



The Post-Hakimullah Insurgency in Pakistan

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Pakistani officials and many other sources quoted by the international media² believe that Hakimullah Mehsud, the 30 year old aggressive leader of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), was killed as the result of a successful drone attack on 14th January 2010 in Shatkoi village between North and South Waziristan. The attack took place days after the militant commander appeared in an Al-Jazeera video with Humam Khalil Abu-Mulal al-Balawi, the Jordanian suicide bomber who killed the 7 most experienced and senior CIA counter-insurgency experts in the Camp Chapman attack in southeastern Khost province of Afghanistan, on 31st December 2009. Until now the Pakistani Taliban have been denying his death, they had also reacted in the same manner when top commander and founder of the TTP, Baitullah Mehsud, was killed in an airstrike in August of 2009. Neither Pakistani officials, nor Taliban spokesman provided any physical evidence for supporting their claims regarding Hakimullah's death, yet some media outlets quoted reliable sources that suggested that a new militant commander, Malik Noor Jamal, or better known as Mullah Toofanwas selected as the new leader of the insurgency.³

Although the government of Pakistan has always been critical of U.S. drone attacks they have been very successful in targeting militant hideouts and eliminating several dangerous foreign and local terrorists in the ungoverned tribal areas. The latest such attack killed Qari Mohammad Zafar, head of Pakistani militant group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. Qari Mohammad Zafar was believed to have close ties with Al-Qaeda which had prompted the U.S. had offered a USD \$5 million reward for information leading to his capture.⁴ These militant groups pose a serious threat to the very existence of Pakistan, challenging the government and its authority by carrying out brazen attacks in Islamabad

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² Christian Science Monitor- Pakistani Taliban leader Hakimullah Mehsud is dead, say officials- Feb. 10, 2010

³ UPI.com- Taliban pick leader amid Mehsud rumors- Feb. 04, 2010

⁴ BBC- Missile 'kills Lashkar-e-Jhangvi leader in Pakistan'- Mar. 02, 2010

and other major cities like Karachi, Rawalpindi and Lahore. The government of Pakistan and its army has not been able to prevent these attacks or eliminate the perpetrators of these attacks. From killing two time elected Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, to seizing towns and imposing strict Sharia law, to killing dozens of tribal leaders and launching sophisticated attacks on the GHQ (General Headquarters) of the army, to carrying attacks outside of the country, particularly in Mumbai and Afghanistan. The Pakistani militants, operating across the country under several shadow names have caused the international community to question the capability and willingness of the Pakistani government in dealing with the issue of militancy.

The implications of terrorism in Pakistan on Afghanistan

Pakistan will never accept this as fact, but many analysts believe that the country intentionally allowed terrorism to flourish when it first started to run amok in the tribal belt obviously because the Pakistani government had been supporting extremism and fundamentalism for a long time in order to use it for its interests in Afghanistan and Kashmir. These interests included the installation of a friendly and extremist government in Afghanistan and to bleed India on the Kashmir issue. Long before TTP was established, militants had started threatening educational institutions and intimidating the population through letters and pamphlets and later when they preached for jihad on FM radios and started recruiting school-age young boys for insurgency, locals demanded action from the government but its rhetoric was that there were only a few misguided individuals and everything would soon return to normal. Instead, it became worse. Unfortunately, this situation still remains unchanged when it comes to dealing with the Afghan Taliban.

The insurgency is responsible for deadly insurgent attacks against the Afghan government as well as the international forces. During the course of the past few years, Pakistani army conducted major operations in South Waziristan, Swat, Bajaur Agency, Orakzai and Mohmand Agencies, but there was no single operation against the Afghan Taliban in North Waziristan, Quetta, and other places where Afghan insurgents were operating. Pakistan also had constantly denied presence of the Afghan Taliban leaders on its soil but was proven incorrect when many of the Afghan leaders were captured in recent raids including Mullah Baradar and Mullah Kabir, both of whom are part of the Quetta Shura and the Peshawar Shura. Many believe the reason behind these arrests was the militants' demonstration of willingness to reconcile with the Afghan government while isolating Pakistan from the talks. Whatever the reason, it is expected that the arrests will weaken the extremist movement to some extent.

Pakistan's duplicity in Afghanistan

Pakistan has been a frontline U.S. ally in the war on terror and can play an important role in bringing peace to the region as it happens not only to be one of Afghanistan's closest neighbors but also a place where militancy has been nurtured and growing. Instead of dealing with terrorism with a strong hand or playing a positive role in the reconciliation and reintegration process, Pakistanis busy portraying itself as a victim to the conflict. This is albeit to attract more international aid and justify its policies for its 'strategic depth' in Afghanistan while at the same time countering India's presence in Afghanistan. Unavoidably this creates a conflict of interest in the region and inevitably weakens the counter-insurgency efforts. The international community has been supporting Pakistan, and in that, its priority is curbing Al-Qaeda and the Afghan insurgency. While Pakistan accepts its role in the global war on terror its main priority remains to be countering India and curbing the Pakistani Taliban. For this reason, Pakistan was highly vocal in its condemnation of U.S. drone attacks when they targeted mostly the Afghan Taliban and Al-Qaeda operatives in North Waziristan and Bajaur Agency but there was a sharp decrease in this attitude when the attacks started killing more Pakistani Taliban commanders, notably the two most wanted Mehsuds – Baitullah and Hakimullah.

Why Pakistan sustains terrorism on its soil

Nonetheless, Pakistan's stance on supporting, or simply allow, the Afghan insurgency to operate from its soil is not beyond understanding. The country may have suffered heavily from terrorism but that does not necessarily mean that Pakistanis will automatically stop supporting terrorism unless you can identify and address the reasons behind this. We often ask each other about the factors that motivate Taliban fighters, and one factor is Pakistan's support in terms of providing sanctuaries. But we always avoid or ignore discussing the underlining factors that motivate Pakistan to support terrorism in the region.

The Durand Line debate

Since its inception, Pakistan has been feeling insecure on both its eastern (Afghan) and western (Indian) borders. On the eastern border, the former British colony feels that a stable Afghanistan means reemerging of the once very troubling Pashtunistan issue that had pushed the two neighboring countries into a war-like situation. That issue was also one of the main factors which motivated Pakistan to wholeheartedly support the jihad against the Soviets and play a role in the civil war afterwards. When the Taliban emerged in 1994, Pakistan jumped to help them in an attempt to

have a strong partner in Kabul. Though Pakistan eventually realized that the Taliban will never recognize the Durand Line as a legitimate border, it became more comfortable for them to deal with the extremists who both dependent on them for support and who did not bother about the existing border issue with Pakistan.

This long-time and much controversial border issue forces Pakistan to move away from any political activities in the tribal areas, including the prevention of the inhabitants of the tribal area to participate in the democratic system. The barbaric Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR), which was enforced by the British imperialism during the 1850s, is still in practice in the tribal areas even the British themselves found it inadequate and wanted to change it in 1919. The British had amended it many times, but Pakistan continues to enforce it even after 60 years has lapsed from the time decolonization by the British Raj in the region. The FCR advocates collective punishment and ban on political and democratic system and this gives enough space for extremism to flourish and nurture.

Indo-Pak Conflict

On the western border, India and Pakistan have always acted as enemies and were close to waging war many times in recent history. Before 2001, India was seriously concerned about the training camps that operated under the Taliban in Afghanistan because the trained fighters who traveled to Kashmir where they fought against India. Undoubtedly, the camps enjoyed complete support from the ISI, the premier intelligence agency of Pakistan. After 2001, when the Taliban were defeated and the international community was engaged in Afghanistan, India jumped to take part in the rebuilding of the country and since then has been expanding and strengthening its presence in many ways. Now Pakistan has serious concerns about the growing Indian presence in Afghanistan and that has resulted into a proxy war between the two-archrival countries. It is believed that the major attacks on Indians in Afghanistan are cause of this proxy war.

Another serious problem in dealing with insurgency and extremism in Pakistan is the powerful extremist institutions within the government of Pakistan, which are not under the control of the democratic system of the country. For that reason, when the government of Pakistan stopped supporting extremist groups fighting in Kashmir, these groups with alleged support from the ISI and extremist elements within the army turned against the government and formed the TTP. Since they were formerly trained by the government and the army itself, these terrorists are much more sophisticated in the kinds of attacks and tactics they use than any other militant groups. They have direct contacts with Al-Qaeda, they have sympathizers inside the government, the army and the political and business circles, and they have direct outside contacts for funding and resources.



Hence, in consideration of all these challenges, we can say that targeting leaders like Baitullah Mehsud and Hakimullah Mehsud in U.S. drone attacks may weaken the insurgency for a short period, but will eventually require a strong political solution concerning major regional issues to ensure a long-term solution. Among them the most important is the border issue between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and the Kashmir issue between Pakistan and India. The tribal areas also need special attention in terms of their political freedom, reforms and reconstruction. Unless these problems are solved through a sustainable process, Pakistan or powerful elements within Pakistan, will surely continue to support terrorism in the region. Therefore, as a result we could see the introduction of more aggressive and brutal Hakimullah Mehsuds and Mullah Toofans. We must keep in mind, that there are thousands of madrassahs in Pakistan and they will always be ready to supply more and more of them.