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RCDS 2008 – CONTEMPORARY STRATEGIC ISSUES

What Would Be The Most Effective Strategy For Denying The Federally Administrated Tribal Areas To The Taliban And Al Qaeda?

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WHAT WOULD BE THE MOST EFFECTIVE STRATEGY FOR DENYING THE FEDERALLY ADMINISTERED TRIBAL AREAS TO THE TALIBAN AND AL QAEDA?

Key Judgements

The Pakistani polity remains paranoid over its perception of the threat posed by India. This perception continues to adversely affect policy responses in the FATA. The international community should continue to encourage rapprochement between Pakistan and India.

Because security in the FATA depends upon security in Afghanistan and vice versa, there is a need to develop a joint US/NATO, Pakistani and Afghan strategy to address security issues in the Pakistani-Afghan border region.

The Pakistani Government, which since 2006 has implemented a “comprehensive approach” in the FATA, lacks the political, military and administrative capacity to tackle the challenges posed in the tribal areas.

The existing long-term comprehensive strategy, which focuses on undercutting extremist appeal through institutional reform, education, health, economic and infrastructure development in the FATA, should be boosted by the international community.

Because any direct US or western activity in the FATA is counter-productive, direct military action by the US should be strictly limited and all development programs should be implemented by Pakistani authorities with low profile western involvement.

No reform will succeed if it is not supported by tribal elders.

The Pakistani government capacity to deal with problems in the FATA will be boosted by a strengthening of the Pakistan economy; a reduction in military interference in the government decision making and the strengthening of civil society. Provided it is done sensitively, the international community has a role to play in assisting Pakistan in each of these areas.

1. Current challenges in the FATA¹

Historically, Islamabad has had minimal control over the fiercely independent largely Sunni Pashtuns. Tribal leaders (*maliks*), local imams and governors known as political agents were traditionally the on-the-ground arbiters of all decisions in many districts. They

¹ The semi-autonomous Federally Administered Tribal Areas consist of seven areas called agencies: Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, Kurram, and North and South Waziristan and six Frontier regions (Peshawar, Hohat, Tank, Banuu, Lakki and Dera Ismail Khan).

maintained control through the colonial-era Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR) based on the “principle of collective punishment” for crimes committed by an individual. The political agents are widely considered corrupt and inefficient and in many areas no longer exercise any real control.

The conflict in Afghanistan has become the cause for underdevelopment, radicalization, terrorism, weapons proliferation and narcotics trafficking in the FATA. Home to approx 3.5 million people, FATA suffers from a lack of development in the education, health, energy and agricultural sectors. The literacy rate is around 18% which is well below the 44% average in Pakistan. Only 30% of the males and only 3% of females receive education. Currently there are al-Qaeda (global terrorists), Afghan Taliban, Pakistani Taliban, tribal militias and extremists groups operating in the FATA.

Pakistan has tried to control militancy in the tribal areas through counter-terrorism operations and various peace agreements. So far, these deals have brought negligible success. The Pakistani government has little means to force tribal leaders to hold up their part of the bargain who themselves have largely lost influence to Islamist preachers with a strong global jihadist bent.

Pakistan was involved in the creation of the Taliban in Afghanistan – in order to prevent ‘strategic encirclement’ by an Afghanistan allied to India. It is likely that senior Pakistani officials continue to make strategic calculations to protect the Taliban as a hedge against the increasing Indian influence in Afghanistan or the possible collapse of the Karzai regime in Kabul. Therefore the Pakistani military has, to some extent, been reluctant to fight the Afghan Taliban. Al-Qaeda, other foreign Jihadists and recently also the Pakistani Taliban, which is seen as a threat to Pakistan herself, have been targeted more effectively. Any activities that strengthen Pashtun solidarity among the tribes living on both sides of the border are also seen a potential threat to the territorial integrity of Pakistan.

Military operations have also become increasingly unpopular both with general population and with the Pakistani military. With up to 25% of the Pakistan military having Pashtun ethnicity there is a sense among many that they are fighting against their own countrymen under American pressure. Despite being subjected to a wave of suicide attacks and the spread of talibanization, the Pakistani people feel these are reactions to the government’s support of US policies. Recent US raids into Pakistan and collateral damages have increased antagonism, which does not help the Pakistan Army’s efforts. The Pakistani Army, the Frontier Corps and other policing forces lack the training and equipment to conduct counterinsurgency. However, in the aftermath of Marriot bombing in Islamabad it seems that the Pakistani Army is ready to use all possible means to fight “the cancer” which is increasingly destabilizing the country.

Having recognized all challenges the Pakistani government began to implement a comprehensive plan in the FATA from 2006. Pakistan’s long-term strategic objectives for FATA include rendering FATA inhospitable to extremists and strengthening rule of law, improving security environment, and improving economic and social conditions of the people. The program consists of political, security, administrative and development

strategies. In the political and administrative sphere the government seeks to bolster effective governance by empowering local officials. In order to improve security Pakistan's objective is to increase the capacity and efficacy of local security forces. The development plan concentrates on basic human services, natural resources, communication, infrastructure and economic development. The plan would cost \$2 bn. The US plan to deliver \$750 m for the program.

The Comprehensive approach has not been implemented effectively, because the Pakistani government lacks the political, military and administrative capacity. Current civilian political leaders have little experience in dealing with an issue of this scale. Political uncertainty in Islamabad has also yielded a fragmented approach to the tribal areas.

2. What can be done to boost the Comprehensive Plan?

Security

Security in the FATA depends upon security in Afghanistan and vice versa. Therefore there is a need to develop a joint US, Pakistani and Afghan strategy in the border region. The US should also facilitate a political process between Pakistan and Afghanistan in order to have a recognised international border. As Pakistan is not able to control incursions into Afghanistan on its own, Afghanistan, the US and/or NATO should increase troops and check movements on the Afghan side of the border. The counterinsurgency capabilities of the Pakistani military should be further improved. The US and its allies should focus on supporting the Pakistani military and security forces with technical assets, training and intelligence. Any direct American action in the FATA is counterproductive and further deteriorates the unstable situation not only in the area but throughout Pakistan.

Equally, adverse perceptions of the threat posed India continue to dominate the Pakistani polity – particularly among the military – thus creating the underlying economic, social and political conditions for conflict. Until these perceptions change, Pakistan will find it extremely difficult to abandon its historical relationship to the Pashtun nation as a potential security asset to be cultivated. Rapprochement between the leaders of India and Pakistan, should be encouraged by the international community.

Governance

The Pakistani government must reform the political and institutional structure in the FATA in order to promote good governance. This can not be done without consultation and cooperation with tribal leaders. A recent survey of FATA residents shows that there is strong support for amending the colonial era Frontier Crimes Regulations, but there is little consensus on what should replace it. Therefore resolving the complex institutional issues will take a long time. A communication plan is an essential part in winning hearts and minds. Empowering moderate tribal leaders and spreading awareness among the local

tribes could clear up prevailing misconceptions and mistrust. The Awani National Party – a secular liberal Pashtun nationalist party is influential in the neighbouring North West Frontier Province and offers the potential to play an important mediating role between the Pakistan government and Pashtun tribesmen in the FATA.

Social and economic development

The current Pakistani Comprehensive long-term plan includes all essential development projects (health and education services, water and sanitation facilities, transportation infrastructure, communication, agricultural and trade development). It is important to reach an effective agreement with the tribes in the FATA region in order to implement development projects. It will have far reaching implications, if the tribes will realize the benefits of these projects for their areas. As there is evident hostility towards western aid, all western support should be delivered through the Pakistani Government. The international community should try to engage moderate Islamic states (GCC states) to participate in development projects. This would decrease suspicions and appeals to extremism among local tribes. For immediate impact, the most important factor is providing jobs to the people in the area. In the short term, creating governmental jobs is the only option as there are currently no preconditions for private enterprises. The failure of the current development program to deliver results – due to capacity constraints far outstripping the availability of funds – suggests that a decentralised system of aid delivery in small scale projects across a wide area is likely to be more successful.

At a strategic level, Pakistan's ability to address the challenges posed by the FATA will be strengthened if it is able to maintain economic growth, decrease the direct influence of the military in government decision making and increase civil society. The international community has an important long-term role to play in these areas.

3. Conclusion

There is no quick solution to resolve the complex challenges which promote appeal to extremism in the FATA. Pakistan is not able to tackle the issues on its own. In the short term a joint US, Afghan, Pakistani counterinsurgency strategy is indispensable to deny the area to Al Qaeda and Taliban. All operations in the FATA must be conducted by the Pakistani Army and security forces. The Pakistani Government has got a long term comprehensive plan which includes all necessary development projects. The Pakistanis are not able to implement the programme without the support of the international community. The underlying precondition for any positive development is the support of the local tribes. Any western aid or direct involvement is counterproductive. Engaging Islamic countries in different projects would facilitate winning hearts and minds.

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