



US/PAKISTAN: Policy reforms seek to stem terrorism

Thursday, May 1 2008

EVENT: The State Department's annual global terrorism report, released yesterday, said that al-Qaida had strengthened itself by using Pakistan's tribal areas to rebuild its leadership and recruit new fighters.

SIGNIFICANCE: The report comes in the wake of a recent US Government Accountability Office (GAO) investigation that heavily criticised US-backed Pakistani counter-insurgency policy. The new government in Islamabad is now mulling talks with 'reconcilable' militants in the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan.

ANALYSIS: Last month's Government Accountability Office (GAO) study painted a bleak picture of US-backed Pakistani efforts to curb terrorism in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). This finding was largely reiterated by yesterday's annual State Department global terrorism report. The continuing presence and regeneration of al-Qaida and Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in the region poses a direct threat to US forces in Afghanistan, and a medium- to long-term danger to both Pakistani and US security. However, the shape of a comprehensive counter-terror policy combining military, economic, political and diplomatic strategies is still being debated in Washington and Islamabad.

Strategic rethink. The United States and Pakistan are re-evaluating their counter-terror efforts in FATA:

- **Islamabad.** The new Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP)-led government in Islamabad wants to utilise all available elements of national power -- military, political, economic and diplomatic -- in confronting the problem (see [PAKISTAN: PPP comes to power with mandate for change - March 25, 2008](#)). This approach may include negotiating peace deals with 'reconcilable elements' of the burgeoning insurgency on the Afghan-Pakistan border.
- **Washington.** For its part, the United States insists that it is also executing a revised strategy, and that it will no longer rely solely on the Pakistani military to draft, implement and monitor counter-terrorism efforts in FATA (see [US/PAKISTAN: New counter-terror strategy is emerging - March 26, 2008](#)). US policy is also intent on recruiting and incorporating support from elected local, provincial and national leaders.

Shared security goals. Washington and the Pakistani government are cognisant of their shared security objectives, and both US and Pakistani policymakers advocate a new, comprehensive approach to counter-terrorism:

1. **Destroying the FATA 'sanctuary.'** Eliminating the sanctuary that FATA affords al-Qaida and the Pakistani Taliban is seen as essential (see [PAKISTAN: Islamabad faces homegrown Taliban threat - February 6, 2008](#)). This might deprive terrorist and insurgent groups of the military, financial and communications resources they have used to regroup and rearm against US forces in Afghanistan and the Pakistani military.
2. **Targeting support networks.** Both sides aim to target extremist madrassas, training camps, financial conduits, and drug and other illicit trade using short-term military intervention that clears a space for sustainable counter-terror remedies. These long-term efforts may include political and constitutional reform, socio-economic development, and public diplomacy.
3. **Building state authority.** There is also a mutual recognition that over the long-term FATA must be properly integrated into the Pakistani state, via political reconciliation, if terrorism is to be uprooted.

Different strategies. However, these common goals disguise some significant differences over strategy:

- **US haste.** Washington is concerned that al-Qaida is capable of launching another mass-casualty attack within the United States. Therefore, it emphasises the need for a swift annihilation of terrorist safe havens in FATA. Recent public statements by President George Bush and the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Michael Hayden, and rising US air strikes in FATA, underline Washington's desire for rapid action.
- **Islamabad emphasises negotiations.** The new Pakistani government has made addressing terrorism a priority, but it has eschewed a purely military approach. Instead, the government has pinned its hopes on negotiating peace deals with some militant elements, such as the recent effort to hold talks the leader of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, Baitullah Mehsud.

US/PAKISTAN: Policy reforms seek to stem terrorism - p. 2 of 3

However, Washington is leery of such engagement, due to the failure of peace talks and truces negotiated during the tenure of the pro-President Pervez Musharraf government that left office last year. Instead, the United States is gradually shifting its aid toward economic development and improving governance, without overt peace deals -- although such efforts have been hampered by ongoing violence.

GAO critique. The GAO report stated, categorically, that Washington had failed to devise a comprehensive counter-terrorism policy in FATA (see [US/PAKISTAN: Long-term policy requires major rethink - January 3, 2008](#)). It identified the reasons for this failure, some recent positive shifts by the administration, and offered several recommendations:

1. **Policy failure causes.** There were two main factors behind this policy failure:
 - **Overdependence on Pakistani military.** The United States provided 10.5 billion dollars in aid to Pakistan from 2002-07. Approximately 5.8 billion dollars was earmarked by Islamabad for FATA but only 4% was used for non-military projects; the rest was used to 'reimburse' the military. Therefore, FATA's development and political needs were ignored.
 - **Interagency disconnect.** The US National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), the '9-11 Commission', and Congress have all sought a comprehensive plan to interdict terrorists in FATA. Yet interagency disconnect led to the underutilisation of all elements of US power, including diplomatic, military, intelligence, development assistance and law enforcement.
2. **Positive shifts.** However, there have recently been some positive developments:
 - **Embassy group.** Beginning in 2006, the Departments of State, Defense and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) began to coordinate strategy better at the US embassy in Islamabad.
 - **Development and governance.** Since 2006, more emphasis has been placed on the development and governance needs of FATA, including improving the economic infrastructure, schools and medical facilities. The importance of political and constitutional issues was also acknowledged.
3. **GAO recommendations.** The report called for remedial action in two areas:
 - **Better coordination.** Building on the Islamabad embassy's example, US agencies should define common outcomes, develop joint strategies and agree on the ideal roles and responsibilities. In addition to joint reports that aid in monitoring and evaluating a comprehensive counter-terrorism plan, agency-specific reports and performance management systems are seen as equally important to defining and monitoring success.
 - **Clear directives.** A comprehensive policy should be drafted, implemented and monitored under clear directives from Congress and the executive branch. The model here appears to be the recent US troop 'surge' in Iraq.

Pakistan's new policy. Pakistan's new civilian leaders were not involved in the US-backed Pakistani counter-terrorism programme of 2002-07, and appear to share many of the GAO's views. Yet while Islamabad is clearly backing non-military action such as political reconciliation and economic development in FATA, the government is less clear on how it intends to draft, implement and monitor its counter-terrorism policy beyond three areas:

- **National reconciliation.** Prime Minister Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani's cabinet appears to be working with a cooperative army, now under the command of Ashfaq Parvez Kayani (see [PAKISTAN: PM has good credentials, limited authority - April 3, 2008](#)). Touting their democratic credentials, Pakistani politicians want a second chance to seal peace deals with moderate militants. They argue that this time peace will lead to security because they have learned from past failures, and democratic leaders will be seen as legitimate brokers.
- **Development aid.** Islamabad wants to create job opportunities for FATA residents, as an alternative to joining militant militias.
- **Improved governance.** In his first speech to parliament, Gilani promised to withdraw or amend controversial colonial-era regulations -- the Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR) of 1901. While many provincial and national parliamentarians disagree with his characterisation of the FCR as extreme and impractical, there is a consensus that the regulations must be reformed to address the separate and unequal citizenship status of FATA residents.

US/PAKISTAN: Policy reforms seek to stem terrorism - p. 3 of 3

Outlook. If US and Pakistani agencies seeking to clamp down on terrorism in FATA, increase interagency coordination and agree upon a comprehensive policy, there is some chance of success. While both countries are pursuing a usefully reformed approach, success may require better and tighter coordination than in the past.

CONCLUSION: Multifaceted and non military-centric US-Pakistan cooperation is a prerequisite for decisively interdicting terrorists and their safe havens in FATA. Otherwise apposite reforms on parallel tracks will almost certainly fail.

Keywords: NA, United States, Afghanistan, international relations, politics, social, aid, foreign policy, government, guerrillas, military, population, security, terrorism, economy, education, espionage, ethnic, welfare

Word Count (approx): 1282