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## Militancy in FATA Wavering?

**Taliban hitting State's machinery:** There is a near-consensus that it is going to get worse before it begins to get better. The Marriott bombing in Islamabad on September 20 was neither the beginning nor the end of the worsening of the situation; it was just the continuity of the terror-process unleashed by the Taliban in recent months. Taliban's strategy has gone a step higher from targeting commoners on the streets to target bombing. In this regards, two bombings are worth noting: Federal Investigation Agency Building in Lahore on March 11 and Pakistan Ordinance Factories in Wah Cantt on August 21. It is suspected that the Taliban realized that the spirit of the Pakistani people couldn't be broken as they went about their daily lives and each time the recovery time was shorter than the previous one. "Pakistanis have proven their resilience as nation and as a society, no matter what amount of fear struck their heart on these incidents. The fear is now replaced with anger and the recent public opinion surveys proved that," an Urdu columnist noted in Daily Express on August 23.

Now Taliban are testing the resolve of the government machinery by attacking the institutions that directly or indirectly are involved in the Pakistan Army's campaign against them particularly in Bajaur and Swat.

**Army gaining ground:** Army operation in Bajaur has claimed good ground and the Taliban are on the run from their strongholds. Army for the very first time in the last three years pushed with what it initially planned and the government rejected the Taliban peace deal on August 25. "They will now be dealt with full force," Rahman Malik, advisor on interior said. According to some observers, the ratio of loss of the security forces during the recent Bajaur operation was 1 security-personnel to 11 militants, as opposed to the past. For the first time the Pakistan Air Force became fully operational and successfully pounded the militant hideouts. Taliban's spokesman, Molvi Umar, vented his exasperation by challenging the security forces to mobilize their ground troops "I they were brave enough." He conveniently forgot that he was not engaged in a tribal feud but against a State that perhaps learnt in the end of July 2008 to shun its emotions of consider Taliban as national strategic assets. An incident is worth quoting that on August 19, the militants surrounded nearly 175 security personnel but the air support

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was immediately called in and that destroyed the geographical supremacy of the Taliban. They left 40 dead, 17 injured and 27 were arrested.

### **Taliban leadership on the run?**

With this successful push of Pakistan Army into Bajaur, the second factor is the complete silence from Baitullah Mehsud who is reported extremely sick and does not exercise his power,

authority and control the way he once did. His role was extremely criticized when Omar Khalid and Shah Khalid factions of Taliban clashed in Mohmand that resulted in the slaughtering of Shah Khalid that his group avenged by killing Haji Namdar in Khyber Agency who was a renowned Taliban supporter and an Afghan war veteran. Another aspect is the total detachment of the Swat's Taliban from the mainstream Taliban movement that they once claimed for being part of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

### **Local tribesmen against Taliban:**

The third factor is the rising of the locals against the militants and this empowering strategy of the Army has worked well thus far. Under the local culture, the residents of various towns, villages and areas both in FATA and Swat were empowered and provided with confidence from the State and they have now stood up. There are five local Lashkars (army of the tribesmen under the tribal culture) have been formed at various places which were previous under Taliban control. "This is a good strategy and Taliban themselves provided enough reasons to motivate these people to rise," Rahimullah Yousafzai, a well known FATA analyst said on a private media channel. These Lashkars have warned the supporters of Taliban and have burnt down the houses of those who did not adhere to their warnings. These gains are indeed worthwhile but this push on both the military and social level must continue to ensure that the militancy is rendered defunct for once and all. Governor NWFP, Owais Ghani, on August 21 announced that the military operation in FATA would continue for five more months and after the Marriott bombing, government announced more troops and supplies for FATA. This is a welcoming sign and speaks about the commitment of the government this time.

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**Battle for Pakistan:** Once again, there's near-consensus that the military operation is not the only solution; it rather will prepare the ground for a permanent solution and the government and military need to move in tandem with both the use of force and socio-economic empowerment. The consensus that the people of Pakistan have today against the terrorist activities of the Taliban was never seen before. This is the opportune moment that government moves quickly, aggressively and decisively to save Pakistan from the hands of those who please themselves from slaughtering innocent people, bombing schools, kidnapping for ransom and proclaiming a religious code of conduct on their own. Army must also understand that the troops are not battling to reclaim FATA and Swat; they are fighting a full scale war to reclaim Pakistan. It's a war that the government, army and people of Pakistan cannot afford to lose. Losing this war simply means losing the spirit and soil of Pakistan.