
Saving Pakistan (The Daiky Times)

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ANALYSIS: Saving Pakistan — Dr Hasan-Askari Rizvi

It is a wrong assumption that the Taliban will again become friendly to Pakistan if it gives up its support to the US-led war on terrorism. The Taliban have an anarchist agenda that aims at dismantling the Pakistani state

The debate continues unabated on militancy in the tribal areas and how the United States should cope with its spillover in Afghanistan. Official circles in Washington hint at resorting to unilateral military action in the tribal areas against the backdrop of intensified military challenges to American and NATO troops from Afghan and Pakistani Taliban, and the overall deterioration of the security situation in southern Afghanistan.

It may appear quite reasonable to some US military strategists to take unilateral military action in the tribal areas, including the use of ground troops. There is no guarantee that such an action can eliminate militancy in the area. Rather, it may worsen the situation and increase American losses. The US should balance the need to control militancy in the tribal areas with the importance of stability in Pakistan. Any major unilateral US military action in the tribal areas will destabilise Pakistan, which will in turn undermine the US goal of controlling militancy and ensuring stability in Afghanistan.

Despite the current distrust between Pakistan and the US on coping with militancy in and around Pakistan, they will have to work together to address these problems.

American talk of unilateral action unnerves the Government of Pakistan, which is already faltering in addressing acute internal political and economic challenges. Top Pakistani officials attempt to salvage their credibility by declaring that no foreign country will be allowed to undertake military action on Pakistani territory. These statements sound hollow to those who remember periodic US air-strikes and, at times, limited ground offensives in the tribal areas. Any new American offensive will add to the problems of the Pakistani government in the domestic context.

Pakistan is using diplomatic channels to dissuade the US from taking unilateral military action. Its Foreign Minister, Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi, visited the US last week to convince American policymakers that Pakistan views the war on terrorism as its own war and that Pakistan is determined to control extremism and militancy. His spirited defence of Pakistani policy was weakened by the statement of Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani on July 14 on the possibility of "Nine-Eleven-like attacks" on the West from the tribal areas and he admitted that Uzbeks, Chechens and other foreign militants were based there.

Pakistani officials are unable or unwilling to explain why and how these elements have become so entrenched in the tribal areas that many people talk of the specter of another 9/11.

The war on terrorism is so closely identified with the US that a good number of politically active circles in Pakistan, especially those with strong Islamic orientations, do not view it as serving Pakistan's interests. Their worldview is so coloured by anti-America sentiments that they are unable to comprehend the fast increasing threat of extremism and militancy to civic order and stability in Pakistan. This world view was partly modified in the aftermath of the Red Mosque incident when the Taliban and affiliated groups resorted to suicide attacks in parts of the Pakistani mainland; some of them began to view Islamic hardliners as a threat to the Pakistani state and society.

However, there are still people in Pakistan, including some in the military and civilian official circles, who consider Pakistani security operations against militants in the tribal areas and the Red Mosque the sole reason for increased violence. They view Taliban violence as a reaction to the use of force against them by Pakistan and the US rather than a strategy to establish their hegemony in the name of Islam.

Some, including those with military backgrounds, describe militancy as the instrument of the weak to challenge a powerful adversary and they describe suicide attacks as defensive moves by the Taliban, who do not possess advanced military equipment.

Pakistan's civilian leadership, military and intelligence cannot cope with the challenge of extremism and militancy without developing a categorical consensus that Taliban-type elements constitute the main threat to Pakistan's existence as a coherent and effective state. Religious fanaticism and violent enforcement of a narrow interpretation of Islam will tear apart Pakistani society to such an extent that it will not be able to sustain itself as a collective social entity.

Pakistan's salvation lies in working towards an egalitarian, pluralist and democratic political order that derives ethical inspiration from the teaching and ideals of Islam. Pakistan has to identify with and practice Jinnah and Iqbal's vision of a homeland for the Muslims that gave equal status to the followers of other religions.

Pakistan's survival depends on functioning as a nation-state in an inter-dependent international system. Some extremist groups cannot be allowed to hijack Pakistan to pursue their narrow and bigoted agenda.

The political circles have to first develop a consensus among themselves on the dangers of religious extremism and violence. This will make it easy for them to mobilise the people in favour of a tolerant, plural and democratic socio-political order.

People have to be sensitised to a number of issues. First, no individual or group has the right to enforce Islam by coercive means. None of the Taliban leadership is a known Islamic scholar who understands Islamic teachings and principles in their true spirit and recognises diversity in the interpretation of Quranic verses and Shariah.

Second, no group can establish a state within the Pakistani state and resort to public executions, extract money for protection or doing business in the region, kidnap for ransom and dispatch young boys as suicide bombers.

Third, Pakistan should not allow its territory to be used by any group for challenging established authority in a neighbouring state. The principle of sovereignty applies equally to Pakistan and other states.

Fourth, the time has come to finally give up the esoteric notions of 'territorial depth', 'militancy as an instrument of the weak', 'militants as the vanguard of the Pakistan military', and that the Taliban are now contesting the Pakistani state because it is pursuing the American agenda in the region. It is also a wrong assumption that the Taliban will again become friendly to Pakistan if it gives up its support to the US-led war on terrorism. The Taliban have an anarchist agenda that aims at dismantling the Pakistani state.

One of the Pakistani Taliban leaders, Baitullah Mehsud, is said to have delivered an ultimatum to the NWFP government to resign in five days or face his wrath. This shows that the Taliban are determined to confront the Pakistani state because they have learnt from experience that the Pakistani state caves in to their demands. If these trends continue, the Taliban will soon demand the withdrawal of federal administrative and security presence from the tribal areas.

The federal government and the military/intelligence authorities should adopt a determined and unambiguous approach to cope with the militancy challenge. However, the federal government has lost most of its momentum due to its failure to work along with its political partners on restoring the ousted judges and deciding the future of Musharraf. If the political forces continue to drift in different directions, they may not be able to cope with the current challenges to the Pakistani state and may lose the initiative either to the military or to the Taliban.

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Re: Saving Pakistan (The Daiky Times)

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SHEIKH SAADI SHIRAZI (GULISTAN-e-SAAD)

A band of Arab brigands having taken up their position on the top of a mountain and closed the passage of caravans, the inhabitants of the country were distressed by their stratagems and the troops of the sultan foiled because the robbers, having obtained an inaccessible spot on the summit of the mountain, thus had a refuge which they made their habitation. The chiefs of that region held a consultation about getting rid of the calamity because it would be impossible to offer resistance to the robbers if they were allowed to remain.

A tree which has just taken root
May be moved from the place by the strength of a man
But, if thou leavest it thus for a long time,
Thou canst not uproot it with a windlass.
The source of a fountain may be stopped with a bodkin
But, when it is full, it cannot be crossed on an elephant.

The conclusion was arrived at to send one man as a spy and to wait for the opportunity till the brigands departed to attack some people and leave the place empty. Then several experienced men, who had fought in battles, were dispatched to keep themselves in ambush in a hollow of the mountain. In the evening the brigands returned from their excursion with their booty, divested themselves of their arms, put away their plunder and the first enemy who attacked them was asleep, till about a watch of the night had elapsed:

The disk of the sun went into darkness.
Jonah went into the mouth of the fish.

The warriors leapt forth from the ambush, tied the hands of every one of the robbers to his shoulders and brought them in the morning to the court of the king, who ordered all of them to be slain. There happened to be a youth among them, the fruit of whose vigour was just ripening and the verdure on the rose-garden of whose cheek had begun to sprout. One of the veziers, having kissed the foot of the king's throne and placed the face of intercession upon the ground, said: 'This boy has not yet eaten any fruit from the garden of life and has not yet enjoyed the pleasures of youth. I hope your majesty will generously and kindly confer an obligation upon your slave by sparing his life.' The king, being displeased with this request, answered:

'He whose foundation is bad will not take instruction from the good,
To educate unworthy persons is like throwing nuts on a cupola.

'It is preferable to extirpate the race and offspring of these people and better to dig up their roots and foundations, because it is not the part of wise men to extinguish fire and to leave burning coals or to kill a viper and leave its young ones.

If a cloud should rain the water of life
Never sip it from the branch of a willow-tree.
Associate not with a base fellow
Because thou canst not eat sugar from a mat-reed.'

The vezier heard these sentiments, approved of them nolens volens, praised the opinion of the king and said: 'What my lord has uttered is the very truth itself because if the boy had been brought up in the company of those wicked men, he would have become one of themselves. But your slave hopes that he will, in the society of pious men, profit by education and will acquire the disposition of wise persons. Being yet a child the rebellious and perverse temper of that band has not yet taken hold of his nature and there is a tradition of the prophet that every infant is born with an inclination for Islam but his parents make him a Jew, a Christian or a Majusi.'

The spouse of Lot became a friend of wicked persons.
His race of prophets became extinct.
The dog of the companions of the cave for some days
Associated with good people and became a man.

When the vezier had said these words and some of the king's courtiers had added their intercession to his, the king no longer desired to shed the blood of the youth and said: 'I grant the request although I disapprove-of it.'

Knowest thou not what Zal said to the hero Rastam:
'An enemy cannot be held despicable or helpless.
I have seen many a water from a paltry spring
Becoming great and carrying off a camel with its load.'

In short, the vezier brought up the boy delicately, with every comfort, and kept masters to educate him, till they had taught him to address persons in elegant language as well as to reply and he had acquired every accomplishment. One day the vezier hinted at his talents in the presence of the king, asserting that the instructions of wise men had taken effect upon the boy and had expelled his previous ignorance from his nature. The king smiled at these words and said:

'At last a wolf's whelp will be a wolf

Although he may grow up with a man.'

After two years had elapsed a band of robbers in the locality joined him, tied the knot of friendship and, when the opportunity presented itself, he killed the vezier with his son, took away untold wealth and succeeded to the position of his own father in the robber-cave where he established himself. The king, informed of the event, took the finger of amazement between his teeth and said:

'How can a man fabricate a good sword of bad iron?
O sage, who is nobody becomes not somebody by education.
The rain, in the beneficence of whose nature there is no flaw,
Will cause tulips to grow in a garden and weeds in bad soil.
Saline earth will not produce hyacinths.
Throw not away thy seeds or work thereon.
To do good to wicked persons is like Doing evil to good men.'

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