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Taliban's Terrorizing Insurgency: Challenge to Pakistani State

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Taliban's Terrorizing Insurgency – Challenge to Pakistani State

Pakistan is literally on fire and we, Pakistanis, have neither the appropriate fire-fighting equipment nor trained fire-fighters. We must ask the world to come help us put the flame out or the flame shall burn us all to ashes. The issue is no longer about our sovereignty. The issue is now about our very existence as a nation-state.

Our decision makers -- both military and civilian -- somehow remain submerged into all kinds of conspiracy theories involving India, the US and Israel -- and that the whole world is out to destabilize Pakistan. The simple fact is that Pakistan is up against a potent jihadist insurgency, and we would have to take care of this insurgency before it takes care of Pakistan.

On average, terrorist violence is killing 10 Pakistanis a day, every single day. Imagine; 11,129 innocent Pakistanis have already lost their lives. Over the past 9 months, 4,141 innocent Pakistanis have been killed. Last year, Maulana Fazlullah of Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM) actually seized 59 villages in Swat and established a parallel government. On Dec 14, 2007, a "Shura of 40 senior Taliban leaders established the Tehrik-e-Taliban (TTP) as an umbrella organization" and appointed Baitullah Mehsud as its Emir. Imagine; an area covering some 11,000 square kilometres between the Tochi River to the north and the Gomal River to the south has been lost to the de-facto "Islamic Emirate of Waziristan."

In NWFP, at least 20 of the 24 districts have strong militant presence. Parts of Tank, Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan, Lakki Marwat, Kohat, Shangla and Tank are under militant control. In South Waziristan, Pak Army is fighting TTP and elements of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). In Darra Adam Khel, Pak Army is fighting TTP and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. In Swat, Pak Army is battling Fazlullah and his zealots who are part of TTP but in effect represent Al Qaeda. Over the past few months, militants have actually managed to isolate and capture defended government posts (the Sararogha Fort, for instance).

Is this terrorism or is it an insurgency? The distinction is crucial because the state of Pakistan

would have to devise its counter-strategy. Should it be counter- terrorism or counter-insurgency?

The dictionary definition of terrorism is the "unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence by a person or an organized group against people or property with the intention of intimidating or coercing societies or governments, often for ideological or political reasons (The American Heritage Dictionary)." Terrorists generally do not challenge government forces directly and terror groups do not require sympathy or active support of a large portion of the population. As a matter of record, rarely will terrorists attempt to actually control physical terrain.

An insurgency--as oppose to terrorism--is an "armed revolt aimed at overthrowing or subverting the government regime in power." Yes, insurgents use terror as a weapon. Yes, insurgents do believe in "killing one and frightening a thousand." Yes, "terrorism is not always linked with insurgency but insurgency cannot exist without terror." Yes, the "ultimate goal of an insurgency is to challenge the existing government for control of all or a portion of its territory." And, insurgencies "require the active or tacit support of some portion of the population involved." According to counter-insurgency experts, "external support, recognition or approval from other countries or political entities can be useful to insurgents, but is not required."

Clearly, putting the two--terrorism and insurgency--into two distinct caskets is no easy undertaking. Terror, fear, horror and intimidation are common characteristics to both terrorism and insurgency. At the risk of simplifying two rather complex phenomena, the distinguishing characteristic seems to be an insurgency's attempt to actually hold and control physical terrain.

Is Pakistan up against an insurgency or is it terrorism? Answer: It's a little of both. In South and North Waziristan, it is more of an insurgency than terrorism (insurgent elements in Kurram, Orakzai, Kyber, Mohamand and Bajaur are stronger than ever). In Pakistan that lies east of Indus River, it is mostly terrorism.

To be certain, our counter-insurgency as well as our counter-terrorism capabilities are both next to nothing. We have already spent a colossal \$1.43 billion for 18 new F-16C/D combat aircraft, \$667 million for AMRAAM air-to-air missiles, \$298 million for 100 Harpoon anti-ship missiles and \$891 million for 60 mid-life update kits for F-16A/B combat aircraft. We have already spent \$4.55 billion on killing machines that may never be used. Isn't it time to concentrate on counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism? Our very existence as a nation-state depends on it.