The New Taliban Warlords and Organization

Syed Manzar Abbas ZAIDI

Abstract: This paper traces the resurgence and reorganization of the Taliban into a new organizational entity, the Taliban in Pakistan. The Taliban, forced to flee Afghanistan, have found a haven in Pakistan’s tribal areas, re-organizing and recruiting anew in the process. Pakistani Taliban are ideologically similar to the Taliban in Afghanistan, but are organized in distinct organizational entities. They are, in effect, the new face of the Taliban. A comprehension of the evolution of this phenomenon is a vital aid to any research into the gravity of the geopolitical situation. The study traces the profiles of their warlords, organizations, and terror tactics.

Keywords: Taliban, Terrorism, Fundamentalism, Jihad.

Introduction

The 1978-92 Afghan war caused a regional and human rights catastrophe, and in its aftermath created a radicalization of the tribal mind set in Afghanistan and Waziristan. In Afghanistan, it created the Taliban; in FATA, it has resulted in their reorganization in the shape of the new Taliban.

When a jihadi model was used in evicting the Soviets from Afghanistan, little thought was given to its after-effects, which have included, amongst others, a severe radicalization of tribal thought in Pakistan. It may be argued that the FATA areas were conservative from the very start. However, there is a difference between the early separatism-oriented tribalism of FATA and the

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* Syed Manzar Abbas Zaidi is a lecturer in Policing and Criminal Investigation at the University of Central Lancashire, U.K.
1 The most troubled tribal territory of Pakistan in terms of Talibanisation.
2 FATA stands for “Federally Administered Tribal Areas” in Pakistan. For more details, see the author’s article ‘The New Taliban-1: Emergence’. 
contemporary Islamist agenda. This is not a war with physical targets to be achieved; it is ideological, and thus based on emotive elements.

From 1978-1992, $66 billion worth of weaponry was introduced into the region, working out at $134 million per person. A result of Pakistan’s reliance on the jihadist intervention model, led to the creation of a worldwide network of Afghan war veterans of all nationalities. The widespread prevalence of radicalization prevailing in Pakistani tribal areas has created a nexus between the local jihadist and the ordinary unemployed youth. This has led to the rebirth of the Taliban movement in the area.

The military’s use of proxy warriors in the shape of the tribals had become common after the Afghan Jihad. These were the perfect weapons which compensated for the unbalanced military strength between India and Pakistan; ideologically motivated, ferocious, and cheap to maintain. The Pakistani military began more active proxy penetration into Kashmir and Afghanistan after the start of jihad against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan from 1978-92, with the help of these readily available weapons. These weapons have now turned inwards against the state, and the world of the ‘unbelievers’ in general.

In trying to pin the contextual parameters in which the Taliban in Pakistan have arisen, one can lay down some basic defining characteristics:

The New Taliban is composed mainly of Pakistani tribesmen who have been radicalized by the rhetoric of jihad, specifically due to the invasion of Afghanistan by the coalition forces. They are thus a post-afghan Taliban phenomenon, but intimately related to it.

They have a natural suspicion of strangers, and a tradition of resistance, fuelled by the tribal code of *Pashtunwali*. They have constantly been used since the inception of Pakistan as proxy warriors, to fill a capacity gap between India and Pakistan, their natural warrior instincts having been used to the fullest in Kashmir by the ISI (Inter Services Intelligence, the premier intelligence agency of Pakistan).

During the Soviet jihad, the tribals were freely exposed to radical doctrines by the presence of committed fighters in their midst. The misfortune of the area has been due to close proximity with Afghanistan, thus it was used as a training and indoctrination base by the ISI-CIA nexus and the Islamist parties. By then, the example of Taliban had favorably captured the imagination of the people, and local parties mimicking the Taliban arose. Many of the Waziristan tribesmen took part in the Afghan Jihad against the Soviets from 1989 and later joined the Taliban in their civil war.

After the disintegration of the Taliban in 2001, a new jihad against the allies in Afghanistan has started, but the venue is the tribal belt of Pakistan abutting Afghanistan. The writ of the state does

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3 For more details see author’s article: ‘The new Taliban-2: Ideological Sanction’.
5 *Pashtunwali* is the pre-Islamic Pashtun code of conduct which regulated the intra and inert tribal dynamics. It is more of a set of principles, rather than codified laws. Honor and chivalry occupy a central theme in this tradition, along with undying loyalty to the tribe, and fierce opposition to occupation.
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not run here; warlords like Baitullah Mehsud in South Waziristan, and Sadiq Noor in North Waziristan or the Iraqi Arab Abu Kasha in Mirali have more power.

At the conclusion of the Soviet-Afghan War, the militant Taliban, forced to flee from Afghanistan, found a safe haven in the FATA and Waziristan. It was here that they engrossed themselves in the process of reorganization and undertaking fresh recruitment directly or through madrassahs (religious seminaries), which were flourishing after the collapse of the state educational system. Emotionally charged locals, the Pashtuns, had been living well below subsistence level for a long time under successive governments in Pakistan. A combination of abject poverty and an ultra orthodox religious zeal and hatred for the Western powers, provided a fertile nursery for this new class of militants.

These militants have become so powerful in the area that the life of more moderate residents has become unbearable. Investments made in tribal region for development, were nullified by the militants forcibly discouraging female education to the extent, that the schools and colleges meant for female education were torched. Life has become extremely hard for the tribals by denying them even the meager facilities which they were used to. Music and television are banned. This new generation of Taliban is under the influence of al-Qaeda, and is supplemented by militants of different localities, like Chechens, Bosnians, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Arabs, and Egyptians, who have started dictating their terms based on the conservative interpretation of Islam as per the beliefs and practices of a distorted version of the Deobandi school of thought. To them other sects like Barelvis and Shiias are Kafirs (infidels), and, therefore, Wajib-ul-Qatl, or liable to be killed without evoking any legal or religious sanction. A new organizational technique adopted by these New (Pakistani) Taliban is their organization district-wise, which facilitates hitting their targets in settled districts like Peshawar, Dera Ismail Khan, Hazarajat, and the capital city of Islamabad, etc.

Amongst these terrorists, Baitullah Mehsud has established his stronghold in South Waziristan, Sadiq Noor is ruling North Waziristan, Iraqi Arab Abu Kasha is holding the fort at Mirali and, similarly, Najmuddin Uzbek is also in the FATA. Out of these militants, Baitullah Mehsud has had the most meteoric rise. He is fighting a pitched guerilla war against Pakistani Defense and Paramilitary forces with alarming success so far. He is now heading the Tehreek-e-Taliban-e-Pakistan (TTP) formed on December 15, 2007, and is commanding a well-organized force of 20,000-30,000 fighters, who are always at his beck and call. Suicide human bombers are sent by him to inflict heavy casualties on military, paramilitary, and the police personnel on a regular basis. This is the first experience of this kind that the state forces are confronting.

Another surprise in the hitherto peaceful district of Swat is the emergence of a militant leader known as Maulana Fazlullah, who is working under the guidance of Baitullah Mehsud and following his instructions for the carnage and murder of tribal elders, setting music and television shops aflame, torching girls’ schools and colleges, and ordering compulsory beards for all males. He is the son-in-law of Sufi Muhammad, Commander of Tanzeem-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammad (TNSM).

In this paper, I undertake an examination of the profiles and organizational strengths of the more prominent leaders of the new Taliban, which is vital to any strategic comprehension of the geo-politics in the area. This is a focused area study, which would tend to rely on locally originating reports and intelligence. The Implications of the spread of the phenomenon are,
however, regional and even global, since the New Taliban are, in essence, a legacy of the old one in Afghanistan, and arguably just as organized and dangerous.

**A Profile of Baitullah Mehsud**

I have endeavoured in this section to trace the ascent to power of Baitullah Mehsud, considered in some intelligence circles as a threat as big as, or bigger than, even Osama bin Laden. His rise from a relatively little known entity, to the head of a fully fledged Taliban movement in Pakistan, has not only grave repercussions for local security, but also for the global war on terror. The rise of this movement in Pakistan is not just a local disturbance, but the phenomenon of resurgence of the Taliban after their setback in Afghanistan, with Mehsud as a protégé of Mullah Omar taking charge.

Baitullah Mehsud has recently been named in Time magazine's 100 most influential people in the world. Newsweek has labeled him "more dangerous than Osama bin Laden". Certainly, he has become a household name in Pakistan, and an almost endless source of worry for intelligence and strategic circles. His meteoric rise to infamy is coupled with an almost mysterious shroud of secrecy, which has surrounded him from the very inception of his career. It is be a worthwhile exercise to trace his ascent up the extremist ladder, to the head of the Taliban in Pakistan.

Baitullah Mehsud, a Pashtun from the Broomikhel branch of the Shabikhel sub-tribe of Mehsuds, was born to late Muhammad Haroon in the early 1970s in a village called Landi Dhok in the Bannu region of the North Western Frontier Province at a distance from the Mehsud tribe’s stronghold⁶ in South Waziristan. Geographically, the whole of Waziristan is a single unit. However for administrative convenience it has been split into two agencies, i.e. North and South Waziristan. The area has been described as inhospitable terrain, with high and difficult hills and deep and rugged defiles.

In the family, Baitullah Mehsud had four male siblings⁷ by the names of Muhammad Yaqoob, Muhammad Ishaq, Yayha Khan and Zahir Shah. One of his brothers is a major in the army on active duty, and is purportedly helping the forces to capture him.⁸ Twelve years ago, as a young student of a local religious seminary, i.e. madrassah, Baitullah Mehsud was immensely inspired by Taliban ideology, and made frequent visits to Afghanistan as a volunteer to participate in the process of enforcement of Sharia by the Taliban. As a traditional tribal man, he is evidently a

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⁶ *Daily Times* newspaper, March 31. It is important to understand the modalities of publishing of Pakistani newspapers to understand the style of referencing, which broadly follows the Chicago manual of style. All newspapers quoted are national editions, unless stated otherwise, and most references are extracted from the news sections, again unless specifically stated to be from a different section. Most have an online version, which takes the researcher to a home page, from where the archives can be accessed. Unfortunately, some newspapers have a tendency to cancel links to the more diverse pages in the archives without notice, in which case accessing the hard copy has to be the only option.


skilled marksman and expert in using small arms. Baitullah calls himself a Talib, and swears by Mullah Omar, despite signing a deal with the Pakistani army in February 2005, in which Baitullah and three other tribal leaders furnished an unconditional guarantee to the government that he or his tribe would not support or shelter al-Qaeda terrorists.

Baitullah never went to a formal school or finished his religious education in any religious seminary. Mehsud, believed to be around 35, is suffering from diabetes and is permanently under treatment for his aforementioned physical handicap.

A local tribal chieftain divulged to IslamOnline.net on condition of anonymity, that “despite his diabetes, he is a very active man and keeps changing his hideouts frequently and briskly in order to be clueless to the hostile agencies,” he noted.

“Personally, he is a very generous and polite man. I have met him once some six months back. I found him a good person, and felt nothing extraordinary about him.”

As a guerrilla fighter, Mehsud sharpened his skills under the guidance of legendary Pashtun commander Maulana Jalaluddin Haqqani, who is widely believed to have helped Osama bin Laden escape the targeted bombing by the United States in the Tora Bora mountains of Afghanistan in early 2002.

Known as Amir (commander) among his followers, Mehsud was an unknown figure on the tribal scene until late 2004, when he filled the vacuum left by the famous tribal militant leader, Nek Muhammad Wazir, who was killed in a missile attack in June 2004.

His name appeared for the first time in newspapers after the abduction of Chinese engineers about two years back as an aide to Abdullah Mehsud, a former Guantanamo detainee who later played an important part as a commander of the local Taliban.

Baitullah was earlier more or less in the shadow of Abdullah Mehsud, but has come into his own now.

Baitullah and Abdullah, both hailing from the powerful Mehsud tribe of Pashtuns, were inseparable initially, but parted their ways soon. Abdullah fought for the Taliban in Afghanistan against the Northern Alliance and in 1996 lost a leg when he stepped on a land mine. He was taken captive by warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum who turned him over to American forces. Abdullah Mehsud was sent to Camp Delta at Guantanamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba and held prisoner for two years, insisting the whole time that he was just an innocent tribesman. He was released in 2004 for reasons remaining unclear, and returned to Waziristan. Soon after his return, he

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10 Latif (2008)
11 Ibid.
13 Nasir (2006)
orchestrated the kidnapping of two Chinese engineers working on a dam in his region, proclaiming that Beijing was guilty of killing Muslims. He also ordered an attack on Pakistan's Interior Minister in which 31 people perished.

Abdullah, upon whom Baitullah had once had suspicions of being a double agent, was killed in a shootout in July 2007, in Zhob district of south western Baluchistan province on the Afghan borders. This happened in a clash with Pakistani military forces as they raided his residence, as a result of which he detonated a grenade and killed himself. His death was a crucial element in catapulting Baitullah to the top leadership slot in South Waziristan and areas in its vicinity.

On February 7, 2005, Baitullah Mehsud signed a deal with the federal government which the latter interpreted as his surrender, though denying this claim his associates called it merely a peace agreement. One might call by whatever term one might prefer, but it is a fact that Baitullah Mehsud and scores of his supporters laid down arms in a tribal Jirga meeting. It is also an undeniable fact that he was wanted by the government for allegedly sheltering and assisting al-Qaeda fugitives in areas dominated by the Mehsud tribe.

As a part of the peace agreement, Baitullah pledged that he and his associates would not provide assistance to al-Qaeda and other militants, and would not launch operations against government forces. Baitullah, at that time, explained that the peace agreement was in the interests of the tribal regions as well as in the interest of the government of Pakistan, since hostile forces like India and Russian-backed former Northern Alliance fighters were benefiting from the lack of unity between the government and the tribesmen. This has been more or less a consistent theme in his communications. He has referred to the Pakistani army as a national institution which he does not see weakened by infighting. “We understand fighting against Pakistani security forces did not help the Taliban at all,” he told an assembled audience of press: “Pakistan has also realized that fighting tribal people is undermining it. Pakistan’s enemies are India, the Northern Alliance and Russia.”

In return for amnesty, Mehsud promised not to attack security posts or cross into Afghanistan for jihad, though he backed out of this commitment in late August 2007 following the Red Mosque military operation in Islamabad. If nothing else, this treaty has tremendously raised his stature amongst his own men, and established him as a negotiating entity on a par with the government, also allowing a respite to widen and further strengthen his support base. Mehsud further consolidated his hold, and established his warlord credentials, when the government conceded to his demand to free militant prisoners in return for releasing more than 240 Pakistani soldiers.

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15 Latif (2008)
16 Nasir (2006)
17 The Nation newspaper (February 8, 2005).
18 Ibid.
19 Daily Times and Dawn newspapers (February 7, 2005).
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seized by his fighters, and held hostage for two and half months. Among the released militants were presumably a number of would-be suicide bombers.\textsuperscript{21}

According to his aides, Mehsud has taken an oath of allegiance to the Taliban supreme leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar. Apart from sharing the same ideologies on sharia and jihad, Mehsud also shares with his spiritual leader an aversion to publicity and photographs.\textsuperscript{22}

The militants have established their bases and strongholds in the rugged terrain of the tribal belts of Waziristan and Wana, straddling the border with Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{23} They have been implicated in more than 60 suicide attacks in Pakistan over the last year, including the assassination of Benazir Bhutto on December 27, 2007.

The assassination of Benazir has catapulted Mehsud into the mainstream as much as Mullah Omar. Baitullah was a relatively unknown entity to lay Pakistanis until an English daily in October 2007 quoted a “low-profile tribal leader” as threatening to exterminate Benazir Bhutto if she returned to Pakistan. Bhutto was largely seen to have returned to Pakistan riding on a wave of American support.\textsuperscript{24}

Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan, the founder of Pakistan’s nuclear program, was quoted as saying that, upon Benazir Bhuatto triumphant return to Pakistan in October 2007,\textsuperscript{25} Baitullah instructed al-Qaeda militants in Karachi to kill her for “three major offences against Islamists.” First, she stated in clear terms that the Pakistani military’s operation on ‘Lal Masjid’ (the Red Mosque) in Islamabad on July 10, 2007 as justified and proportionate. Lal Masjid is an extremely emotive issue on the Pakistani radical scene; one hundred and sixty-four Pakistani special-forces commandos stormed the mosque and madrassah, killing at least 20 and injuring over 100 radicals holed up inside. Second, Bhutto had engaged in a vigorous shuttle diplomacy with Washington and, probably as a corollary, had stated in unequivocal terms that if she succeeded in taking power in Pakistan, she would allow an American search for Osama bin Laden inside Pakistan’s borders. This is anathema to extremists. Finally, she made a pre-electoral statement that she would allow the International Atomic Energy Agency to question A. Qadeer Khan. Mehsud has indicated that he considers the detention of Dr. Qadeer over alleged nuclear contraband smuggling to radical buyers as unjustified and unsubstantiated, and an American ploy.

The militant commander is said to be the man who has masterminded most of the recent suicide attacks in the country. A UN report released in September last year blamed Mehsud for almost 80 percent of suicide bombings in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{26} According to some reports, Mehsud has

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{21} Ibid.
\bibitem{24} Latif (2008)
\bibitem{25} BBC (2007)
\bibitem{26} \textit{Daily Times} newspaper [Lahore edition] (September 30, 2007).
\end{thebibliography}
compiled his own hit list of political leaders and high-profile government officials, and has formed special squads for carrying out such terrorist acts. While he has admitted targeting military personnel in reprisal attacks, he has usually denied attacking any political figures. In particular, he denied on October 18, 2008, that he had anything to do with the assassination of Benazir Bhutto in December 2007.

He claimed that it was against tribal custom to kill women. However, the truth of this is arguable since Benazir was hoping to return to the Pakistani political scene as an icon of the war against terror. It is also an undeniable fact that there was a strong anti-Benazir feeling among the militants. When a BBC reporter spoke to some of them in October, days before the first attack, most regarded her as an “American pawn” and some openly condemned her for belonging to the minority Muslim Shia sect, which makes her apostate in the eyes of many of these ultra orthodox Sunnis. Many of them are of the opinion that Benazir Bhutto got what she deserved. Some investigators maintain that extremists from radical groups such as the sectarian Lashkar-e-Jhangvi could have been responsible for the October attack, and conspiracy theories abound regarding her assassination. Be that as it may, for the moment, however, the media-shy Taliban commander is very well poised to grab first spot as Pakistan’s public enemy number one, both within the country, and internationally.

Mehsud’s name regularly began to emerge in daily news reports, after President Pervez Musharraf imposed a state of emergency, which marked a watershed in Pakistani political history. Some have tended to portray Baitullah as merely an annoying thorn in Musharraf's shoe, while others have consistently seen him as a key figure that can disturb the political equilibrium in Pakistan. It is pertinent to mention here that the Mehsud is the biggest belligerent tribe in South Waziristan, with 60 per cent of the 700,000 population, while the rival Waziris make up 35 per cent. Michael V. Hayden, the director of the CIA, has gone on record to mention the level of threat. Hayden said in a 45-minute interview with The Washington Post: “What you see is, I think, a change in the character of what’s going on there,” adding, “You’ve got this nexus now that probably was always there in latency but is now active: a nexus between al-Qaeda and various extremist and separatist groups.” Hayden added, “It is clear that their intention is to continue to try to do harm to the Pakistani state as it currently exists.”

This young and committed jihadi has consistently acted as a liaison and more, for the Pakistani Taliban and those on the other side of the Pak-Afghan border. Mehsud’s Taliban connections are a moot point now but it was not always so as earlier his Taliban connections were sometimes a point of conjecture. Many had believed that Mehsud had been involved in the Taliban insurgency in

27 Daily Times (May 31, 2007).
28 BBC (2007).
30 BBC (2007).
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Afghanistan by dispatching his men to fight against the U.S. led Coalition forces, a point which seems quite probable in hindsight. A close aide of Mehsud, Hakimullah Mehsud, was captured by NATO forces in the border region while trying to cross into Afghanistan with five foreign fighters.  

Mehsud was initially intensely media-shy; one would suspect that he was in this respect emulating his spiritual and religious mentor, Mullah Omar, but he has recently become far less reclusive and is not above flaunting his power occasionally. His operations now boast of more or less openly operating terror training camps near the Afghan border, and the destruction of a suicide bombing ‘nursery’ in Spinkai by Pakistani troops was flouted in the media as evidence of his operational strength. Even more intriguingly, there is evidence that he is in possession of state of the art intelligence monitoring equipment, which relies on encrypted information to monitor Pakistani troop movements in real time.  

Pakistani intelligence circles have so far been unable to decrypt these signals.

Brig (r) Mahmud Shah, ex-secretary security Fata, suggested the government should dislodge local militants from foreign fighters who, he said, were the actual players of the game. “Their actual masters are these foreigners and our government should seriously work towards separating both of them. Otherwise these jirgas would have no role to play in resolving the conflict,” he declared.

Baitullah seems to be obsessed with the concept of jihad, which is the militant’s hallmark. He draws his authority from verses of the Holy Koran, citing several verses to defend his stance that non-Muslim foreign forces must be evicted from Islamic countries. “Allah on 480 occasions in the Holy Koran extols Muslims to wage jihad. We only fulfil God’s orders. Only jihad can bring peace to the World,” he says.  

The militant leader has been active in fighting foreign troops in Afghanistan, and apparently the traditional Pashtun aversion to invaders also runs in his blood. “We will continue our struggle until foreign troops are thrown out. Then we will attack them in the US and Britain until they either accept Islam or agree to pay jazia (a tax in Islam for non-Muslims living in an Islamic state).” Suicide bombers are a vital tool in his arsenal; he has predicted that they are capable of giving a bloodier nose to foreign forces in Afghanistan “in the years to come.” “The mujahideen will carry out even more severe attacks. If they [the West] have air power we have fidayeen [suicide bombers]... They will leave dishonoured.”  

The militant leader has contested an American general’s claim that a Taliban leader, Jalaluddin Haqqani, was present in the tribal region and was organising attacks across the border. “This is all lies. They don’t have any evidence.”

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32 Dawn newspaper (March 8, 2007).
33 The News newspaper (August 5, 2008).
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
Thus, he is playing a definite and pivotal role in the upsurge of militancy in the North-West of the country, in turn having a direct bearing on the political situation in the country, with grave ramifications for international security.

“Tehreek-E-Taliban” – The Face of the Taliban In Pakistan

The Tehreek-e- Taliban, the movement of Taliban in Pakistan (TTP), was formed on Dec 15, 2007, and launched attacks against the security forces and government installations after their demand for halting military operations in the tribal areas and Swat valley was turned down by the government. Their main demand was to end military operations in North and South Waziristan tribal areas as well as Swat, but they also demanded the release of Maulana Abdul Aziz Ghazi, Imam of Lal Masjid (mosque) in Islamabad. Even though various sources seemed to be reporting a rift between Mullah Omar and the Afghan Taliban on one hand, and Baitullah Mehsud and Omar on the other in late January 2008, it was not a stumbling block for his appointment as Head of the Taliban movement. The reports seemed to suggest that the rift arose because he was focusing on attacks in Pakistan, rather than in Afghanistan. It seems probable that the rift has healed or otherwise did not exist. The phenomenal rise of Baitullah Mehsud played a significant role after President Pervez Musharraf loosened his grip on power, simply because, amongst other factors, the Taliban in the tribal areas and the Northwest Frontier Province have united under the aegis of Baitullah Mehsud, which provides them with a single banner and a single leader.

In December 2007, a shura, or council, of 40 senior Taliban leaders, formalized his appointment as head of Pakistani Taliban, which gives him centralized control of not only militant groups in Waziristan, but also Swat and adjoining areas. “The shura was made up of Taliban representatives from the seven tribal agencies of North and South Waziristan, Khyber, Orakzai, Bajaur, Mohmand, and Kurram, as well as the settled districts of Swat, Bannu, Tank, Lakki Marwat, Dera Ismail Khan, Kohistan, Buner, and the Malakand division.”38 The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan has a straightforward agenda: they have reiterated their continuation of jihad against coalition forces in Afghanistan as their main point. At the same time, they issued a warning to the Pakistani establishment; cease military operations against the Tehrik-i-Taliban, desist from hostilities, and release prisoners or face the consequences. “The meeting participants have demanded an immediate end of the military operation being carried out in Swat, and given a 10-day ultimatum to the government to pull its troops out of the area,” the Nation reported. The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan also demanded “the closure of the military check posts in North and South Waziristan and release of all Taliban activists including former Lal Masjid Khateeb Maulana Abul Aziz.”

“Our main aim is to target the US allies in Afghanistan but the government of Pakistan’s ill-strategy has made us to launch a defensive jihad in Pakistan,” spokesman Maulvi Omar stated. “The government of Pakistan would be paid in the same coin now,” Mehsud said.39 “The consolidation of the disparate ‘local Taliban’ movement is a logical step in the Taliban’s
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insurgency campaign in north-western Pakistan. The Pakistani Taliban, while allied with al-Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban, has operated as local groups. The creation of a unified Taliban movement in Pakistan will allow them a better coordination with Afghan Taliban and al-Qaeda thus affording better military and political advantages inside Pakistan.40

Mehsud has superseded some able and influential Taliban leaders in his nomination as the Amir of the Pakistani Taliban in North and South Waziristan, including Sadiq Noor, Mullah Nazir, and Noor Islam. It is unclear if Faqir Mohammed of Bajaur and the outlawed Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM, the Movement for the Implementation of Mohammad’s Sharia Law) were represented at the meeting, but one cannot rule out its possibility.41 A representative of Maulana Fazlullah’s Swat branch of the TNSM was also in attendance. “Abu Kasha, a key link between al-Qaeda’s Majlis-e-Shura [central organizing committee] and the Taliban, is also said to hold a senior position in the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan.”42 Furthermore, these dissident terrorist forces are equipped with the weaponry of suicide bombers, the like of which has never before been seen aside from some classical references in antiquity of the assassins’ cult. Obviously, it is a threat to humanity, as well as the human progress made by man over centuries, and its consequences become direr by the possibility of the indiscriminate use of nuclear energy falling into the hands of these people. This has certainly not gone unnoticed in intelligence circles; the director of the CIA, Hayden, has been quoted as saying: “The Afghan-Pakistan border region has been an area of focus for this agency since about 11 o’clock in the morning of September 11, [2001] and I really mean this,” adding, “We haven’t done a whole lot of retooling there in the last one week, one month, three months, six months and so on. This has been up there among our very highest priorities.”43 Terrorists, as a part of their worldwide strategy in Pakistan, are displaying a more or less identical pattern in North Western Frontier Province, North and South Waziristan as they are in Afghanistan. The borders between the two countries are by no means impervious, so militants are infiltrating to and simultaneously from the adjoining areas of Afghanistan. These routes had traditionally been offering easy access to members of the tribes existing on either side of the border, and then the supplies of Afghan Mujahideen. These terrorists in FATA are sharing commonalities of objectives with the Afghan Taliban inasmuch as enforcement of Shariah is concerned, hence their tactics of defying government writ by putting the schools to torch, especially the girls’ schools. Mullah Omar’s leadership of the Taliban is, therefore, not very different from the one provided by Baitullah Mehsud to his private army, i.e. Lashkar in FATA.

Maulana Fazlullah

Once considered a haven for tourists from all over the country as well as the globe, Swat44 has long depended heavily on the revenue generated through the tourism industry.45 A rough estimate

40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
44 Population: 1,257,602; area: 5,337 sq. km; sub-divisions: Matta and Swat; population density: 235.6 persons per sq km; urban ratio: 13.8 per cent; main clans: Yousafzai Pathans, Mians, Kohistanis, Gujar
puts the dependence of more than 60 per cent of the region’s inhabitants upon the hospitality industry, which has ground to a complete halt in the wake of violent clashes between militants and security forces, leaving almost 1200 hotels and thousands of people unemployed and suffering from an identity crisis of faith.

The advent of this pervasive movement can be traced back to July 2006, when Maulana Fazlullah came into the limelight. His religious lineage can be traced to Maulana Sufi Muhammad of Tehreek-e-Nifaze-Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TNSM), who is the father-in-law of Fazlullah. It is worth mentioning here that Sufi Muhammad passed a decree declaring military training compulsory for every Muslim. Hundreds of TNSM workers, paying heed to this call, reportedly went for military training in Afghanistan. Sufi was imprisoned for leading an ‘army’ of 10,000 men to Afghanistan to fight alongside the Taliban against the US-led coalition forces and the Northern Alliance. He had been in the Dera Ismail Khan jail for more than six years but has recently been released into the custody of Fazlullah under the auspices of an agreement reached between the militants and the government. (See news report by Riaz Khan, ‘Cease Fire in Pakistan’s Swat Valley’, Associated Press of Pakistan (May 9, 2008).)

Maulana Fazlullah devised a novel strategy of radical preaching; he installed an FM radio channel in 2004, which is now being clandestinely operated. His message was simple: anti-US and anti-government rhetoric, interspersed with a call for support of Taliban in Afghanistan and the establishment of an Islamic state. The title of ‘Radio Mulla’ given to him is apt. According to one estimate there are about 30 FM Radio channels being operated in Swat churning out an indigenous mix of jihadi propaganda. The government has tried to counter this by stepping up the frequencies of the local channels to block this transmission, but these propaganda machines have proved quite effective at covert relocation and transmission.

News reports coming out of Swat give measure to his meteoric rise to popularity by the fact that when he gave a call for the establishment of a madrassah on the banks of the Swat River, Rs. 3.8 million were collected, reportedly within 24 hours, and this later rose to Rs 35 million. The Mulla preaches an essentially fundamentalist and Talibanised ideology. This has prompted attacks on CD shops, a mandatory ban on shaving of beards, and threats to girls’ education, all purportedly based on the Shariah. The threats have also materialized now in the form of the

46 The Mulla has conceded that he had thrice crossed over to Afghanistan to fight alongside the Taliban. The last campaign was to accompany Maulana Sufi Mohammad and his 10,000 followers, in November 2001, to fight the US-led coalition forces and the Northern Alliance.
47 Reportedly, Maulana Masood Azhar formed the militant Jaish-i-Muhammad in Swat after being released from prison in India due to a deal being brokered between the two countries. This organization later imparted jihadi training to TNSM activists.
The destruction of women’s colleges in Swat. This has dealt a crippling blow to the educational prospects of women in that area. It is worthwhile mentioning here that this area of the country had achieved the highest literacy rate for women compared with neighboring districts. Even the religious class was tolerant of women’s education, music, movies, internet, etc. which have become taboo under the new religious leadership. It was only after some time that it was realized by the policy echelons of government that a FATA-type situation was developing in a hitherto open society, which was unprecedented in Pakistan. The measures taken by the Mulla echo images of Taliban whipping women in Afghanistan, which has just been a media report for most Pakistanis until now, but seems to have assumed cataclysmic proportions in a major commercially thriving city which had a robust hospitality culture. Curfew was finally imposed when gun battles between Maulana Fazlullah and security forces failed to resolve the issues in four subdivisions of the Swat district, namely Matta, Kabal, Charbagh and Khwaza Khela.

The situation took an ominous turn when the Fazlullah-led militants joined Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), formed by top Pakistani militant Baitullah Mehsud on December 14 last year, in a bid to provide an umbrella to all insurgent movements operating in several tribal agencies and settled areas of NWFP. With this, the movement fell into the hands of tribal-areas-based Taliban and Maulana Fazlullah lost his authority to make decisions independently. The Swat-based Taliban were previously insisting only on the promulgation of the Shariah but they have started making increasingly strident demands from the government. Now they want the government to kowtow to Baitullah's tough conditions, or else they are not going to end the insurgency. A negotiated agreement was reached regarding a ceasefire on May 31, 2008, which has fallen to pieces, with both sides blaming each other for the failure of the negotiation process. Given this situation in the ongoing insurgency, "Baitullah Mehsud has the last word on the agreement, and until his permission we cannot resume talks aimed at the enforcement of the accord," spokesman for the Swat Taliban Muslim Khan told TNS.

In the peace deal, the government has accepted the pressing demand of the militants, besides others, to enforce Shariah but they are now toeing Baitullah’s line. In fact, Swat’s problem has become further complicated and now there is little chance of a lasting solution, whether military or peaceful. The success of any peace deal is conditional on the situation in the tribal agencies. According to Swati Taliban, in case of any action in tribal areas, the pact would automatically stand terminated.

The NWFP government and Swati Taliban have their own compulsions and could not implement any deal despite sincerity from both sides. It would be wise for the government to realize the ground reality and directly talk to Baitullah for an effective peace accord in Swat since Fazlullah is no more the person calling the shots, or it must devise another strategy to eliminate militancy.

49 Militants razed the government girls’ high school in Charbagh to the ground using a combination of explosives and incendiary materials, The News (May 5, 2008).
“Though Swat was the epicenter of the Maulana Fazlullah-led militancy and suffered heavily due to acts of violence by militants and as a consequence of military operations, other parts of Malakand region too faced fallout of the volatile situation in the valley. Taliban fighters affiliated to the faction of Tanzim Ni’fat-i-Shariat-i-Mohammad (TNSM) headed by Fazlullah also briefly occupied Alpuri, headquarters of adjoining Shangla district, and received reinforcements and support from Upper Dir, Lower Dir and Buner districts and Bajaur and Malakand agencies. The original TNSM, banned by the government after its founder and Fazlullah’s father-in-law Maulana Sufi Mohammad took several thousand fighters on a misguided adventure to fight alongside the Afghan Taliban against the US military and its Northern Alliance allies, still has pockets of support in these places, particularly in Bajaur where Maulana Faqir Mohammad remains defiant and ready to battle the government. Thus it would be wise to form a jirga with representatives from all of Malakand region even though the immediate focus would be to defuse the situation in Swat, where more than 20,000 troops are still deployed after having launched military operations last winter.”

“The provincial government’s writ runs in Swat and other districts in the so-called settled area while the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata), which includes Bajaur and six other tribal agencies, are managed and controlled by the federal government through the Governor of NWFP. It is, therefore, obvious that the ANP-PPP coalition government would be required to first resolve the problems in Swat before contributing to a solution of the more serious and hitherto intractable conflicts in tribal agencies such as South Waziristan, North Waziristan, Bajaur and Darra Adamkhel. Swat valley doesn't border Afghanistan and this single factor has resulted in reduced US interest in the conflict there. The Americans are more concerned about the situation in the two Waziristans and rest of the tribal region as they believe the al-Qaeda leaders including Osama bin Laden are hiding there and Taliban militants based in the area are easily able to cross the border to attack soldiers from the US, Nato and Afghan armies. Any negotiated political solution in Swat would not alarm the US and its allies and they are unlikely to object to such a move. But it would be an altogether different story if the new, democratically elected PPP-led coalition government at the centre attempted a similar political settlement of the conflict in tribal areas over the objections of the US.”

**Terror Tactics**

Baitullah runs a tight ship; deserters are summarily executed and even Taliban not following a tightly regulated code of conduct are summarily dealt with. Similarly, he does not tolerate opposition; and according to reliable intelligence sources at least 100 Waziri tribal leaders have been purged on his orders. His methods may be questionable, but his leadership is not in doubt; in late 2007, a Taliban shura, a 40-member consultative council, chose him to unify its operations in

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54 Ibid.

Pakistan. The methodology of the Pakistani variant is equally violent as their Afghani counterpart’s, not allowing civil liberties & fundamental human rights to this society; they are asking for strict conformity to their code of conduct – i.e. banning music and burning all music and video shops, confiscating vehicles equipped with stereo, and stopping barbers shaving beards – because all of these activities have been regarded by them as haram, i.e. sacrilegious. Baitullah Mehsud has established his own parallel government and he has set up his own judicial system wherein Pashtuns, i.e. tribals, approach him for delivery of justice rather than resorting to judicial courts set up by the government. According to a tribal barber, all hair cutting saloons in the area have been ordered by Baitullah Mehsud to display warning signs to the effect that, since shaving beards has been forbidden, that service is not offered. Not only this, but those violating this order are punished with their saloons being reduced to ashes whereas others have been put to death for undertaking this sacrilegious act. In the words of Hayatullah, a barber in Makeen, “Earlier I would shave my customers, but now I don’t because, if I do, my shop will be torched and I will be punished to death by Baitullah Mehsud.” Hayatullah further mentioned that about three months earlier, Baitullah ordered a couple, who had committed adultery, to be stoned to death.

Baitullah receives money from al-Qaeda and the Taliban to run the affairs of his newly founded ‘parallel state’. “People dance to his tune. On his command, they can sacrifice their lives,” says the editor of a Peshawari newspaper on the condition of anonymity. Baitullah has used local clerics and he is illegally operating twenty FM radio channels in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas to enforce his writ. Evidently, differences of opinion exist. Some are of the opinion that not much has changed in the tribal areas. An officer of Frontier Constabulary holding the rank of an Army Major emphasizes: “It is a question of how you look at things. Jirga has along been a part of tribal tradition and cannot be equated with a parallel government. People in tribal areas were already keeping beards. The women were already in purdah. So, you can’t say that a Taliban-like Shariat has been imposed”. In my opinion, it is imperative to contrast the present situation with the rather laissez faire variety of tribal religiosity that existed before the emergence of this phenomenon. Admittedly, the tribals did keep beards and women were in purdah, but this was more or less done out of a spirit of long standing tribal tradition than an intense religious fervor. As any one having some knowledge of the Pathan way of life would know, the Pathan is a delightfully confusing mix of contradictions. He can be a lifelong friend and a deadly enemy, a paradox of honesty and a shameless cheat; a jovial person who would watch Pashto movies, while taking a break to say his prayers. I quote from Rashid Ahmed: “Anyone who has been touched by an Afghan or visited the country in peace or in war will understand when I say the country and the people are amongst the most extraordinary on earth. The Afghans have also been affected by one of the greatest tragedies of this century – the longest running civil war in this era which has brought untold misery.

“Theyir story and their character involve immense contradictions. Brave, magnificent, honourable, generous, hospitable, gracious, handsome, Afghan men and women can also be devious, mean and bloody-minded.”

56 Shehzad (2006)
In essence, the pre-Taliban tribal scenario was quite different from the one now prevailing, a case in point being the number of educational institutions for women in FATA. These, even though previously not well attended, are now dwindling to zero. Thus, a moot point would be the consolidation of areas that do not have even the vaguest semblances of the writ of the state. This formation of an al-Qaeda and Taliban-run ‘state within a state’ is an alarming development, and certainly cannot be written off as if ‘nothing much’ has changed.

The locals’ opinions tend to mirror the above portrayed situation. Gul Zameen, a local trucker, told Islam Online, “Playing music and watching videos are against the law here.” 58 Baitullah’s camp followers give him credit for bringing peace, but detractors argue that this semblance of peace was a creation of Baitullah’s Mafia and his lieutenants, whose Godfather is Baitullah himself, squeezing the local population of their entire financial and other resources. Allegedly he was in close association with the Taliban leader Mullah Omar for the enforcement of an extreme form of Shariah, without being mindful of the changed scenario. His dictates in the twenty-first century include, “Women must observe a strict form of purdah, and men are forbidden to have their beards shaved. Playing music and watching videos are against the law.” M I Khan, a journalist with the Nida-i-Millat, 59 describes how Mehsud kills pro-government tribal leaders: “First, he would confirm that the guy is an informer and then he would send him a Rs.1,000 note along with a thread and a needle, telling the person to buy and have his kafan (shroud) stitched within 24 hours,” Khan says. “And the guy is murdered within 24 hours.”

He has ordered the murder of adulterers by stoning. There are a few judicial courts in the region run by the Pakistan government, but their services have seldom been availed of by the Waziristanis, who prefer approaching Baitullah Mehsud for the dispensation of a primitive form of justice in South Waziristan and parts of North Waziristan. In these areas, this man is the law.

Fazlullah also operates in similar fashion. After consolidating control of the area, Fazlullah tried to enact his own brand of the Shariah within the area he controlled. The extent of his control can be assessed by the fact that he has set up his own parallel system of administration of justice, by setting up self administered Shariah courts. Public lashings in Mamdheray 60 resonate to the media images emanating from Afghanistan during the Taliban’s heyday. 61 “They were bringing a bad name to my organization. People were complaining that my men were involved in criminal activities. I believe the lashing would serve as a deterrent to others.”

Organizational Efficiency

Baitullah commands a force of 20,000 to 30,000 fighters 62 in the tribal areas of northwest Pakistan. Without discriminating between Muslims and non-Muslims, he has dispatched suicide-bombers to kill Pakistani police and soldiers in Swat, Kohat, Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan, and

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58 Latif (2008).
59 Ibid.
60 Fazlullah’s religious headquarters on the banks of Swat River.
61 The News newspaper, 04.11.07.
62 (Latif 2008).
Peshawar. On August 30, his forces brazenly captured more than 200 Pakistani soldiers and held them hostage for two months until his demands were met. One day after declaring a state of emergency on response to political scenarios in the country, General Musharraf reached a settlement with Baitullah, exchanging 25 militants in government custody for the captured troops. Musharraf later admitted that these men were trained suicide bombers, and one of them was under indictment for participating in a suicide bombing. As part of the deal, Baitullah agreed to expel foreign militants from his territories and stop attacking the army. However, Baitullah has signed peace accords with the Pakistani government before and gone back on his commitments. This can be seen as part of a wider strategy to further entrench his hold on his area of control. As an analogy with Swat, whenever there is a peace treaty with the militants, they use the time available to consolidate their hold on the area.

This is done by giving a sense of security to the locals. This attitude can be examined in light of a local’s statement: “Baitullah succeeded in establishing peace in the area”. Thus, the local people started trusting him. Unfortunately, the Pakistan army failed to act against Baitullah’s private army taking up the self-assumed responsibility without any governmental mandate to establish law and order in the area. Pro-government and pro-US tribal people are being killed in Waziristan – sometimes on the basis of hearsay and in the absence of any formal evidence, which is really alarming in any civilized country.

As regards organizational skills, “Baitullah’s lashkar (army) is well organised. He has divided it into various units and assigned particular tasks to each unit. One of the units has been tasked to kill people who are pro-government and pro-US and support the US occupation of Afghanistan. The last person to be killed was Malik Arsallah Khan, chief of the Khuniakhel Wazir tribe, who was killed on February 22 in Wana (in South Waziristan),” says a source in the Frontier Constabulary.

The number of fighters he has at his command has remained open to conjecture: some sources claim 25-30,000 while others have quoted a figure of nearer to 20,000. However, a local tribal chief has put the number between 8,000 and 10,000 well-trained fighters. “He is no doubt the most influential and powerful person of South and North Waziristan areas,” he said. “His state stretches from South Waziristan to Bajur and from North Waziristan to Kurram agency (approximately 2700 square kilometers).” Around 2500 to 3000 foreign fighters, mostly of central Asian origin, are thought to be the forte of his force. Baitullah was recently elected as Amir (commander) of Taliban Tehrik (movement) Pakistan. “He is now the head of all the tribes harbouring sympathies for Taliban. Tribesmen (local Taliban) from South Waziristan to Bajur agency have gathered under his flag, making him the most powerful and influential person in the tribal belt,” reported a local journalist.

Baitullah has a long list of major victories to his credit up to the start of 2008 – the capture of two important military forts in South Waziristan on January 16 and 17 and the much flaunted

64 Latif (2008).
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
capture of Pakistani army men last year, being just two of the many. Lt General Ali Mohammad Jan Orakzai, the governor of the North Western Frontier Province and a former corps commander of Peshawar, resigned in December 2007 ostensibly because of the central government’s inept handling of the Waziristan situation.

There abound many opinions about the exact role of Mehsud within the overall Pakistani paradigm. Lt General (rtd.) Hameed Gul, a security analyst and a former head of the powerful Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), believes Baitullah is not at war with the army as an institution. “He is acting against only those who have been there (in tribal area) at the behest of America. Otherwise, if not his brother, I am sure his many cousins would be in Pakistan army.” He insists that the military interventions in the tribal area and last year’s fiasco of the Red Mosque onslaught have boosted Baitullah’s popularity. “His only strength is a tribal system, which has given him so much power. In tribal system, everyone is your brother or cousin. So it’s very hard for a tribesman to sit idle if his brother, cousin or even fellow tribesman is fighting.” Gul also maintains that there was no personal animosity towards slain Bhutto. “Taliban came into being during her stint. Her government fully supported Taliban and they too never considered her an enemy,” said the former ISI chief. “She was personally conveyed [a message] by Mehsud that he was not her enemy. She accepted that clarification that is why her party men reject the government claims about Mehsud’s involvement in her assassination.” The veteran expert contends that the issue of Baitullah is being played for political reasons. “This is just a hype being created by the US intelligence agencies about him to provide an excuse to their force to enter Pakistan and attack,” he told IOL. “There is no comparison between Mehsud, and bin Laden or Ayman Zuwahiri……The militants say they don’t wish to fight Pakistani security forces because it only benefits the Americans.” He argues that Baitullah is not the first ‘victim’ of such a hype campaign.

“He is not the first one who is being presented as a big fish. Before him, there were Naik Muhammed, Abul Firaj Al-Libbi, Amjad Farooqi and Abdullah Mehsud,” said Gul, naming local al-Qaeda chiefs killed by security forces in recent years. “It has become a trend here to make villains and then kill them.”

Meanwhile, the fundamentalist movement of Fazlullah in Swat has continued to expand at a rapid pace. “Fazlullah has become a spiritual figure now. A lot of foreign elements, including Arabs, Uzbeks and Chechens moved out from Mirali, Darra Adam Khel and Bajaur, and reached there. “They are in full control of the region and are directly involved in carrying out actions against our security forces,” disclosed by a senior security officer to the media.

“Maulana Fazlullah has a fighting strength of 4600, with an added 400-member Shaheen Commando Force that patrols the streets of Swat with guns placed on their vehicles. The

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67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
69 The News newspaper (November 4, 2007).
70 ‘Shaheen’ means ‘eagle’. The symbolism used connotes a sense of urgency and a sharp eye on affairs, which is not wholly undeserved. Reports are that the Mulla’s forces are arranged with an almost military precision and discipline.
Maulana’s stronghold remains the 59 villages of Matta sub-division,” said the Home Secretary (the most senior official in charge of law and order for the NWFP province) to the media last year.71

Even the Mulla’s zeal has paled in comparison with some of his followers who have reportedly joined him from Mirali in North Waziristan, Darra Adam Khel, Bajaur and other tribal areas to fight the security forces. Some sources have claimed that he has lost control over some of his more overzealous fighters. The ruthless beheadings of captured security personnel are being ascribed to these fighters, which reportedly have a large foreign element within them. It is reminiscent of jihadi fighters joining the conflicts in Bosnia, Chechnya and Kashmir. This suggests that there is an inherent power vacuum in a Terromodel, where a positive tactic stimulus for jihad attracts fractionalization of militant ideologies, complicating the circle of violence. This facet of the Terromodel in Swat merits further research and in-depth strategic analysis.

The New Taliban and Social Justice

As espoused by Maudoodi, jihad is a binding duty of all Muslims, but they must begin this jihad first by correcting themselves (Amar bil-ma`ruf), and then go on to correcting others through instructions (Nahi `an al-munkar), entering into a war only if the conditions set for the justification of jihad make it necessary. It is demonstrable by the almost obsessive zeal of the Taliban to start implementing penal laws and controlling unruly elements in the society, that they are justifying the device of jihad by correcting their society first. The new Taliban have done the same; even when Pakistani military operations were going on against them, they have engaged in organizing penal punishments against offenders. Certainly, Baitullah Mehsud has engaged in these tactics, and so has Fazlullah.

It does seem that the inherent structural imbalances, in distributive social justice in FATA, have left gaping wounds, which the fundamentalist project is quick to exploit. Hussein Khan, who owns a pharmacy in Wana, the capital of South Waziristan, says local tribesmen like Baitullah for some of his “good acts”. “He has restored law and order in the area. Dacoits and thieves have left the area fearing harsh punishments,” he told a media person. According to him, “Some people also believe that there are many bad people in his militia,” citing the killing of 13 family members of the federal government’s political agent in Khyber agency, an adjacent tribal area, in an armed attack by Baitullah’s militia about four months. “He (Baitullah) publicly apologized for the incident,” Khan said. “The Taliban involved in the attack have been languishing in (his) jail for the last four months. They would have been punished if anti-security sentiments against military action had not been aroused72 and the military option had not been exercised.”

“Mehsud is gaining the advantage of indiscriminate bombing and killing of common tribesmen. Sympathies are increasing for him with every passing day. I am not a literate person, or a security expert, but I know that no military operation will succeed against him,” he added.73

72 Latif (2008).
73 Ibid.
“Those who are not supporters of Osama [bin laden] or Baitullah, even they have been forced by the indiscriminate military operation to harbour sympathies.”

Aslam Awan, a journalist working with the jihadi publication Weekly Takbeer, mentions the setting up of a ‘special task force’ in June last year to purportedly crack down on criminals in South Waziristan. “This force launched a number of crackdowns and made a feared kidnapper Abdul Rashid Bakakhel free some of his hostages. Baitullah also collected donations from the local people to establish peace. It was a kind of protection money,” Awan continues.74

Similarly, Fazlullah seems to be playing out the Robin Hood theme; after consolidating control of the area, Fazlullah has tried to enact his own brand of Shariah within the area controlled by him. The extent of his control can be assessed by the fact that he has set up his own parallel system of administration of justice, a claim which he has been quick to deny in his self contradictory statements. “This is not true. We did arrest some killers, drunkards and other criminals and would have delivered them over to the police had the cops been doing their duty instead of locking themselves inside police stations for fear of an attack. The murderers are still in our custody and the seven young students who were caught drinking were released after they sought forgiveness from Allah. We gave them Rs. 100 each so that they could pay for the transport and reach their homes,” he said.75

As mentioned above, public lashings in Mamderay resonate to the media images emanating from Afghanistan during the Taliban’s heyday.76 “They were bringing a bad name to my organization. People were complaining that my men were involved in criminal activities. I believe the lashing would serve as a deterrent to others.”

It is pertinent to mention here that many of these acts are endorsed by the local populace since these are seen as non-discriminatory acts aimed at punishing criminals masquerading as Taliban and committing acts of robbery. In an area where the locals have traditionally complained of ineffective governance by successive governments, which allegedly indulged in nepotism and inadequate resource allocation, a heightened local sense of security may be a driving factor swelling the ranks of his followers. A Terramodel hypothesis does seem to suggest a governance imbalance. In a ‘closed’ society (like Waziristan) which is sequestrated from the mainstream society at large, it is easier to comprehend the negative spiral effects of ineffective governance, but in an area which is relatively affluent by FATA standards, there is a complex interplay of different centrifugal forces which need to be researched in their context. The amount of aid and government resource allocation also needs to be accounted for to appreciate the dynamics of the process. Marc Sagemen77 suggests that the commonplace stereotypical conception of penniless, opportunity-denied Muslim youths turning to violence is not necessarily true. Instead, the desire to reconstruct, or put more suitably, deconstruct the existing society for a more egalitarian one drives some of

76 Ibid.
them to acts such as suicide bombing. Thus, in a Terromodel, existing socio-economic variables would have to interpolate with psycho-social and other juxtaposing factors.

**Conclusion**

With the collapse of the institutional structure in Waziristan, the districts of NWFP are rapidly succumbing to the ruthless onslaught of Talibanisation. Taliban pockets have appeared with impunity in the southern districts of Tank and Bannu, as well as Hangu. Police posts from Tank to Jandola have tended to be abandoned, the police being out gunned and outnumbered. The commercial hub of the Indus highway connecting Karachi with Peshawar is no longer safe. Even convoys of trailers are being hi-jacked at will. Suicide bombers have repeatedly struck Peshawar, killing the head of city police along with fourteen other senior police officers in January 2007. It is most probable that the suicide attacks are emanating out of Waziristan, at the behest of Baitullah Mehsud.

The insurgency is particularly dangerous because it has sparked an identity crisis throughout the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan. The local population, although at varying levels of development ranging from the contemporary to the conservative, maintains a common heritage in Pashtunwali or the Pathan way of life. Depending on the perspective from which the problem is approached, the Pashtun way of life is under threat from extreme radicalism for modern Pashtuns, and from the satanic forces of modernism in the case of the conservative ones. Either way, a battle has commenced for cultural identity.

Many analysts would argue that the Taliban only succeeded in Afghanistan because the country had been in a state of anarchy for more than a decade and a half. The local populace was wholeheartedly willing to support any entity that could provide security under such circumstances. There is little doubt that the Taliban initially emerged as a stabilizing force that took on rapacious warlords. Some of the same analysts would argue that in Pakistan, the situation is totally different. Despite increasing sectarianism and socio-economic problems, there exists a strong, organised, and a functioning institutional set up, despite all its lapses and shortcomings. Thus, according to these analysts, there is no Islamist peril in the long run. I argue differently. The danger is not from the creation of a Taliban state in Pakistan, but the disorder and chaos resulting in the attempts by Taliban to do so. The state may be able to withstand the separatism or regional autonomy of the Taliban in the long run, but at a huge cost of geopolitical instability in the region. The Taliban in Pakistan have become a populist movement in Pakistan, otherwise they would not have blossomed in the incremental manner that they have. There is a grave peril, and it has to be recognized in its context.

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