, Ladha and Spinkai Raghzai. Then an ordinary fighter Baitullah Mahsud started organizing his fellow tribesmen against the government forces and soon became a bigger militant-commander than Nek Muhammad with the support of his tribe in reaction to the government destruction earlier in its Wana operation against the Wazir militants.⁹

On February 2005, the government ended the operation against Baitullah Mahsud led militants by signing another agreement known as Sararogha Agreement. Though Baitullah agreed to cooperate with government in its operations against the militants, he formed Shariat courts and committees to monitor 'un-Islamic acts' in the area replicating the administration of justice carried out by the Afghan Taliban during the rule.¹⁰

The hide and seek between the security forces and militants groups in South Waziristan Agency continued till 2009, when military started a full scale offensive against the militants in the entire Mahsud territory. This happened without revoking peace

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agreements with Wazirs in both South and North Waziristan agencies to isolate the Mahsud in the region.

In October 2009, operation codenamed as Rah-e-Nijaat was launched against TTP its extremist's allies, both local and foreigners, in South Waziristan Agency. In a steamrolling operation the military dismantled hideouts and trainers centers of Taliban leadership. It established the government writ in area controlled by TTP for years. Rah-e-Nijaat operation is largely believed to be the successful military offensive against the battle-hardened Mahsud militants, flushing them out of their bases, destroying their training centers and communication networks. Being cut off from Afghanistan, the military successfully blocked the supply line to the Mahsud militants forcing them and their foreign allies to leave their strongholds for taking refuge in the rugged mountains of neighboring North Waziristan.

The Military policy of pushing the militants to adjoining mountains led to the influx of miscreants to North Waziristan which also gradually turned out to be another battleground. Soon the main towns of North Waziristan- Miran Shah and Mir Ali and other surrounding areas - witnessed certain fierce clashes between security forces and militants.¹¹ The militants instead of fighting pitched battles against military – trained in conventional mode of fighting- adopted guerrilla warfare and resorted to hit-and-run tactics in the rugged mountainous terrains of the entire tribal region. Use of IEDs, ambushes, remote-controlled bomb explosions and rocket attacks on military checkpoints and government installations have become a routine matter in the tribal regions inflicting huge damages on the government forces and civilians.¹²

Keeping the military largely engaged in Waziristan region, the militants successfully extended their influence to Orakzai, Kurram, Khyber, Mohmand and Bajaur agencies. Gradually all the tribal agencies have been turned into major fronts by the military in its war against militants.

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In 2009, the Pakistan military launched bigger offensives – known as operation *Brekhna* (Lightening) - against the TTP affiliated militants in the rugged and barren terrains of Mohmand Agency. Mohmand - sharing a long border with Kunar province of Afghanistan - had witnessed widespread violence by militants who imposed bans on barbers shaving beards and playing music and women were barred from going to schools and colleges.

To suppress militancy in Mohmand Agency, the government forces have to conduct more than three major operations; one at lower Mohmand and two other at upper Mohmand. Besides using large number of ground forces, military here resorted to heavy use of air power to disrupt and destroy the militants' hideouts and training centers and facilities in Safi, Khwezai, Pandiyali and Ambar areas. (Interview with Brig Said Nazeer Mohmand, Rawalpindi).

In Bajaur tribal agency the government carried out two major and a number of smaller operations against the Taliban militants – mostly Afghan and Arabs – who had established their rule by taking control of Bajaur in early 2007.

Operation Sherdil (Lion Heart) was the first military offensive launched in Bajaur Agency in September 2008 by the paramilitary forces with the support of a strong combat brigade of the Army in retaliation to the siege of a military convoy by Taliban at Loyesam. The military after taking control of various areas including Loyesam continued their advancements towards Nawagai, mauling the miscreants completely and destroying their hideouts and camps.¹³

Despite steamrolling large areas of the agency, pockets of militants' resistance continued fighting with forces launching sporadic attacks and target killing those who extended support to the government. Even in August 2012, military had to conduct a major operation against the militants who managed to take control of the key Batwar border area and some vital supply routes of the Pakistan Army's troops in Salarzai tehsil. In the ensuing weeks

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long major military offensives, security forces claimed to have killed 87 militants and lost 18 security personnel, 14 volunteers of Aman Lashkar (peace committees) and 20 civilians before flushing the militants out to mountains and across the border.¹⁴

Like an infectious disease, militancy has also been spread over to the Khyber Agency – particularly Bara sub division- and military was called in support of paramilitary forces to arrest the increasing insurgency. From time to time three major operations - code named as “Daraghlum”, ‘Bia Daraghlum’ and ‘Khwakh-badshum’ - besides a number of small scale operations were launched by the paramilitary forces against a host of insurgents including Tariq Afridi group, LI and activists of TNSM and groups of Afghan militants.¹⁵

Like Khyber, Mohmand and Bajaur; militants have virtually taken control of Kurram and Orakzai agencies and are carrying out all kinds of terrorist activities.

To secure the routes and population centers from the militants, security forces launched anti-militants offensives codenamed as Operation Koh-e-Sufaid in July 20011 in Kurram Agency. Security forces claimed to have launched Operation Koh-e-Sufaid on the demand of people and tribal elders.¹⁶ The TTP was though formed in South Waziristan. However, Orakzai Agency was its important base from where the TTP’s incumbent leader Hakimullah Mahsud was commanding the militants of Khyber, Orakzai and Kurram agencies.

In March 2010 security forces extended its operation known as *Operation Khwakh Ba De Sham* (I will teach you a lesson) from Khyber Agency to upper Orakzai, Mamozai areas, to clear it from the insurgents. Subsequently, the offensives in upper Orakzai led to the displacement of some 34,000 families. After a year of active engagements, the government announced victory asking all the displaced families to return home. However, most parts of the Orakzai agency particularly Mamozai areas – bordering Tirah

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valley remained under the influence of militants' threats and IDPs are still reluctant to go back to their respective areas.¹⁷

These successive military operations in tribal areas have been considered as vitally important for the country's lingering war against terrorism. Security forces largely applied the conventional counterterrorism strategy to flush out both the foreign and local militants, disrupt their networks and destroy their hideouts.

However, decade down the line – when first military operation was launched –even now almost all of the tribal districts are controlled either by the military or the militants alike. Militants are still carrying out attacks, using IEDs and target killing in the tribal elders and those who supported the government forces. The militants groups are still relevant giving tough time to the security establishment by terrorizing masses not only in tribal areas but rest of the country. The current insurgency situation in the tribal belt and adjoining settled districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa demonstrates that the strategy of the military operations has not worked.

Failures of Military Operations

Pakistan suffered innumerable losses in terms of men and materials and in the fight against militants about 40,000 people including 5000 police and military men have been sacrificed. The financial cost is about US\$70 billion, besides the negative psychological impacts on the masses and damages done to the communication, agricultural and market infrastructures plus mass displacement of the tribal communities.

Security experts believed that the government's exclusive dependence on military prowess to handle the militancy and ignored other tools of the conflict management.

No doubt, to a limited level the military kept the doors of peace negotiation open for the militants and had reached a number of peace agreements and ceasefires understandings. In most of the

cases the security forces agreed to sign peace agreements with militants after facing failures in anti-militants operations or finding the environment not favorable for prolonged engagements – a sure position of weakness – leading to strengthening of the militants. The peace agreement in Swat with Mulla Fazalullah, Shakai agreement with Nek Muhammad and the Sararogha agreement with Baitullah Mehsud are some of the important agreements that favored the militants and were signed by the security forces after facing tough resistance from the insurgents.

The first peace deal struck in South Waziristan in March 2004 between Nek Muhammad and government highlighted eight important points. Resultantly, Pakistan military agreed to pull out in return of release of 12 paramilitary troops by militants. Government also agreed to minimize interference in the tribal areas, paid compensations for death and destructions and the Corps Commander Peshawar personally visited the militants. Peace agreements were with Ahmadzai Wazir militants led by Moulvi Nazeer, Sararogha, agreement with Baitullah Mahsud, North Waziristan Peace agreement with Hafiz Gul Bahadur led militants and in Bajaur with Faqir Muhammad. The government signed some of the other important peace agreements after face-offs with the militants and tribes.

No doubt, the government forces fought the war with hearts and mind against the battled hardened ideologically driven militants, however analysts believed the failures of government in quelling the insurgency was due to the over reliance on the military solution – ignoring and confronting the insurgents politically, ideologically and socially. Showing over-confidence in handling the militancy militarily, the government ignored the fact that the tribal terrains and socio-cultural environment were more hospitable and favorable for the militants instead of the military that had no past experience in handling insurgency and was primarily trained for fighting conventional battles.

Militants adopted the guerrilla warfare tactics and enlarged the battle ground by spreading like an infectious disease into the

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whole of the tribal regions from South Waziristan agency to Bajaur in the north. Instead of confronting the military directly, the militants kept on shifting their hideouts from one place to another and then waited for opportune movements to strike on moving military convoys, check points and camps.

Military, instead of responding to the guerrilla tactics of militants, continued fighting what is believed to be an unconventional war with a conventional mode. Forces kept on moving in huge convoys with heavy logistics for catching up the insurgents moving in small groups, who after launching attacks disappear in the mountainous inhospitable terrains.

The security forces in its overall counterinsurgency strategy did not take the pains of taking local population onboard before launching anti militants offensives. Support of the local population is vital for the fighting against insurgents as weaning away the local people deprives the miscreants of finding safe havens to hide and plan attacks in a hostile environment.

Tribal areas, except Orakzai, are connected to a long international border and an active war zone across the border is providing easy way for supply of logistics, weapons and recruitments which could not be stopped permanently.

The insurgents used to draw maximum strength from the terrains, as the entire tribal territories are favorable for the insurgents and inhospitable for conventional military engagements. Additionally, the gun culture in the region with history ridden with conflicts also makes the availability of weapons and new recruits trained in the use of locally produced armories easy for the militants groups. The insurgents have the upper hands in the use of modern small arms and better knowledge of terrains than the army soldiers.

The introduction of IEDs into the insurgents' war machinery has changed the face of war giving a greater edge to militants causing huge damages to the security forces and government

facilities. In Afghanistan, more than 80% of the military casualties are due to the explosions of IEDs. While in Pakistan too this ratio is not less than 70% particularly in the tribal areas.

So far no technology is available to defeat the IEDs particularly in the region where communication networks are weak and this makes military job to guard its moving convoys and deployment camps very difficult. The experts in the making of IEDs and the raw materials are mostly available in everybody's kitchen or a farmhouse and need not the supply from outside markets.¹⁸ The command system in the military is also conventionally central, having little space for on-spot decisions. Soldiers follow the standard operating procedures while operating in certain areas against miscreants, while the militants are free in the use of target, time and place like any guerilla.

Using Political Options

Besides using the military muscle against militancy, the government has also committed itself to confront the militants politically. Allowing the security forces to have peace agreements locally with different groups, the Pakistani parliament has also came up with certain policy guidelines for the government to handle the conflict in the tribal regions.

In the middle of October 2008, the first joint sitting of the parliament was convened to debate the increasing issue of militancy, extremisms and deteriorating lawlessness in the country. In a consensus resolution at the end of the in-camera joint session, the parliamentarians noted with great concern that extremism, militancy and terrorism in all forms and manifestations was posing grave danger to the stability and integrity of the country. Asking for urgent review of the national security strategy and methodology of combating terrorism in the region, the joint session asked the government to meet challenge of militancy and extremism by developing a consensus and dialogue with all genuine stakeholders.¹⁹

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The national parliament on different other occasion also issued guidelines for the government to establish writ of the state in the troubled zones through confidence building mechanisms using tribal customs and local communities (*Jirga*).

Former Prime Minister Syed Yusuf Raza Gillani also publically announced on several occasions that the government wanted to resolve the issue of militancy and insurgency by pursuing a policy of 'Three Ds' in the troubled tribal regions.

The government has repeatedly acknowledged that military action was not a solution to the problem and stressed on 3 Ds, in the light of parliamentary resolution to deal with militants and extremists.²⁰

However, just like the military which could not achieved the three stated objectives of military operations, 'clear, hold and transfer', the civilian government also ignored the 'dialogue and development' components of its stated policy and remained focused on the 'deterrence' option only and relied only on military operations.

Some critics of the current counterinsurgency policy believed that the government avoided direct contacts with the militants due to pressure from the US and Afghan governments. In addition, Islamabad had left the issue of growing militancy in the tribal regions in the hands of the military. The first blunder committed by the military after entering into the tribal territories was the weakening of civilian administration, the tribal *Maliks* and the *Jirga* system - hitherto working as crucial links between the state and the tribes. In addition, the military commanders through the weakened tribal elders or civilian administrators carried out all the peace agreements signed with militants except the one in Swat.

The talk's offers to the militants groups from political administration mostly remained confined to media statements. These offers for peace talks with militants has also been suffixed or pre-fixed with conditions like laying down weapons, accepting

the law of the land and disengaging themselves from the foreign militants groups. None of the top political office holders – the President and the Prime Minister – ever took the troubles of visiting the tribal areas where more than 100,000 troops were engaged against the militants.²¹ The insincerity shown by the government in reaching out to the tribal militants politically was also reflected in the launching of development projects in the tribal regions for amelioration of the lives of poor tribal people. The government not only criminally ignored the region in the development projects but also even diverted the funds coming from the international community to other areas. The military operations have damaged the available communication infrastructure to a great extent and in certain cases have destroyed big markets, shops and roadsides businesses, depriving large number of people from their sources of livelihood.²²

Need of Change in the COIN Strategy

The decade of military operations in the tribal areas need a complete revisiting in the light of the parliamentary resolutions. The US led nations fighting the Afghan insurgents for a whole decade across the border now suffer from fatigue and have decided to leave Afghanistan by 2014. The US-led international community - after exhausting all the available high-tech war machineries without any hindrance against the rag-tag Taliban militia - has now realized that military solution is a deficient option for resolving the insurgency and for lasting peace in Afghanistan, they must open a door for dialogue and negotiations with Taliban. The Afghan government is also vigorously pursuing efforts to reach out to the insurgents and has constituted a national level High Peace Council for negotiating peace with Taliban leadership.

Pakistan is facing two different scenarios and the situation demand revisiting of the whole strategy keeping in view the emerging situation across the border. In case of international combat troops' withdrawal from Afghanistan and failure of Afghanistan government in making peace deals with Taliban

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leadership prior the 2014, that country might again fall into a quagmire of civil war.

If the international combat troops depart Afghanistan without putting in place a genuine representative government and negotiated settlement with Taliban, a very likely scenario is that Taliban will gain more power and will occupy more areas. That situation might lead to further motivate the Pakistani Taliban – who will definitely want to see their brethren successful in Afghanistan- to continue fighting in FATA region. The ultimate success for Taliban militia shall be in no way acceptable for Pakistan as in that situation it is definite that Pakistan militants would have a big boost.

Pakistan needs to lead from the front in making peace arrangements with the tribal militants and help the Afghan government - if it can - to reach out to Taliban.

The tribal *Jirgas* and the elders are still capable – if given authority and freedom – to broker peace deals that will be to the advantage of the government. The tribal know how to deal with the tribal insurgents. These *Jirgas* must be made powerful with the backing of the government and tribes thereby isolating the militants.²³ However, success of the government in the tribal regions depends on the success of Afghan government in making peace deals with the Taliban insurgents. It is also time for Pakistan to lead the peace efforts going on in Afghanistan. If sincere efforts are made in that direction, Pakistan can earn respect in the eyes of not only the Afghans but the international community. The policy of supporting ‘Afghan initiated, Afghan led and Afghan owned’ slogans is not a working policy and tantamount to skirting one’s responsibility.

After Afghanistan, Pakistan is going to be the major beneficiary of the peace in Afghanistan, if Islamabad succeeds in brokering peace deal between the Afghan government and Taliban before the departure of the international combat forces from Afghanistan.

Besides opening efforts for peace deals, the government also needs to initiate developmental projects in FATA and start working on the reconstructions of communication, agriculture and businesses infrastructures destroyed during the military operations or militants' attacks.

The tribal areas have been always neglected in the award allocation of developmental schemes and projects in the social sectors. It needs to be brought at par with the rest of the country particularly improving its social indicators.

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