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American Failure in Afghanistan & Need for a New Social Contract in FATA

American Military/Policy Failure in Afghanistan:

In June 2008, during the Paris Conference, Karzai government was criticized for “massive administrative corruption and weak governance and accountability in spending the aid in economic and reconstruction projects.”

Islamabad, are willing to pay attention to the calling of the time. Nearly seven years of continuous military action in Afghanistan has killed less “terrorists” and has created more. Despite the international community’s full support to Karzai, he has not been able to extend his government’s writ in Afghanistan (where he has been ruling for nearly the same amount of time). In June 2008, during the Paris Conference, Karzai government was criticized for “massive administrative corruption and weak governance and accountability in spending the aid in economic and reconstruction projects.”¹ No one, it seems, is prepared to shed much light on the failure of the Afghan government in spite of all the American military presence in addition to the world’s technical and development support. Everyone, it seems, readily points at Pakistan for everything that goes wrong in Afghanistan.

Nowhere in international law, Pakistan could be blamed for the American led allied forces and NATO failures in Afghanistan as it would just like blaming the US & NATO military action in Afghanistan for the incessant suicide bombings in Pakistan during 2007 that claimed 4,299 lives of Pakistanis. This figures also includes 740 security officials and the number of suicide bombing was 66 i.e. more than one attack per week.² Should Pakistan allege the American and NATO forces in Afghanistan along with the Afghan government for the domestic failure to ensure law and order? Obviously not as managing law and order within the Pakistani boundaries is the job of Pakistani government; exactly the same way maintenance of public order and security in Afghanistan is the job of the Afghan government.

The failure of American policy of waging a mindless war in Afghanistan has a silver lining, provided the decision makers particularly in Washington and generally in

If the Afghan government is adamant on linking Afghanistan’s deteriorating law and order situation to Pakistan then Pakistan can legitimately blame Pakistan’s domestic disturbance on Afghanistan. Intriguingly, in large part of the blame-game, particularly in the Western media and in the minds of American officials, Pakistan is the focus of all negative attention and criticism. When allegations are hurled that the Pakistani government is supporting the rouge Taliban elements, it does not help the US-led Global War on Terror as the Pakistani government feels under tremendous public pressure to reduce cooperation with the Allied forces in Afghanistan for it has not delivered anything to Pakistan but suicide bombings and deaths of its security officials and civilians.

With such visible cracks and frictions between the “global coalition against terror,” Taliban and other militant forces appear to be the only winners. The policy makers in the alliance should join their heads and forces to ensure that the coalition should have the last laugh. It’s a war that the world cannot afford to lose and blaming Pakistan will not help.

Situation in FATA:

The stereotypes have to be discarded about the people of FATA and they should be given an organized chance to build a good life for themselves and their future generations.

Baitullah somehow continues to attract the world’s attention but he is not the *only* strong Taliban commander in FATA. The world largely ignores the territorial, tribal and personal allegiance of various militant groups active in FATA who may have an ideological connection with Mehsud but they may not necessarily work under his command. Mehsud apparently is the strongest of all the

Taliban commanders and reportedly commands force from 5,000-6,000³ well trained, motivated and disciplined force but there are many active groups in Bajur, Mohmand, Khyber and Wana in the leadership of Molvi Faqir Muhammad, Commander Umar Khalid, Mangal Bagh, Haji Namdar and Molvi Sadiq Noor respectively. Molvi Faqir Muhammad and Molvi Sadiq Noor’s groups are considered to be highly influential on Baitullah Mehsud at the same time having close ties with the Egyptian Shaikh Isa and Aimanuz Zawahiri of Al-Qaeda.

The society in FATA’s all seven agencies certainly is tribal but the socio-economic and political situation is

¹ BBC Monitoring South Asia. June 15, 2008.

² Opposition’s White Paper quoted in Daily Express. July 5, 2008.

³ Estimate of FATA tribal leaders.

not monotonous and therefore, the solution and approach to fixing these problems cannot be either. There is a dire need that all the concerned nations sit together, evolve policies based on the ground realities, let politics have a chance and demonstrate a confidence on each other that is impregnable. When they plan to sit together without suspicions in their minds, they should understand that there is no quick fix to the problems that FATA faces. It took nearly two decades for the situation to worsen and it could not and *will not* be fixed overnight. The spree of allegations and mistrust shown by the US, NATO and Afghanistan on Pakistan will not help as it has not helped thus far.

Politics and military cannot be used mindlessly as the pressure on Pakistan suggests to “do more” in FATA. Pakistani forces are engaged in a relentless military operation in FATA since 2004 and have lost more than 1,000 men and officers of the security forces. This number is reportedly bigger than the combined loss of the security officials of both the US and NATO forces. Should such losses on the Pakistani side continue? Would an increase in such losses solidify the Pakistani resolve and commitment in GWOT? Could Pakistani people welcome any increase in Pakistani forces’ loss and politically support government and the armed forces to continue with the campaign in FATA? “No” seemingly is the only answer to all the valid and relevant questioned asked above.

One element that the US and NATO need to understand is that Pakistan is not against taking military action in FATA as it has done so in the past. The overwhelming use of the military might and the magnitude of the “collateral damage” had not produced any solution and in return, the militancy, extremism and attacks in Pakistan had only gone up. This increase has damaged both the resolve of the Pakistani government and the people, especially in the face of all the allegations that keep flying in from the West and Afghanistan.

It is the time that America’s global philosophy as originally defined by the founders of the Project for the New American Century (PNAC) must be reviewed, examined and redefined. The “Fundamental Propositions” of the PNAC proposed that “American leadership is good both for America and for the

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world; and that such leadership requires military strength, diplomatic energy and commitment to moral principle.”⁴ America has tried her military strength and diplomatic energy. Maybe this is the time that the US adheres to the moral principles not only of the modern day democratic America but also that of her Founding Fathers.

The Need for a New Social Contract in FATA:

In hindsight, Pakistani military operation in Kalusha, South Waziristan, in March 2004 now seems ill-conceived, hastily planned, poorly carried out with no tangible and long term gains. It is commonly believed that Musharraf, then Chief of Army Staff, was quick to jump the gun without concerted thinking, deliberations and consultations with his commanders and the people who knew FATA well and ordered an operation under pressure from the US so that he looked good to both the US and the West.

A little more than four years after, with more than a thousand casualties and more than ten thousand injuries, this military expedition has proved expensive without succeeding to nip the militancy and extremism in the bud. Musharraf and then military under his command terribly undermined and wickedly belittle the setup of civilian and political administration and acted on their own. This destroyed the credibility of the old system that worked and was in place since 1901. Both the locals and the Taliban started ignoring the centuries old Jirga⁵ system conducted by the tribal elders and leaders to settle all kinds of issues under the sun in FATA.

Military under Musharraf zeroed the standing and respect of the old system and now the traditional handling of the FATA situations via Jirga, peace committees and tribal leaders’ councils that once worked and reported to the powerful office of the federally appointed Political Agent, stand useless. For the very first time in the entire history of FATA, a

peace Jirga in Dara Adem Khel, a place near Peshawar, was attacked on March 2, 2008 that killed 42 tribal elders and leaders. Before and after this incident, many tribal leaders and elders have been killed for talking peace but none of them was targeted in a Jirga. Musharraf’s haste and the American pressure are at the root of the failure of the system that once had successfully governed FATA.

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Taliban now rule supreme and so does the law that they announce and proclaim. They have

⁴ 2005. The New Imperialism by David Harvey; page # 192.

⁵ Meeting of the two differing factions under the tribal code and law.

become the judge, jury and the executioner. The failure of excessive military might has proven that a shift and change in approach is much needed. Now is the time that the right of the people of FATA should and must be recognized on Pakistan the way people of the other four federal units have. There is a dire need of social, political, economic, educational and industrial reformation but any such reform *must not* challenge or threaten the existing systems of the tribal society there in the short term. Instead of imposing or dictating a change from the above, let the change come via these reformations.

The introduction, and subsequent success, of these reformations would need that the Taliban and the other tribal forces are taken onboard and into confidence.

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future generations. Any donor driven agenda and ideas conceived across the seven seas will not help. The change, if there has to be, should be homegrown, sensitive to local customs and traditions and long-term oriented. The stakes of the locals have to be built into any such process if the reformation effort has to succeed. These stakes cannot be built by those consultants,

nongovernment officials and think tanks who wouldn't know more than the people whom they are funding and providing with money.

Trying to reform the FATA and its people via the military operation has only increased the number of extremists and the militants; it is the time for a social operation that is integrated and coherent with the social norms and situation. The use of the military power ought to be kept as a deterrent-stick instead of the only modus operandi. The social change *should be* the carrot that both Pakistan and more particularly, US and West need to present and provide to the people in FATA. If the sensitivities of the present time are not addressed, the situation will only aggravate both in Pakistan and the region. Especially in a situation when US *might have* also learnt that a crushing military might cannot be the solution to all political and social problems, social change via politics is the way to go ahead. Otherwise, the situation will not improve and none in the coalition in GWOT will win.