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**AIRRA**

**EMERGING SCENARIO OF TALIBANIZATION IN THE REGION:  
IS THERE TO BE A SPRING OFFENSIVE?**

**AIRRA Special Edition/Analytical Report**

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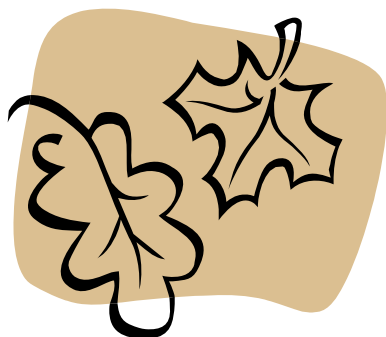
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- REGIONAL COOPERATION
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## 1. Background

One way of understanding the war against terror is to study the simultaneous interplay of convergent and divergent factors like unilateralism and multilateralism, and solving the paradox of Talibanization vs. Military operations. The other important factor to understand in this context is the implications of both dialogues and military operations with the non-state religious militant organizations. While understanding how the non-state actors, who have become more organized, coordinated, trained and equipped over time, get initial support in the local community is crucial for understanding the complexity of the process of Talibanization in the Pashtun belt. How the leadership of Taliban understands the structural vacuums in the state, how does the leadership create a discourse for social contagion and how does it get social control are all issues which are to be understood if this war is to be won<sup>1</sup>.

Immediately after 9/11, the United Nations responded to the emerging situation and built a consensus to fight religious militancy in the region. The Afghan war in 2001, which was directed against Taliban and Al-Qaeda, was fully backed by the international community including Pakistan. In this regard, the United States and other nations involved were entitled to take action under the United Nations Charter, Chapter 7, and Article 51 which recognizes “the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs”.<sup>2</sup> In a statement, the then President of the General Assembly, Han Seung-Soo (Republic of Korea), condemned the terrorists attacks in strong words and “called for international cooperation to bring to justice the perpetrators, organizers, and sponsors of the outrages”.<sup>3</sup> The Security Council also adopted resolutions on this issue which predicted the military action in Afghanistan. The then Secretary General of the UN, Kofi Annan, urged the nations for sustained efforts and broad strategy to defeat terrorism. In a subsequent press release, it was stated that the “cause must be pursued by all the states of the world” and through all possible means.<sup>4</sup> This is the consensus we are witnessing in the form of ISAF and NATO presence for the last seven years in Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup> The NATO-ISAF forces with more than 55,000 troops drawn from 41 countries under the UN-mandate in accordance with the Bonn Conference, in December 2001, are there to assist the Afghan government in bringing about stability and security.<sup>6</sup> Observers, although, believed at that time that the US had little patience for state building and nation building in the war ravaged countries in the post Cold War era<sup>7</sup> and afterwards. It is yet to be seen whether the new US administration can assure the world of its commitment to state building and nation building in Afghanistan, Pakistan and other war ravaged countries around the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Hussain , Khadim. The writ of the religious radicals in the Pashtun belt—factors and implications. <http://www.airra.org/presentations.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Article 51, Charter of the United Nations, <http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/chapter7.shtml>

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Press Releases. The United Nations and the war in Afghanistan GA/SM/274 AFG/151 8 October 2001, [http://www.humanist.org.nz/docs/UN\\_Afghanistan.html](http://www.humanist.org.nz/docs/UN_Afghanistan.html)

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Press Releases. The United Nations and the war in Afghanistan GA/SM/274 AFG/151 8 October 2001, [http://www.humanist.org.nz/docs/UN\\_Afghanistan.html](http://www.humanist.org.nz/docs/UN_Afghanistan.html)

<sup>5</sup> NATO in Afghanistan, <http://www.nato.int/issues/afghanistan/index.html>, International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), <http://www.nato.int/issues/isaf/index.html>

<sup>6</sup> Government - Afghan Bonn Agreement, <http://www.afghangovernment.com/AfghanAgreementBonn.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Rashid, Ahmad. *Descent into chaos*. Penguin: USA, 2008.

Prior to the 9/11, the US enjoyed the status of the sole super power of the world. A debate started in geopolitics that affirmed the supremacy of capitalism and, of course, the US at the top of a unipolar world. The ideological conflicts subsided for a moment but before the dust could finally settle down an unprecedented event took place that held the whole world in its grip. America was under attack, so was the whole of the capitalist world. The international community immediately responded and gave America a green signal to attack Afghanistan. At that time, the US imperialistic designs were in full swing so much so that the US had to coin the doctrine of “pre-emption” in the absence of “the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs”. It took some time to pass the Resolution 1441.<sup>8</sup> The United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) were allowed “immediate, unimpeded, unconditional and unrestricted access” in case of non-compliance and continued violation, Iraq would have to face “serious consequences”<sup>9</sup>. The Bush Doctrine, as it was called, was a strategy to secure the US from countries who harbor terrorist groups by launching preventive wars. According to the Nation “Pre-emption, in contrast, validates striking first--not in a crisis... but on the basis of shadowy intentions, alleged potential links to terrorist groups, supposed plans and projects to acquire weapons of mass destruction, and anticipations of possible future dangers. It is a doctrine without limits, without accountability to the UN or international law, without any dependence on a collective judgment of responsible governments and, what is worse, without any convincing demonstration of practical necessity.”<sup>10</sup> The War in Iraq not only brought a bad image for the US but also threatened the unilateralism and would ultimately lead America to eat a humble pie.

But the US holds trump card in Afghanistan where the diverse geopolitical stakeholders are at play. According to M K Bhadrakumar in his article in Asia Times Online, the US has succeeded in establishing its long-term military presence in Afghanistan.<sup>11</sup> The US has already announced doubling its troops up to 60,000 and long-term contracts have been signed for building houses for the troops and food supply. One big challenge the US is facing is to have some bargain with the regional powers about the transit routes in case regional players like Russia, China and Pakistan with the collaboration of India and Iran pose hard conditions on the supply of goods and arms. The recent quest for the new land route through the southern Caucasus to Afghanistan will altogether brush aside the impression that the US can not do it without the regional powers though it will be quite feasible for the US to pay heed to the interests of the regional powers to win the war. In this connection, supply route through Pakistan will also lose its traditional historical importance and the “war against terror” could lead to a new phase ultimately posing a greater challenge for Pakistan and the Pashtun belt who are the direct beneficiary of this supply route. Nevertheless, the regional powers will keep an eye on the developments and a major shift can be anticipated in the policy line towards US presence in Afghanistan.

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<sup>8</sup> RESOLUTION 1441, Security Council 4644th Meeting (AM)

<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2002/SC7564.doc.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Press Release, SC/7564, Security Council, 4644th Meeting (AM),

<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2002/SC7564.doc.htm>

<sup>10</sup> The New Bush Doctrine By Richard Falk, June 27, 2002

<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20020715/falk>

<sup>11</sup> All roads lead out of Afghanistan, By M K Bhadrakumar, South Asia, Asia Times, Dec 20, 2008 , [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South\\_Asia/JL20Df01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/JL20Df01.html)

The new US administration has already done enough home work to balance the diverse convergent and divergent factors. The significant thing is a refreshing commitment to focus Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Tribal Areas. The newly-appointed US special envoy for Pakistan and Afghanistan, Richard Holbrooke, has urged the need for a winning strategy inside Afghanistan on the one hand and the challenges Obama's administration will face while dealing with the insurgencies in the tribal areas on the other hand.<sup>12</sup> If sanity prevails, the new administration will go after regional cooperation though without compromising its major stakes.

## **2. Talibanization vs. Military operations**

While we witness an increase in drone attacks inside the tribal belt, we see a grim picture of the settled areas of North West Frontier Province of Pakistan especially Swat, Dera Ismail Khan, Tank, Bannu Charsadda, Mardan and Darra Adam Khel where Talibanization and the social control of Taliban is expanding with the passing of each new day. The federal government of Pakistan is making renewed pledges to ensure the writ of the state while the provincial government has almost confessed of losing it after the Taliban in Swat issued a list of 43 people to be targeted.<sup>13</sup><sup>14</sup> There are question marks in the wake of military operations while the ambivalence of the Pakistani state towards militants is getting exposed day by day as the state is more critical of the drone attacks rather than paying heed to establish the lost writ of the state to Taliban. Pakistani intelligentsia has yet to decide whose war is this and the quest for dialogue reigns supreme.

One of the perceived reasons for lack of commitment on the part of Pakistan is that the democratic government, political parties and civil society have yet to come out of the trauma the Musharraf regime had inflicted. The most affected is the provincial government of NWFP and Pakhtoon intelligentsia who are bearing the brunt of Talibanization. They are also at a loss to untie the knot which had almost paralyzed the Awami National Party (ANP) led provincial government after ANP's leader Asfandiyar Wali Khan escaped a suicide attack in October 2008.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, some 100 ANP activists have been target-killed since the operations in different parts of NWFP and FATA have started. The provincial government security apparatus is not up to the mark even to ensure law and order situation (in a highly volatile region of civilian control due to its closeness with the tribal areas), let alone fighting a full fledged insurgency. Mian Iftikhar Husain, the provincial Information Minister has repeatedly spotted the dichotomy of military deployment as the last resort and the lack of effective security apparatus under the civilian provincial administration.<sup>16</sup> Thus all blame lies on the shoulder of the federal government especially the military establishment for not devising a comprehensive, effectively targeted and answerable military operation in the north-western Pakistan. The

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<sup>12</sup> News Desk, The News International, January 25, 2009,

[http://www.thenews.com.pk/top\\_story\\_detail.asp?Id=19861](http://www.thenews.com.pk/top_story_detail.asp?Id=19861)

<sup>13</sup> Swat Taliban summon politicians to sharia court, Daud Khattak, Daily Times, January 26, 2009,

[http://dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2009\01\26\story\\_26-1-2009\\_pg1\\_1](http://dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2009\01\26\story_26-1-2009_pg1_1)

<sup>14</sup> ANP admits govt has lost its writ in Swat, Daily Times, January 27, 2009

<sup>15</sup> The Nations, October 2, 2008, <http://www.nation.com.pk/pakistan-news-newspaper-daily-english-online/Politics/02-Oct-2008/4-killed-6-injured-in-suicide-blast-outside-Asfandiyar-Wali-Khans-house-officials>

<sup>16</sup> EXCLUSIVE: Under the Taliban's Rule, Shaheen Beneri, January 29, 2009,

[http://www.themedialine.org/news/news\\_detail.asp?NewsID=24083](http://www.themedialine.org/news/news_detail.asp?NewsID=24083)

concerns of the regional states such as Iran, India, Russia, China and Afghanistan and of the international stakeholders such as Europe and the US may be seen in this context.

### **3. Emerging Scenario of Talibanization in the region: Is there to be a spring offensive?**

Recently Pakistani Taliban, Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Maqami Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (MTTP) (led by Baitullah Mehsud, Malvi Nazir and Hafiz Gul Bahadur in South and North Waziristan respectively who have previously at loggerheads over a matter of interpretation) have joined hands against what they called ‘the forces of Kufr’. The MTTP was considered to be a pro-Pakistan organization which abstained from attacking the military and other security services of Pakistan. Both TTP and MTTP have joined hands to form Shurai Ittihad-ul-Mujahideen,<sup>17</sup> though they would retain their separate organizations with their previous nomenclature. MTTP has a standing Fatwa in favour of ‘Jihad’ against the US and the Afghan government only. In the recent past, Mullah Nazir had conflicts with the Uzbek Mujahideen over Jihad in Afghanistan as the later were not much interested in crossing over the Durand Line. The same is true of Hafiz Gul Bahadar who had almost fallen short of an armed conflict with Baitullah due to differences with him. Now a new alliance is formed in which all the three factions would pursue common ideals under the leadership of Baitullah Mahsud, chief of the banned Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) without having to surrender their distinctive status and in believing in the supreme commandership of Mullah Umer. Their common agenda is to resolve their differences and fight all their enemies including the US, Pakistani military, political government and Asif Ali Zardari. On the other hand, Malvi Faqir of the TTP Bajaur has also announced a unilateral cease fire the other day<sup>18</sup> though the government has rejected the unilateral cease fire<sup>19</sup>. In a way the Taliban movement in Pakistan has clearly communicated to the ANP-led provincial government and Mr. Zardai’s led federal government that it understands the political and strategic complexities in the region. This brings us to the hypothesis that the military of Pakistan, the US and Taliban factions in Pakistan and Afghanistan are going to be engaged in hot battles during the coming spring and summer in Afghanistan before the elections are held there. The reaction of the Indian government to the Swat Peace deal also suggests that the Indians expect a mounting pressure by the Taliban and the Punjabi militant organizations in Kashmir in the near future.

If the present scenario is seen in the context of the deal between the provincial government and TNSM, Fazlullah’s truce and Fazlullah’s speech in which he prayed the US to be defeated in Afghanistan, the matter goes beyond the internal dynamics of dialogue with the “disenchanted organizations” but seems to be a preparation for the spring offensive on Kabul and also for mounting pressure on India in Kashmir. Indian’s inquisitiveness towards “Swat peace deal”<sup>20</sup> and its aftermath vis-à-vis Mumbai attacks

<sup>17</sup> Taliban form new alliance in Waziristan, Monday, February 23, 2009

Name 13-member Shura; declare Mulla Omar as their supremo

By Yousaf Ali

[http://www.thenews.com.pk/top\\_story\\_detail.asp?Id=20512](http://www.thenews.com.pk/top_story_detail.asp?Id=20512)

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/pakistan/story/2008/08/080824\\_bajor\\_ceasefire\\_ka.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/pakistan/story/2008/08/080824_bajor_ceasefire_ka.shtml)

<sup>19</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/pakistan/story/2008/08/080825\\_no\\_mercy\\_govt\\_ra.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/pakistan/story/2008/08/080825_no_mercy_govt_ra.shtml)

<sup>20</sup> Swat peace deal hot topic at Indian reception, Monday, February 23, 2009

by Mobarik A. Virk

[http://www.thenews.com.pk/daily\\_detail.asp?id=164076](http://www.thenews.com.pk/daily_detail.asp?id=164076)

and the conspicuous absence of ANP from the Indian diplomatic circles in Islamabad after the deal are all apprehensions that has started gathering substance. Washington will also be anxious to understand the implications of the peace deal. They have already voiced their concerns that they are "troubled and confused in the sense about what happened in Swat, because it is not an encouraging trend," , according to US Special Representative for Pakistan and Afghanistan, Richard Holbrooke.<sup>21</sup> He has already made it clear in Munich Security Conference that the situation in Afghanistan poses a great danger for America and her allies by terming Afghanistan worse than Iraq and by calling it the worst crisis he has ever witnessed. He warned that America and her allies should prepare for more devastating situation in the coming years.<sup>22</sup>

The consequent visit of the Pakistani military top brass and the foreign minister of Pakistan, Shah Mahood Qureshi, to the US seem to have two angles. First, the military and civilian leadership of Pakistan would like to convince the State Department of their sincerity to fight religious militancy in Pakistan and that the process of dialogue initiated by the civilian leadership is to isolate the Taliban organizations from the larger pan Islamist movement on the one hand and from the common people of the region on the other hand. Second, they will try to convince the US that the Pakistan military and the civilian government need both technical and financial support to fight terrorism in the region. In turn, the state department would be interested to get across the point that India-phobia on the part of Pakistan is bringing no dividends to the state of Pakistan. The visit of Afghan president Hamid Karzai to Pakistan in the near future also seems to be in the context of the new strategy adopted by the Taliban. The Taliban in turn have probably understood the fact that the assistance and long-term commitment of the international community will remain decisive factors in deciding their war with the states of Pakistan and Afghanistan. The decision of the Taliban movement in Pakistan to cease its war with the security apparatus of Pakistan for a while indicates their understanding of the fact that both public support and international assistance for NWFP, FATA, the federal government of Pakistan and the government in Kabul are making the victory a far cry for them. This seems to be both the strategic and theoretical understanding of the Taliban leadership.

## Conclusion

AIRRA seeks to urge all the stake holders for regional cooperation and mutual trust to defeat terrorism with all its root causes mentioned in the first paragraph of this report. In this regard, democratic institutions and political parties must be strengthened and the need for institutionalization must be emphasized. Secondly, the use of coercive means to curb terrorism must be targeted, answerable to the civilian elected governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan and the NWFP government and accountable to a parliamentary committee. Thirdly, the security forces working under the civilian administration, such as police and Frontier Constabulary, must be equipped and trained. Thirdly, the US and

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<sup>21</sup> Swat peace deal not encouraging, says Holbrooke, ARY one world, Thursday February 19, 2009

<http://www.thearynews.com/english/newsdetail.asp?nid=22288>

<sup>22</sup> Change in American foreign policy: an impossibility, khpalwak Atal, February 18, 2009, <http://www.tolafghan.com/home/detail/12593>

European Union must give a long term commitment to both Pakistan and Afghanistan for nation building and state building. Fourth and most important, a comprehensive, coordinated and people-centric development framework has to be introduced in the affected areas, i-e, FATA, NWFP and Afghanistan with immediate effect. The federal government of Pakistan and the Pakistan military in consultation with the NWFP government have to develop a comprehensive and coordinated strategy to defeat terrorism in the region. The alliances of the Taliban outfits in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Indian Kashmir may pose a real threat to the states of the region in the near future.