

WWW.IMMIGVANHEUGTEN.NL

BACKGROUND 2014-02

**SHARIA HIGHWAY: HEADING FOR
KABUL, PESHAWAR AND ...
ISLAMABAD?**

OLIVIER IMMIG

2014-02

THE NETHERLANDS

Introduction

As I recently read the remarkable book 'I am Malala' by Malala Yousufzai, it occurred to me that a broader perspective on her story might be of interest to other readers as well. The following article has been written several years ago but, owing to more urgent obligations at the time, has never been published before.

Up to this very day, and for the foreseeable future, both the Pakistani civilian government of Nawaz Sharif and the Pakistani Army are invariably attempting to appease and gain control over a wide array of violent, murderous militant movements. Most of them are united in the TTP, now led by militant leader Fazlullah, of all people. Former president and army leader Musharraf, hospitalized or otherwise barred from leaving Pakistan, is facing trial.

Like all political, military, tribal and business leaders in neighbouring Afghanistan, the Pakistani leadership is anxiously awaiting the consequences of the withdrawal of most, if not all, Western military from that country by the end of 2014. All in all, we wish that the article presented here will help shed more light on militancy in the region.

As the admirable book written by Malala and Christina Lamb has been banned in some parts of Pakistan, especially in her home area of FATA and PATA, and Malala herself now involuntarily lives in the United Kingdom, these facts alone should urge us to continue dissecting the 'mindset' of militant leaders and their followers. And pay tribute to her determination and bravery.

Amsterdam, February 10, 2014

Sharia Highway: Heading for Kabul, Peshawar and...Islamabad?

On 16 February 2009 Chief Minister of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) Ameer Hussain Hoti of the ANP-led coalition government of the NWFP publicly announced that his government had signed an agreement with TNSM-leader Sufi Mohammad concerning the full implementation of Sharia law in Malakand Division, an integral part of the NWFP. "All un-Islamic laws in Malakand division of Swat, which is geographically one third of the whole province (NWFP), have been abolished", declared Chief Minister Hoti.¹

This agreement on a 22-points charter of demands² was reached after several weeks of intense negotiations. The ANP-PPP government in Peshawar gave in to all demands of the TNSM (Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi, or Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Laws) concerning the introduction of an autonomous Islamic criminal justice system in the Malakand Division as a whole *which will no longer be subject to the appellate jurisdiction of the courts in Peshawar and Islamabad*. The signing of the required bill (the Nizam-e-Adl Regulations 2009)³ was tacitly approved by Pakistan's president Zardari.

Both signatory parties now set out to fulfil the necessary preconditions of the agreement. The government maintained that it would only be implemented after full peace in the region, in particular in Swat Valley (130 kilometers northwest of Islamabad), had been re-established. Also, the 'writ of the government' (authority) had to be accepted. Sufi Muhammad convinced his son-in-law and co-leader Fazlullah to accept the agreement and have the TNSM lay down its arms. Fazlullah made it clear that it had agreed to a ten-day ceasefire as a gesture of goodwill.

A three-member TNSM-committee was formed for holding talks with the non-TNSM Taliban in the region; Sufi Muhammad is said to have forged links with other jihadi groups and al-Qaida in the region.⁴ Pakistan's military announced that it had lifted the curfew in Swat Valley after two years, and that it would cease its operations in the Swat Valley, thus obeying a government order to hold its fire⁵. Immediately after the

¹ Syed Saleem Shahzad, 'The Taliban get their first wish', [Asia Times Online](http://www.atol.com), February 19, 2009. Access through: www.atol.com

² 'Text of draft Nizam-e-Adl regulation 2009', March 2009, in: [South Asian Terrorism Portal](http://www.satp.org) (SATP). Access through: www.satp.org

³ 'NWFP govt unveils Nizam-e-Adl'; [Daily Times](http://www.dailytimes.com) (Site edition), February 17, 2009

⁴ 'Pakistani Taliban say Swat ceasefire to be reviewed', in: [The Times of India](http://www.thehindu.com), 22 February 2009

⁵ 'Pakistan army 'holds fire' in Swat; [Aljazeera.Net](http://www.aljazeera.net), February 18, 2009

announcement of the agreement it was severely criticized both inside Pakistan and abroad; it has remained a hot topic ever since. How did this state of affairs come about? What exactly is at stake?

Origins of the TNSM

In June 1989 Maulana Sufi Mohammad, having left the Jamaat-e-Islami party (JI) after he had renounced electoral politics⁶, became the founding father of the TNSM (Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Laws). The TNSM headquarters were located in the city of Mardan, Malakand Division, which borders on Bajaur Agency – which borders on Afghanistan.⁷ The Maulana, then in his late fifties, for a while used to live in the Malakand Division of the NWFP, of which the Swat Valley and its surroundings are an integral, well-known part to many people, if only for its natural beauty.⁸ About 1,6 million people live there, mainly of Yousafzai Pashtun tribal origin. The Yousafzai tribe is one of the largest Pashtun tribes in Pakistan.

The TNSM from its inception was to be a religious militant organization with only a single-point agenda; enforcing the Islamic criminal justice system, or sharia, in Malakand Agency. Although the TNSM predated the Taliban movement in neighbouring Afghanistan, close links soon developed between the TNSM and the Afghan Taliban after the latter emerged in the summer of 1994. In its religious outlook it is equally Wahabi-oriented. Still, the TNSM for many years basically sought to introduce sharia law in its own territories, openly advocating the use of force to achieve that aim. It rejects democracy as 'un-Islamic', and all political and religious political parties with it as well, since they merely 'seek to duplicate the western style of democracy'.

The TNSM operates primarily in the Pashtun tribal belt in the PATA (Provincially Administered Tribal Areas). Although it has acquired a considerable following in Malakand Division and Bajaur Agency it had little success in expanding its activities beyond the tribal areas of these regions.⁹ Quite a large number of its followers are ex-servicemen from the Pakistani army, as well as experienced Afghan mujahedin and Kashmiri fighters.

During the second term of Prime Minister of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto (1993-1996) the TNSM in November 1994 organised huge road blockades in the Malakand Division, seeking to force the national government in Islamabad to yield to the demand of Sufi Mohammad to enforce Islamic laws in the area.¹⁰ It also occupied Saidu Sharif airport, and took hostage civil court judges and government officials. Mrs. Bhutto, now faced with an increasingly violent armed uprising and the prospect of enduring turmoil in the entire region, accepted all but one of his demands.¹¹ Among others, the TNSM had demanded that Pashtu would be used in

⁶ Maulana Sufi Muhammad declared that "the politics of elections was haram" (forbidden under Islamic law). Quoted by Zia-Ur-Rehman in 'Extreme solutions' *The role of TNSM in Talibanising the Malakand—a journey into history up to the present times*, in: The News International, 1 July 2007 (News On Sunday). Before Sufi Muhammad parted ways with the Jamaat-e-Islami, he actually did participate in elections. He won a seat on the district council of Dir, representing his Maidan constituency. Rahimulla Yusufzai, 'The man that is Sufi Muhammad', in: The News International, May 5, 2009. It would be interesting, if not revealing, to trace which experiences made the Maulana decide to quit electoral politics and democracy altogether.

⁷ Bajaur Agency lies between Swat Valley in Malakand Agency and Kunar and Nangarhar provinces of Afghanistan. These provinces are hotspots of Taliban activity. Supposedly Bajaur Agency would have been cleared of militants, mostly Afghans and Arabs, in September 2008. It was not. As a new deadline, Pakistani military commanders mentioned half March 2009. See: Mukhtar A. Khan, 'A profile of Militant Groups in Bajaur Tribal Agency', in: Terrorism Monitor, Vol. VII Issue 6, March 19, 2009. Published by The Jamestown Foundation, Washington. Access through: www.jamestown.org The operations of the Pakistani forces are supported by a lashkar (tribal army) of the Salarzai tribe

⁸ Jinnah once called Swat Valley 'Switzerland of Pakistan'; the Valley always has attracted numerous tourists.

⁹ In the early 1990's, disaffection among many people in Dir made them support the TNSM, not the question of 'how Islamic' the state was. Their disaffection was mainly caused by an oppressive state machinery that badly handled common property resources, in particular forest resources. Dir, Swat and Chitral were only incorporated into the district administrative structure of the Pakistani state in 1969. Agitation by local communities against unjust handling of common property resources started in the mid-1970s. Aasim Sajjad Akhtar, 'Putting things in context', in: The News International, February 22, 2009, The News On Sunday.

¹⁰ Remarkably, this armed uprising by the TNSM in Malakand Agency coincided with the first broadly published actions by the new-born Taliban-movement (July 1994) in Afghanistan. Already in October of that year the Taliban took over the city of Kandahar

¹¹ B. Raman, 'Swat: Groping For Peace'; International Terrorism Monitor, Paper No.497, 17 February 2009, South Asia Analysis Group (www.saaq.org). On Benazir Bhutto's troubled second term, also see: Hussain Haqqani, Pakistan. Between

court proceedings instead of Urdu, the national language.

Sufi Muhammad wanted Islamic courts to be set up in the Malakand Division. They should be totally autonomous with the appellate, secular courts in Peshawar and be completely free from any judicial intervention from Islamabad. The legal system of Pakistan was based on English laws and practises, and therefore not acceptable to the TNSM. This key demand was the only one not accepted by the government. The then Chief Minister of the NWFP (Aftab Ahmed Khan Sherpao) entered into an accord with the TNSM to establish Qazi Courts, replacing the regular courts in Malakand Division in May 1994. The NWFP Governor imposed sharia law in the Malakand Division by ordinance – which, however, was not carried out.

In June 1995 an angered Sufi Muhammad and a number of his followers were arrested after renewed clashes with security forces; they had started to kidnap government officials, and even killed a member of the NWFP parliament, Badiuz Zaman. The Bhutto-government was accused of not implementing Sharia, as was agreed earlier. Neither Nawaz Sharif (1996-1999) nor Pervez Musharraf (1999-2008) have ever revised this 'agreement', in spite of the fact that the TNSM had established parallel 'Qazi' courts in Malakand Division, thus directly challenging the 'writ' of the federal government.

However, until Operation 'Enduring Freedom' started in October 2001 in Afghanistan, which was aimed at removing the Taliban-regime from power, the TNSM was not particularly known for any form of rabid anti-Americanism (although it had threatened to kidnap Americans and attack American property as a retaliatory measure for the cruise missile strikes on the Zawhar Kili camp complex near Khost in Afghanistan on 20 August 1998). The American decision to provide both material and active in-the-field support to the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance in its 'march on Kabul' changed all that.

At a mass meeting in Mingora (Malakand Division) Sufi Mohammad on 20 September issued a 'fatwa' (an authoritative religious order by a Muslim spiritual leader) to his followers to come with him to Afghanistan to fight against the American troops, together with the Afghan Taliban.¹² Reportedly, thousands of heavily armed volunteers did cross the Durand Line (the *de facto* border between Pakistan and Afghanistan since 1893). Conveniently, the political administration of Bajaur Agency as well as the security forces allowed this army of holy warriors to cross its territory into Afghanistan unhindered.¹³

This ill-conceived expedition rapidly ended in complete failure. The beleaguered Afghan Taliban were not particularly welcoming to their brethren-in-arms, asking the eager Pakistani to merely 'stand by'.¹⁴ Once at the front, numerous Pakistani 'fighters' (if they were that in the first place) subsequently got killed by US air-strikes shortly after their arrival.¹⁵ This led to a hastily retreat of Sufi Mohammad and his remaining followers into the safe haven of Malakand. Many blamed Sufi Muhammad's incompetent leadership and lack of combat skills for this tragedy, heavily eroding his moral authority.

Decline and revival

Once back in Musharraf-ruled Pakistan Sufi Muhammad was arrested on 15 January 2002 and got sentenced to seven years of imprisonment; the TNSM was banned after being branded as a 'terrorist' organisation. Maulana Fazlullah (born on 1 March 1975), a son-in-law of the imprisoned Sufi Muhammad also was a member of the

Mosque and Military, Washington 2005, p.237-238

¹² South Asian Terrorism Portal; www.satp.com, 'Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi' (Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Laws), 4 pp. Site accessed in February 2009.

¹³ During the 1980s and 1990s Bajaur Agency was known as the 'Poppy Kingdom'. From its numerous Afghan refugee camps Taliban fighters were recruited; in 2005 most camps were closed. See: Hassan Abbas, 'Pakistan's grip on tribal areas is slipping', in: *Asia Times Online*, 4 October 2007, 8 pp. Access: www.atimes.com

¹⁴ This cool reception should not have come as a surprise. Until this very day Afghans, in particular Pashtuns, harbour rather mixed thoughts and feelings about the blessings of the meddling Pakistani friendship. Most Afghans prefer, and have always preferred, to be left on their own. Throughout history they seldom were.

¹⁵ For two first-hand accounts of American operations in Afghanistan from September 2001, see: Gary C. Schroen, *First In. An Insider's Account of How the CIA Spearheaded the War on Terror in Afghanistan*, New York 2005. Gary Schroen was succeeded by Gary Berntsen, also known as 'Gary II'. Berntsen also published his account of developments in Afghanistan, in spite of all obstructions by his former employer, the CIA. Gary Berntsen & Ralph Pezzullo, *Jawbreaker. The Attack on Bin Laden and al-Qaeda - A Personal account by the CIA's Key Field Commander*, New York, 2005. Gary II makes it abundantly clear how strongly the Musharraf-regime was opposed to the Northern Alliance overtaking Kabul.

expedition force to Afghanistan. After his release from prison after 18 months he returned to Swat and took over as supreme leader of the 'executive body' of the TNSM.¹⁶ The massive loss of cadres on the Afghan battlefield, the unceremonious demise of the Taliban-regime and the continued imprisonment of Sufi Muhammad by the Musharraf-regime all contributed to a decline in activities of a weakened TNSM.

Avoiding armed confrontations with the Pakistani Army and the Frontier Corps, its leadership now concentrated on taking over as a ruling power in the Swat Valley. Maulana Liaquat and Maulana Faqir Mohammed were two other prominent leaders.¹⁷ Soon, Maulana Fazlullah and his executive body of Mullas were carrying out the *de facto* civil administration and criminal justice system.

In this process, the TNSM underwent an important change; it now turned into a broad-based political religious organisation, instead of merely being a purely militant religious movement. It no longer just demanded the immediate instalment of a 'true Islamic judicial system' but also sought to establish an Islamic system of education and the introduction of a strict code of conduct for all Muslims. In order to spread this message, as well as to acquire support for the ongoing struggle of their 'brotherly' Afghan Taliban against the newly installed Karzai government in Kabul and its foreign supporters, the TNSM set up a number of FM radio stations. In spite of the local authorities banning the stations, Maulana Fazlullah soon was known as 'Maulana Radio'.

External developments

In seeking to regain its strength, the TNSM immensely profited from two major external developments. The Musharraf-regime held national and provincial elections in October 2002. To make sure that its main political ally, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA, or United Council of Action) would win them it did not allow political parties to participate and had banned political rallies; the polls were manipulated. The MMA consisted of six religious fundamentalist parties (it did not include the TNSM); its individual candidates ran on a heavily anti-American platform, demanding the immediate closure of U.S. bases in Pakistan.¹⁸ The virtually unchallenged MMA did win, and formed the new government of the NWFP. The new chief minister, Akram Durrani, echoing identical views from Mullah Omar, stated: "We believe that God prearranged food and clothing for every man or woman he created. If we give up the ways of God and devise our own solutions to perceived problems we may land in trouble".¹⁹

Although the militant TNSM was formally banned by the federal government the new provincial MMA-government in the NWFP, not surprisingly, turned a blind eye to its undisrupted activities. Thus, the TNSM became the *de facto* rulers in the Swat Valley. Like the MMA, it extended its full support to the Afghan Taliban leaders and their struggle against the foreign backed Karzai government in Kabul. An uneasy co-existence now

¹⁶ Maulana Fazlullah is a son of Biladar Khan, a Pashtun of Babakakhel clan of the Yasoufzai tribe. Highly inspired by the TNSM, Biladar Khan became one of the trusted lieutenants of Sufi Mohammad; he sent his son to the madrassa of Sufi Mohammad at Qambar in Dir district. The News correspondent Amir Mir, quoted in: B. Raman, 'Jihadi Cocktail Awaiting Holbrooke', *South Asia Analysis Group*, (SAAG), 7 February 2009, International Terrorism Monitor, Paper No 492

¹⁷ Maulana Liaquat got killed on October 30, 2006, in a Pakistani air strike in a madrassa in Chingai Village in Bajaur. Both these leaders were wanted by the Pakistani Government for 'harbouring Taliban operatives' and 'training of militants'. South Asian Terrorism Portal; www.satp.com, 'Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi' (Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Laws). Maulana Faqir Mohammed, a member of the Mommand tribe, had accompanied Sufi Mohammad on his reckless expedition into Afghanistan. After its forced return Faqir Mohammed managed to escape arrest and settled in Bajaur Agency again (he was born there), to become a prominent TNSM-leader, working closely with at least six other militant Islamic groups in fighting against the Pakistani security forces. Although a member of the Mohmand tribe, he became a deputy leader of Pakistani Taliban leader in Waziristan Baitullah Mehsud in Bajaur Agency and developed close contacts with al Qaeda members. Mukhtar A. Khan, 'A profile of Militant Groups in Bajaur Tribal Agency', in: *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. VII Issue 6, March 19, 2009. Published by The Jamestown Foundation, Washington. Access through: www.jamestown.org

¹⁸ Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos. How the war against Islamic extremism is being lost in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia*, New York & London 2008, p. 157-159. Only a few weeks before the 'elections' were held in October 2002, the military leader turned-president of Pakistan, Musharraf, had received another solid pledge from the Bush-government of 230 million dollars to buy (American) military hardware, 'to keep al Qaeda on the run'. Clearly, Washington could not care less how this aim would be achieved, even if it meant supporting a military dictator that relied on rabidly anti-American, fundamentalist forces in his own country. This course of events also serves to underline Musharraf's duplicity in his dealings with both antagonist parties.

¹⁹ Interview with Akram Durrani by Illyas Khan, in: *Herald*, February 2003

developed between a frustrated, if not frightened, federal government on the one hand and the actual ruling power in the Swat Valley, backed by the MMA-government of the NWFP, on the other. Maulana Fazlullah and his mullas were running the civil administration and the criminal justice system, the army and the Frontier Corps remained in charge of internal security.²⁰

The second opportunity to strengthen its position in Malakand Division occurred when a strong earthquake on 8 October 2005 struck Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir and parts of the NWFP. Quite a number of inhabitants of Swat and Malakand were convinced that the earthquake was a divine punishment for their misdeeds – whatever those may have been. The TNSM-leaders told them that burning all musical and electronic equipment could prevent the further wrath of god. TNSM cadres were active in aiding the victims of the earthquake and their families.²¹

Militancy spreads in ‘the land of the pure’

The uneasy ‘modus vivendi’ between the TNSM and the federal government was radically altered by the decision of the Musharraf regime in July 2007 to forcefully clear the Red Mosque (Lal Masjid) in Islamabad of radicals (known as ‘Operation Sunrise’).²² Simultaneously, the Pakistani army had dispatched reinforcements to Malakand Division and North Waziristan, attempting to pre-empt the expected retaliatory violence.²³ To be sure, the first casualty in Islamabad was a government soldier (a Ranger), who got killed by bullets fired from the mosque. Lal Masjid figured prominently in the al-Qaeda supported revival of the Afghan Taliban since 2004. From here, Taliban activities in Afghanistan were coordinated; besides, the mosque had steadily developed into an important recruiting center.²⁴ Youths were sent for training to North and South Waziristan, as well as to the Swat Valley.²⁵

In response to the bloody military take-over of the Lal Masjid between 10 and 13 July, Maulana Fazlullah instructed his men to carry out attacks on ‘Pakistani installations’, which they eagerly did.²⁶ From 12 July 2007, when Swat experienced its first suicide bomber attack ever, there was a rapid increase in suicide and armed attacks, resulting in hundreds of casualties. Scores of militants started to assemble in the Swat Valley. Accused by the government of belonging to the Taliban, Fazlullah stated: “It is not a charge, it is an honor. I say that I am with the Taliban and I consider Mullah Omar as my *amir* (head)”.²⁷ The government was right.

But by now both Washington and the Pakistani army high command were thoroughly fed up with the seemingly unstoppable mushrooming of militant groups and the unheard-of violence that erupted in the country. Musharraf cancelled the truce with the Pakistani Taliban he had concluded in 2006 and fired his close associate

²⁰ B. Raman, ‘Swat: Groping For Peace’, Paper No. 497, 17 February 2009. [South Asian Analysis Group](http://www.saag.org). Access through: www.saag.org

²¹ Western medical aid workers on the spot were often treated with contempt and suspicion. Although they were the best medically qualified personnel around, they often were not allowed to help female victims. President Musharraf pinned some medals on their chests, but this could hardly relieve their frustration and anger. Personal communication.

²² B. Raman, ‘Pakistan Tribal Unrest Intensifies’, International Terrorism Monitor, Paper No. 267, 18 August, 2007. [South Asian Analysis Group](http://www.saag.org). Access through: www.saag.org

²³ B. Raman, ‘Musharraf faces Pashtun Mutiny’, [South Asia Analysis Group](http://www.saag.org), International Terrorism Monitor, Paper No. 259, 19 July 2007. Access through: www.saag.org

²⁴ These activities considerably contributed to a strong Taliban Spring offensive in 2006, bringing an unpleasant surprise to Western troops in Afghanistan as well as the Karzai-government in Kabul.

²⁵ Syed Saleem Shahzad, ‘Net closes on mosque – and Pakistan’, in: [Asia Times Online](http://www.atimes.com), 6 July 2007, 3 pp. Web address: www.atimes.com

²⁶ In South Waziristan, militant commander Baitullah Mehsud did the same. North and South Waziristan, bordering on the Afghan provinces of Khost and Paktika, are the main centers of crossborder activities by Pakistani Taliban and al-Qaeda groups. See: Hassan Abbas, ‘Increasing Talibanization in Pakistan’s Seven Tribal Agencies’, in: [Terrorism Monitor](http://www.jamestown.org), Vol. 5, Issue 18, September 27, 2007. Access: www.jamestown.org

²⁷ Interview with Maulana Fazlullah by Syed Saleem Shahzad, ‘A new battle front opens in Pakistan’, in: [Asia Times Online](http://www.atimes.com), 14 July 2007. Access through: www.atimes.com In another interview, Fazlullah admits that he has no madrasa certificate and has only received some religious education from his father-in-law. See: Mushtaq Yusufzai, ‘Mullah of Imam Dehrai. A profile of Maulana Fazlullah’, in: [The News International](http://www.the-news-international.com), 22 July 2007, Special Report in News On Sunday (NOS). When the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was formed in December 2007, Fazlullah readily accepted the leadership of Baitullah Mehsud

in Peshawar, Governor Ali Jan Orakzai. On 19 July 2007 the army launched a huge military offensive in FATA, although it had repeatedly and recently stated that there were 'no militant training camps' to be found in the tribal area. Simultaneously, the construction of a large American base on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, in the 'talibanized' Bajaur Agency, was well underway. It was supposed to guard the entrance roads into Khyber Agency and, especially, the Khyber Pass as well as monitor militants' troop movements. US forces were in heavy combat with Taliban and al Qaeda fighters in the Afghan Kunar province, bordering on Bajaur Agency.

The Pakistani army made little progress in 'pacifying' the tribal areas. Worse, hundreds of soldiers got killed in fighting against their own country fellow-men, making this task particularly unpopular among many units. Increasingly, the para-military forces (mainly the Frontier Corps, largely made up of inhabitants from the tribal areas) were faced with desertions. At the same time, alarming US intelligence warnings announced that al-Qaeda was rapidly reorganizing in Pakistan's tribal areas. It meant that 'the key to (win) the war on terror did not lie in Afghanistan but next door, in Pakistan'.²⁸

This often overlooked but crucially important development coincided with the already steeply declined popularity of 'strongman' Musharraf. The deepening political crisis in Pakistan prompted the Bush-administration to urge general Musharraf to broaden the political base of his regime and to accept that his glory-days of being America's trusted political ally were over.²⁹ A power-sharing agreement should be agreed with Benazir Bhutto, keeping Musharraf posted as president while Benazir might become prime minister once more. To this end, on 27 July 2007 Bhutto and Musharraf met for the first time in Abu Dhabi.³⁰ Mrs. Bhutto had repeatedly voiced her opposition against religious extremism and terrorism. As she was widely seen in the West as a secular, highly popular politician who could lead the country to full democracy, it was hoped that a power-sharing deal with Musharraf would help to diminish Islamic extremism in the country.³¹

Although it took an increasingly beleaguered and isolated Musharraf some time to realise that he did not have much choice, eventually he digested the message, allowing Benazir Bhutto and her husband Asif Ali Zardari to return to Pakistan. A 'National Reconciliation Ordinance' was pushed through; this legal ruling withdrew all cases of corruption pending against all politicians, Bhutto and the Sharif brothers included, accused of corruption, and looting the national treasury. Both parties had set out their conditions: Musharraf should again be able to run for president before a new parliament would be elected; the PPP-leader wanted him to take off his uniform as army chief of staff before he did so. Seeking to be re-elected as president, Musharraf found the Supreme Court, led by a sacked but re-instated Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammed Chaudhry, squarely on his way. Not only was it quite unlikely that the Supreme Court would consider Musharraf eligible for election again; on 23 August 2007 it also ruled that Nawaz and Shahbaz Sharif, living in exile in Saudi-Arabia, were free to return to Pakistan.

Events now rapidly unfolded. On October 2, 2007 Musharraf appointed General Pervez Ashfaq Kayani (born in August 1951) as the new Chief of Army Staff; Kayani would take over only after the re-election of general Musharraf as president.³² Four days later Musharraf was duly re-elected as president by 386 'friendly' national and provincial parliamentarians. On 18 October 2007 PPP-leader Benazir Bhutto returned to Pakistan. She was welcomed by a huge crowd in Karachi – until a series of bomb explosions near her armour-plated truck created a horrible blood bath, killing 179 people. It came as no surprise to Bhutto, who had warned journalists as well as Musharraf in advance that she was well aware that an attempt on her life would be made.³³

²⁸ Philip H. Gordon, 'Pakistan at the Crossroads', in: [Yale Global Online](#), August 7, 2007.

²⁹ Ahmed Rashid, 'The Countdown has begun', in: [Daily Times](#), (Site Edition), August 13, 2007

³⁰ Mark Mazzetti, 'U.S. Is Prodding Pakistan Leader to Share Power', in: [The New York Times](#), August 16, 2007; 'Bhutto plans return to Pakistan', in: [Al Jazeera](#), August 11, 2007

³¹ This rosy scenario was based on wishful thinking in Western capitals. Nor the extremists neither the army would be overly deep impressed by a PPP-dominated civil government. See: Stephen P. Cohen, 'Pakistan, Wishing on a Star', in: [Globe and Mail](#), August 4, 2007

³² Subhash Kapila, 'Pakistan's New Chief of Army Staff: A Predictive Estimate'. [South Asia Analysis Group](#), Paper No. 2399, 3 October, 2007. Kayani had served as Deputy Military Secretary in the first government of Benazir Bhutto (1988-1990); at this moment of his 'promotion' he served as Director General of the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), the notorious secret service of the country.

³³ Arnaud De Borchgrave, 'Commentary: Murderous premonition', in: [United Press International](#), October 19, 2007. He stated: 'She e-mailed this reporter, eight hours before flight time...'. See also: Benazir Bhutto, [Reconciliation. Islam. Democracy and the West](#), London 2008, p. 6-14.

Renewed government offers of a ceasefire between the Pakistani army and militant Pakistani Taliban groups in North and South Waziristan were turned down; especially in the Swat Valley Pakistani troops faced increasing attacks from both militant groups and the population. At the beginning of November in neighbouring Afghanistan the Afghan Taliban went on the offensive, making it 'the deadliest year since the 2001 U.S.-led invasion'.³⁴ In this highly charged atmosphere, Pakistan's national and provincial elections were to be prepared – unless Musharraf would decide to impose the state of emergency first.

On November 3, 2007, Musharraf in his capacity as Army Chief, declared a state of emergency. Obviously, he still enjoyed the full support of the top army command. Formally, this decision was motivated by 'the state of deteriorating law and order' and the 'vanishing writ of the state owing to acts of terrorism' in the country.³⁵ Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, who by now had also returned to the country, gave a harsh verdict: "If Musharraf's arguments are true then he should be tried for bringing the country to this point instead of punishing the people of Pakistan by taking away their fundamental rights".³⁶ On national television Musharraf presented the state of emergency as 'a declaration of war against militancy', especially in the tribal agencies where the army was already fully engaged.

A war it certainly was; on October 7 Pakistani troops had invaded the tribal areas of North and South Waziristan, in an attempt to prevent a renewed post-Ramadan Taliban offensive into Afghanistan. Simultaneously, as a much needed diversion to the developing struggle in Waziristan, Taliban sympathizers in Swat Valley jumped back into action; it resulted in their capture of several villages and towns.³⁷

In Islamabad, paramilitary units (Rangers and Frontier Corps units) surrounded the Supreme Court. The resisting Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry and a number of judges were forced to march out and put under house arrest. The Supreme Court members, who were now removed because of 'judicial interference' with the prerogatives of the executive power, were expected shortly to invalidate the re-election of Musharraf to the presidency on 6 October. For the second time in one year, Chief Justice Chaudhry was fired. Musharraf proclaimed a 'Provisional Constitutional Order' (PCO), replacing the operation of the suspended Constitution but, significantly, it did not dissolve the provincial and federal assemblies and governments. The sitting National Assembly, dominated by 'the King's party' (PML-Q) supporting Musharraf since 2002 and soon to be dissolved, dutifully endorsed the state of emergency and the PCO. Earlier, the National and Provincial Assemblies had almost unanimously voted in favour of the continuation in power of Musharraf as president, and its members themselves were up for elections on 16 and 24 November.

An embarrassed and angered Benazir Bhutto called on the American government to tell Musharraf that 'it does not accept martial law, and that it expects him to conduct free, fair, impartial and internationally monitored elections within 60 days under a reconstituted election committee'.³⁸ Mrs. Bhutto, like the United States, thus continued to bet on two horses. She publicly uttered strong pro-forma criticisms of Musharraf's actions, yet she did not go as far as call for a public revolt to demand his resignation, keeping open the option of returning as Prime Minister under a Musharraf presidency. She did welcome the announcement Musharraf made about national elections being held before January 9, 2008. At the same time, she asked him to step down.

Lal Masjid: Point of no return?

Ever since the nationwide eruption of violence after the Lal Masjid operation in July 2007, Swat Valley and its surrounding areas had been in flames. Of its approximately 1,6 million inhabitants, hundreds of thousands had fled from their homes in the valley, heading for Peshawar and beyond. In October 2007, Pakistani forces (over 12.000 soldiers) led by Major-General Ahmed Shuja Pasha³⁹ started a huge offensive against Taliban militants,

³⁴ Dan Murphy, 'Fighting With Taliban Flares in the West, and East, of Afghanistan', in: *Christian Science Monitor*, November 2, 2007. Access through: www.csmonitor.com

³⁵ Najam Sethi, 'News analysis: Where do we go from here?', in: *Daily Times* (site edition), November 4, 2007

³⁶ 'Nawaz Sharif slams 'second martial law'', in: *Daily Times*, November 5, 2007

³⁷ Syed Saleem Shahzad, 'Taliban stage a coup of their own'; *Asia Times Online*, November 7, 2007. Access through: www.atimes.com

³⁸ Benazir Bhutto, 'Musharraf's martial plan', in: *Daily Times*, November 8, 2007 (Originally published in *The New York Times*)

³⁹ Ahmed Shuja Pasha at the time was Director-General of Military Operations (DGMO). On September 29, 2007 he was promoted and became Director-General of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)

numbering about 3.000, in Swat Valley. Faced with an overwhelming number of government troops and the prospect of heavy losses Maulana Fazlullah's TNSM temporarily disengaged from the fighting, only to re-emerge as a hit and run force later, while suicide bombers demanded numerous victims, as well.

As the national election campaign gathered steam, on 27 December 2007 Benazir Bhutto got killed in Rawalpindi. As many parts of the country, especially Sindh province, exploded with grief and anger, president Musharraf ordered a curfew; the elections were postponed. Baitullah Mehsud, one of militant Pakistani Taliban most prominent leaders in South Waziristan, was accused of having planned this attack, an accusation he vehemently denied.⁴⁰ The national and provincial elections eventually were held in February 2008. They resulted in a huge electoral loss for both the PML-Q, the so-called 'King's Party', and the traditionalist MMA-coalition ruling the NWFP (down from 52 to 10 seats).

The Awami National Party (ANP) had roundly defeated the 'coalition of the mullahs' by emphatically employing the 'non-violence' and 'peace' slogans. During its vigorous campaign, it had strongly opposed the military's operation against the local parties, and had urged the use of peaceful means to solve the problems. The ANP gained 32 seats, up from 8, winning substantially in the Swat Valley as well. In adjacent Buner and Dir districts it was equally successful; also, in Bajaur Agency, another stronghold of the TNSM bordering on Afghanistan, the ANP gained its first seat for the National assembly. The ANP and the PPP now formed a provincial coalition-government in Peshawar. The new government of the NWFP announced it would be willing to seriously negotiate a peace deal with the Taliban groups in their province.

The PPP, having emerged as the largest national party, together with the PML-N moved to establish a broad coalition government in Islamabad. As Nawaz Sharif put it: "The PPP and the PML-N undertake to form a coalition for a democratic Pakistan".⁴¹ On March 17 the newly elected and radically altered federal parliament held its maiden session. Former army chief Musharraf, all but politically isolated now in his presidential palace by the unexpected results of the election, was increasingly pressurized to step down as president, as well.

Mr. Zardari and Mr. Sharif, having formed Pakistan's new coalition government together with the support of the ANP and the small religious party Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), announced their willingness to negotiate with militant groupings; military force would from now on only be used as a last resort.⁴² The new government led by PPP-premier Gilani wanted to limit and control the unrest in the tribal areas, to counter a threatening destabilization of the NWFP and Pakistan as a whole. The Pakistani Taliban, by now united as the Tehrek-e-Taliban (TTP) and led by Baitullah Mehsud, were eager to reach an agreement with Islamabad. Their professed goal at the time was not primarily the 'Talibanization' of Pakistan but increasing their 'jihad' against US and other western forces in Afghanistan.⁴³

Another peace, another war

On May 21, 2008, after ensuring a cease-fire in Swat, another peace agreement was finally concluded between the NWFP coalition-government, led by the Pashtun Awami National Party, and Taliban militants largely belonging to the TNSM in Swat. One month earlier former TNSM-leader Sufi Muhammad had been released

⁴⁰ The day after Benazir's assassination Baitullah Mehsud made a phone call which was intercepted, and published. In it, Mehsud congratulates Maulvi Sahib, who confirms to Mehsud that the two men who carried out the job were 'our men'. 'Transcript of Baitullah's phone call', in: Dawn, December 29, 2007. Although this transcript may have been a fabrication, at least it connects Mehsud to the murder. Baitullah Mehsud had stated well before October 18 already that "Benazir Bhutto would be killed in a suicide attack". Muhammad Naeem Chishti, 'Bhutto's murder plan', in: The Frontier Post, December 29, 2007. Access through: www.thefrontierpost.com Al-Qaeda top commander for Afghanistan operations and spokesperson Mustafa Abu al-Yazid claimed responsibility for the murder of Bhutto: "We terminated the most precious American asset which vowed to defeat mujahideen". Al-Yazid further stated that the death squad consisted of Punjabi associates of the underground anti-Shi'ite militant group Lashkar-i-Jhangvi, operating under al-Qaeda orders. Syed Saleem Shahzad, 'Al-Qaeda claims Bhutto killing', in: Asia Times Online, December 29, 2007, Access through: www.atimes.com

⁴¹ Muhammad Bilal, 'Judges' restoration through parliamentary resolution: PPP-PML-N sign historic coalition agreement', in: Daily Times, March 10, 2008

⁴² This resolve alarmed American officials, who feared a softening stance toward the militants. Washington considered short-term peace deals between the militants and the Pakistani military as signs of weakness. Jane Perlez, 'Pakistan to talk With Militants, New leaders Say', in: The New York Times, March 22, 2008

⁴³ M.K. Bhadrakumar, 'US tightens its grip on Pakistan', in: Asia Times Online, May 10, 2008. Access through: www.atimes.com

from custody. Since the summer of 2007, the TNSM and several other militant groups had been fighting government troops, and succeeded in keeping them at bay. Among others the peace deal stated, just like the previous ones in 1994 and 1999, that 'Shariat-e-Muhammadi' would be implemented in the entire Malakand Division – not just in Swat Valley.⁴⁴ The government even granted formal permission to the radio station of Maulana Fazlullah to operate; also, a number of militant cadres were freed from prison. The security forces suspended their operations. A mixed committee of government representatives and Taliban-members was to oversee and control the implementation of the agreement.⁴⁵

However, disunity between several militant groups now surfaced. The Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) led by Maulana Masood Azhar, refused to adhere to the new agreement. A number of dissenting TNSM-followers joined their ranks. The JeM is a member of Osama bin Laden's International Islamic Front (IIF); the locally oriented TNSM is affiliated with, though not a member of, the national Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).⁴⁶ The adherents of the JeM in Malakand Agency are popularly known as the 'Punjabi Taliban'. Little love is lost between the Yousafzai Pashtuns and the Punjabi Taliban; there regularly are armed clashes between them, adding to the turmoil of 'jihadi anarchy' in the tribal belt of the NWFP. This explains why Sufi Muhammad and his locally oriented TNSM used to be considerably more popular in Malakand Agency than the non-TNSM militants but they, however, controlled approximately 80 % of the region.⁴⁷ Sufi Muhammad and Fazlullah cannot exercise control over them.

The TTP, led by Baitullah Mehsud, was formed in December 2007; it moulded together 27 Taliban groups under one umbrella, which only served to illustrate how fast their number had increased⁴⁸. The TTP was organized to carry out three objectives: to support the Afghan Taliban in their struggle with US and NATO forces in their country; to undertake defensive operations against Pakistani security forces; to enforce the sharia in the entire Pashtun tribal belt or FATA.

This time the 'peace' agreement (although after only a few quiet weeks local Taliban commanders began to target government property, female educational institutions and security personnel again) lasted for three months. In that short period, Taliban fighters coming from all over FATA and other areas massively flocked into Eastern Afghanistan, making life for American and NATO-troops rather difficult. June 2008 was the deadliest month for U.S. troops since the war had started in Afghanistan in 2001.⁴⁹ At the same time the Khyber-pass (which Agency is mainly populated by the Pashtun Afridi and Shinwari tribes), a key transit point where at least seventy percent of all American material needed in Afghanistan passes, was seriously threatened as well. So was provincial capital Peshawar, starting point of the main artery of supplies for US and NATO forces operating in eastern and southern Afghanistan.

It left Prime Minister Gilani little choice; on 28 June 2008 security forces started simultaneous clean-up operations again in the Khyber Agency, Swat Valley, and South-Waziristan. Gilani chose not to inform president Musharraf, officially still the supreme commander of all military forces. Chief Of Army Staff Kayani did. Gilani on his turn merely obeyed orders from his political boss, *de facto* chairman of the PPP Zardari, who had charged his confidant, Rehman Malik, with handling all matters concerning terrorism. Thus, Rehman Malik announced the suspension of the peace deal with the TNSM, negotiated by the provincial Government of the NWFP. The Awami National Party now began to feel extremely unhappy with its national and provincial coalition-partner, the PPP.

At this time, Pakistan's national security policy was in a mess.⁵⁰ As it was aptly written in an editorial of

⁴⁴ 'Text of the North West Frontier Province Government's agreement with the Taliban', in: Daily Times, May 22, 2008.

⁴⁵ The TNSM had made four demands: the enforcement of sharia, the withdrawal of the armed forces, the release of the Taliban prisoners, compensation payments for damage suffered by the people. Interview with Muslim Khan, spokesman for Swat militants, in: The News International, February 1, 2009, Special Report, News On Sunday. Interview conducted by Delawar Jan

⁴⁶ B. Raman, 'Gilani Govt. Relaxes Curbs On Pro-Al Qaeda Terrorists'. South Asia Analysis Group, International Terrorism Monitor, Paper No. 394, 23 May 2008 (www.saag.org)

⁴⁷ 'Omens against peace in Swat...', Editorial in: Daily Times, February 20, 2009

⁴⁸ This rapid increase in Pakistani Taliban groups since 2004 can largely be attributed to Saudi financing of numerous madrassas

⁴⁹ Jayshree Bajoria, 'As Afghanistan Roils, Pakistan Draws Heat'; Council on Foreign Relations, Daily Analysis, July 15, 2008

⁵⁰ B. Raman, 'Jihadi Anarchy in Pakistan – The Free For All Tribal Belt'. South Asia Analysis Group, International terrorism Monitor, Paper No. 2750, 29 June 2008 (www.saag.org)

the daily 'Dawn', Pakistan at that moment resembled "a bus full of drivers with no one really at the steering and the bus lurching from one side to the other"⁵¹ By now, the major Taliban groups were firmly entrenched in most of the tribal areas, while most of the government machinery was in complete disarray. The TTP even demanded the removal of the NWFP government.

To complicate matters further, two of the coalition partners of the four-party federal government, the PML-N of Nawaz Sharif and the JUIF of Fazlur Rehman, opposed adopting an uncompromising stance against the Taliban, thereby severely weakening the cohesion and resolve of the federal government. Already in May 2008, barely two months after its formation, Nawaz Sharif had withdrawn his ministers from the Federal Government, though not its political support. On August 18, after prolonged talks and threats, president Musharraf chose to step down before he would be impeached. Not even one week later the PPP-PML-N 'grand coalition' in Islamabad fell apart, after Nawaz Sharif had announced his party would also withdraw its political support for the federal government. Bone of contention was the apparent refusal by president Zardari to reinstall former Chief Justice Chaudhry in the Supreme Court. Increasingly, the ongoing judicial crisis and the bitter struggle between the president and the politicians was exacerbated by mushrooming economic troubles.

In the meantime, the security forces and the Taliban in Swat Valley once more were fully engaged in armed struggle. Both the security forces and their checkpoints, as well as girls' schools, were targeted by the TNSM and TTP; after all, Maulana Fazlullah had labelled female education as "a source of obscenity".⁵² On August 25, close advisor to president Zardari Rehman Malik announced a formal ban on the TTP. Despite the peace deal, he said, the militants kept attacking security forces, burning schools and damaging public buildings.⁵³ Though large parts of the NWFP were plagued by violence, Swat Valley remained the epicentre of it. On August 29, not only gunships but even fighter aircraft were used for the first time to strafe the militants positions in Swat.⁵⁴

It showed how desperate the government had become; both the Awami National Party and the Jamaat-ul-Ulema-Islam (JUI, led by Fazlur Rehman) publicly acknowledged that Peshawar, the provincial capital, was about to fall into the hands of the militants. The ANP, although always favouring dialogue, saw no other way out then resorting to the use of force against local and foreign militants. Curiously, the Gilani-government on August 30 by mouth of Rehman Malik suddenly announced a ceasefire in the Swat Valley, supposedly on the occasion of the holy Ramazan fasting period. Immediately, the TNSM made public that it would not observe a ceasefire until its demands were accepted and implemented by the government; the release of all its captured members and the introduction of the sharia in the Valley.⁵⁵

Crossing borders

On September 2, 2008 Pakistani military jets now bombed the Ghat Peochar area in Swat Valley, narrowly missing Fazlullah. One day later U.S. Special Forces carried out a short operation on Pakistani soil. Since U.S. troops now threatened to regularly cross the border to carry out similar 'snatch and grab' operations inside Pakistan, several stern warnings were issued by leading Pakistani politicians and supreme military commander Kayani that Pakistan would not allow any foreign forces to operate on its territory. This only underlined the unwillingness and incapability of important quarters within Pakistan's armed forces to effectively combat militant groups in the NWFP.

In October, a suicide attack was launched against ANP-leader Asfandyar Wali Khan; he got away unhurt, but three other people died. Earlier, the ANP leadership, after having had to admit that its attempt to wean away so-called 'reconcilable' militants from the hardliners had failed, had given its unequivocal support to the military operations in Swat, to deal with the insurgency once and for all.⁵⁶ The attack on Wali Khan, occurring

⁵¹ Dawn, Editorial, June 25, 2008

⁵² Queted by Kanchan Lakhsman, 'The Slippin Frontier', in: South Asia Intelligence Review, (SAIR) Vol.7 No.6, August 18, 2008

⁵³ Dawn, August 25, 2008

⁵⁴ Alok Bansal & T. Khurshchev Singh, 'Violence in Pakistan: Trend Analysis for August 2008', Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses (IDSA), New Delhi, September 30, 2008. Access through: www.idsa.org

⁵⁵ B. Raman, 'Zardari's U-Turn On Counter-Terrorism'. South Asia Analysis Group, International Terrorism Monitor, Paper No.434, 1 September 2008 Access through: www.saag.org

⁵⁶ Ismail Khan, 'ANP airs misgivings about anti-terror war seriousness', in: Dawn, October 7, 2008

within just two weeks of the devastating assault on the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad aimed at Pakistan's political leaders, served as another strong reminder that the Pakistani state and society were under severe militants' threat. Clearly, the Pakistani Taliban would ruthlessly target any individual or entity that stood in the way of realising its politico-religious agenda.⁵⁷

At the end of October, an armed clash between a group of pro-Fazlullah Taliban and the adherents of a local Pir, Samiullah, head of a tribal armed force (lashkar) occurred. The Pir had formed a lashkar against local militants at the request of the army.⁵⁸ A group of Taliban had attempted to kidnap the Pir from his home but they were stopped by dozens of tribesmen who set free their leader. Not much later hundreds of Taliban returned and publicly beheaded three members of the lashkar, warning that this would happen to 'anyone who tries to oppose us'.⁵⁹ In the gun battle that followed both Taliban militiamen and tribesmen got killed. That was not the end of it. On December 13, Pir Samiullah and eight of his followers were killed by TNSM-members in Swat.⁶⁰ His body was dug up by the Taliban and hung in a square of the village he lived in. Anyone who defied Taliban rule knew what to expect; everybody also knew that the Pakistani government and military could not be trusted upon to offer protection.

Nevertheless, tribal resistance against the Taliban mounted. In November, a grand jirgah (meeting) of the Salarzai tribe in Bajaur Agency, for instance, set out to remove all militants and criminals from the area through a tribal lashkar. The Salarzai stated that they wanted to restore normalcy in their region; the presence of militants was a constant threat to security and peace.⁶¹ If anything, initiatives like these unequivocally demonstrated how thoroughly fed-up many people in the area were with the ongoing violence, whether applied by militants or the Pakistani army.⁶² The Taliban responded by killing as many pro-government tribal chiefs in Bajaur Agency as they could lay their hands on, while at the same time building up its numbers.

As winter approached, Pakistan's security forces in Swat Valley were put into a troublesome dilemma; withdraw or stay? Pulling out would certainly give a great opportunity to the Taliban to strengthen their bases, enabling them to prepare optimally for a spring offensive in Afghanistan and, as readily became clear, in Pakistan itself. It would mean having battled in vain for one-and-a-half year against the militants of the TNSM and its allies. Staying of the over 10.000 troops, on the other hand, would mean the continuation of a dire war of attrition.⁶³

The spectacular attacks in Mumbai (26-29 November 2008) carried out by Pakistan-based militant organization Lashkar-e-Toiba (Army of the Pure, or LeT) readily solved this thorny issue. As a consequence, Pakistan was now faced by two major powers threatening to attack its territory. The American government seriously considered executing more cross-border 'grab and snatch' operations against al-Qaeda's hiding places in the NWFP; an extremely angered Indian government wanted to carry out 'surgical strikes' against militant camps and organizations on Pakistani soil in order to wipe out the 'roots of terror'.

In a rare display of national unity, all political parties pledged their full support to the Gilani-government 'to face off dangers to the integrity of the country'.⁶⁴ Scores of American politicians flooded New Delhi and Islamabad, all seeking to prevent the outburst of a full-scale armed confrontation between the two nuclear-armed countries. While international diplomacy was fully occupied with extinguishing this fire, numerous successful militant attacks were launched against NATO-supplies for Afghanistan going through the Khyber pass.

⁵⁷ Hasan Askari Rizvi, 'Understanding the insurgency', in: Daily Times, October 5, 2008

⁵⁸ The ANP had resorted to forming local militias (lashkars) after the Taliban had turned down its offer of peace. It led to the assassination of dozens of tribal leaders, ANP workers and members of the provincial assembly. The party saw its electorate in Swat valley dampen. Syed Saleem Shahzad, 'On the Militant Trail, Part 3 (Swat Valley: Whose war is this?)', in: Asia Times Online, January 31, 2009. Access through: www.atimes.com

⁵⁹ 'Swat lashkar battles Taliban', in: Daily Times, October 27, 2008

⁶⁰ B. Raman, 'Pashtuns Aren't Iraqis: Taliban's message To Gen. Petraeus'. South Asia Analysis Group, 30 December 2008, International Terrorism Monitor, Paper No. 486. Access through: www.saag.org

⁶¹ 'Tribal force plans major action in Bajaur', in: Dawn, November 4, 2008

⁶² Pakistani warplanes targeted their goals in Bajaur with the aid of Google Earth; small wonder that numerous victims were civilians! In 2009 in Swat and Buner, new equipment provided by the US was used. Admission by Air Chief Marshal Qamar Suleman. Eric Schmitt, 'Pakistan Injects Precision Into Air War on Taliban', in: The New York Times, July 30, 2009

⁶³ Syed Saleem Shahzad, 'Pakistan torn over its tribal areas'. Asia Times Online, November 15, 2008. Access through: www.atol.com

⁶⁴ Ahmed Hassan, 'Govt wins all-party support', in: Dawn, December 3, 2008

Losing control

At the beginning of 2009, virtually all of Swat Valley was controlled by the militants. They had set up sharia courts, prisons and a parallel administration. A decimated and frightened police force lost seventy officers in 2008 alone; they were beheaded or shot. Small wonder that over 800 police officers in Swat have deserted in two years time. Military and security forces proved equally unable and often unwilling to act against militant terror, thus allowing it to spread further. Increasingly, those who resisted the Taliban, or did not obey their decrees, were beheaded or shot. Regularly, executions were announced through radio transmissions. The police inspector general for the North West Frontier Province stated: "The local population is totally fed up, and if they had the chance they would lynch each and every Talib".⁶⁵ Unintended, his words are partly confirmed by a pronouncement by Muslim Khan, a TTP-spokesman for Swat militants. To a question by a journalist whether he thinks the people support the militants, Muslim Khan answered: "It is not the question of people being with us or against us. People are in favour of sharia and that is what we have been fighting for".⁶⁶

The famed 'writ' of the government was practically absent. President Zardari and the PPP-led federal government, confronted with an increase in the spread of terror, now announced that the government would be willing to talk with those militants who accepted his authority. This renewed peace offer was made in spite of the complete failure of all previous peace deals in Swat or elsewhere. Even worse, these agreements had mainly enabled militants to tighten their grip on the Valley, and kill those people (tribal elders, policemen) who had supported the Pakistani military.⁶⁷ If anything, the militants' grip on the Swat area had steadily increased since October 2007, the moment on which a huge military force had entered the region in order to curb it.

In February 2009 an approximate 600.000 people, over one-third of its population, had already fled from the Swat valley.⁶⁸ In neighbouring Afghanistan, things had not gone better for the Karzai-government and its Western allies; in January 2009 a European think-tank reported that at the end of 2008 72% of Afghan territory was permanently held by the Taliban.⁶⁹ At the beginning of February, news began to trickle in that another civilian exodus was taking place from Dir district (adjoining Bajaur Agency to the north) and Mohmand Agency (to the south of Bajaur Agency), while militants were streaming into both Dir and Mohmand; both areas border on Konar province, Afghanistan.

Death warrants against the entire political leadership of the ANP in the NWFP have been issued, and some have been carried out.⁷⁰ Taliban commanders had issued a Wahabi edict against the pirs and the Sufis of the entire NWFP.⁷¹ Equally, Taliban leaders have threatened to kill all lawyers and judges that failed to stop working with the state judicial system.

Nobody inside or outside Pakistan should have any doubts left about the final aims of the militants. It should also effectively put an end to the absurd claims by some government agencies and military commanders that the RAW (Indian Secret Service), Mossad (Israel) and the CIA were bent upon dismembering Pakistan, instead of radical Islamic organizations. On the contrary; some state agencies had lent financial and logistical support to Taliban groups (and seemingly some still do), ostensibly for such obsolete reasons as the creation of 'strategic depth'.⁷² On March 28, 2009, American General David Petraeus concluded that 'links between the Taliban and ISI (Pakistan's major intelligence service) are very strong and unquestionably remain to this day'.⁷³

⁶⁵ Richard A. Opiel Jr. and Pir Zubair Shah, 'In Pakistan, Radio Amplifies Terror of Taliban', in: The New York Times, January 25, 2009

⁶⁶ Delawar Jan, interview with Muslim Khan, 'No one can ban jihad', in: The News International, February 1, 2009, Special Report, The News on Sunday.

⁶⁷ Opiel and Zubair Shah, *ibid.*

⁶⁸ Dawn, February 5, 2009

⁶⁹ International Council on Security and Development (ICOS), London, January 2009

⁷⁰ Adil Zareef, 'Alarm bells or new strategy?', in: Dawn, February 9, 2009

⁷¹ 'Pakhtuns poised to act against Taliban', in: International The News, February 9, 2009

⁷² An old mantra of the Pakistani military. Basically, it searches to create a dependent regime in neighbouring Afghanistan (like that of the Taliban between 1996 and 2001), providing 'strategic depth' to the Pakistani armed forces to withdraw to when at war with India. Similarly, several Kashmir liberation groups fighting against the Indian occupation of a large part of Kashmir have always been supported by the Pakistani army command.

⁷³ 'ISI under heat in new US strategy', in: Dawn, March 28, 2009

Worse still from an American point of view, ISI still was abetting arch-enemy al-Qaeda.

Policies of appeasement

After several weeks of negotiations, and preceded by a 10-day truce between the government of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and the Taliban, NWFP Chief Minister Amir Hussain Hoti on 16 February 2009 announced that a bill had been signed between his provincial government and a delegation of local Taliban led by TNSM-leader Sufi Muhammad. The bill would create a separate order of justice in the whole of Malakand Division, which includes Swat.⁷⁴ According to Mr. Hoti, the “recommendations and proposals have been finalised, but they can only be implemented after peace is achieved”. He also said that President Asif Ali Zardari “in principle...approved this package”. Obviously the ANP-leadership hoped to achieve ‘peace in its time’. Apparently, it did not at all matter that the TNSM had been banned in 2002 already, under the Anti-Terrorism Act. As an added bonus, the TNSM in Swat Valley received 6 million US dollars (480 million Pakistani rupees) as ‘compensation’ for their losses.

As president Zardari supported the agreement, so did the army. According to military spokesman Athar Abbas, the army operations received little public backing; more civilian casualties would have further eroded the support for the army. From late 2007 till February 2009, over 1200 civilians were killed. At the same time, the local administration had broken down, seriously hampering efforts by the army to return to ‘normalcy’. The virtual dissolution of the existing local police force in the face of militant insurgency only served to increased pressure on the armed forces.

Comments

Immediately after the sharia law deal between the NWFP Government and the TNSM was made public on February 16, 2009, a veritable plethora of reactions and criticism began to break loose. For one thing, this certainly served to make clear how charged the atmosphere in Pakistan, and internationally as well, had become, but it also showed how profoundly feared ‘Islamic’ militancy emerging in and emanating from South Asia has become worldwide. As the debate on the ‘peace deal’ steadily widened and intensified, actual Taliban power and presence rapidly continued to spread in North West Pakistan.

Shortly before she was killed on 27 December 2007, Benazir Bhutto was asked whether Pakistan could withstand the Taliban onslaught and survive. Her response was revealing: ‘Bhutto viewed the Taliban and their ilk as the detritus of a failing state and a broken economy; the victims, if you like, of a rapacious and corrupt military and a civil elite who had by their transgressions and ineptitude reduced the country to the present, sorry pass.’⁷⁵

On the eve of the sharia-deal another criticaster ‘avant la lettre’, renowned Ayesha Jalal, had written: “Those undermining law and order in a Muslim society are perpetrating fitna, literally social and political disorder, and not jihad”. She condemned the practice of granting ‘concessions to murderous obscurantists’, if only because negotiations ‘with armed militants cannot be conducted by undermining the legitimacy of parties and popular representatives that won the confidence of the people in the NWFP as recently as the elections of February 2008’.⁷⁶

In the same vein, reporter Rahmanullah wrote: “If the Frontier Government releases imprisoned fighters who have destroyed nearly 200 schools, ruined public properties and have killed many innocent people for behaving in a so-called un-Islamic way, then prisoners that have committed a single murder should also be freed. If Maulana Fazlullah and his fighters are innocent then thousands of those prisoners who are booked for petty charges are all peaceful citizens”.⁷⁷ According to the Times of India, the Taliban had received state sanction to terrorise the Pashtun population living in Swat, and women would be the worst sufferers.⁷⁸

Seasoned diplomat and US special envoy to Pakistan and Afghanistan Richard Holbrooke, commenting

⁷⁴ As reported in the [BBC News](#), on Monday 16 February, 2009

⁷⁵ Zafar Hilaly, ‘Benazir Bhutto and the Taliban’, in: [Daily Times](#), February 16, 2009

⁷⁶ Ayesha Jalal, ‘The Fallacies of mainstreaming ‘Jihad’, in: [Dawn](#), 14 February, 2009

⁷⁷ Rahmanullah, ‘Peace Accord for All’, in: [Aryana Institute for Regional Research & Advocacy](#), (AIRRA), February 21, 2009

⁷⁸ ‘In Swat, women will pay the price of peace’, in: [The Times of India](#), 22 February 2009

from India, said that 'Swat demonstrates a key point and that is that India, the United States and Pakistan have all a common threat now... We all face an enemy which possesses a direct threat to our leadership'⁷⁹. Mr. Holbrooke also qualified the Swat peace deal as 'a terrifying loss of control'.⁸⁰ Clearly, that meant an American "no" to the deal.

In an early editorial, the 'Daily Times' voiced some fears and criticism: 'The power of the Sufi (Muhammad) will derive from the gun of the Taliban and he will not for long allow a sharia which is different from the one enforced by the Taliban elsewhere'.⁸¹ In the same article, the paper mentions the huge problem that 'there is no exegetical consensus on sharia and its implementation', and that 'its politics, at this point, excludes all but the literalist ultra-orthodoxy of Taliban'.

Numerous American analysts came up with broadly similar criticisms. The Swat valley peace deal strengthened the position of the Taliban in Pakistan; it demonstrated Pakistan's inability to stop the spreading of Talibanism. Reference was repeatedly made to the peace deal entered into by then-president Musharraf in 2006; it had merely resulted in a huge increase in cross-border activity into Afghanistan, and had added strength to the Taliban in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Eventually, that peace deal, as well as all others before it, had failed to produce desired results; rather, it had helped the Taliban gain strength. Western governments and moderate Pakistanis described the agreement as a 'government surrender to ruthless militants.'

Failure or victory?

Soon it became clear that agreeing on and the signing of peace deals was the easy part, the implementation of it quite another. It all started well enough. In its early stages, popular opinion in Swat itself generally welcomed the agreement, as long as a sustainable peace seemed to be possible. Jubilant crowds in Swat celebrated the return of normalcy; Sufi Muhammad received a huge public ovation – for bringing the prospect of peace to the region, not for the advent of sharia law.⁸² After all, that law hardly differs from its informal, inexpensive and easily accessible predecessor practised in the former princely states. As the agreement stipulates, nothing else but a judicial system based on the sharia will be introduced. Criticism mainly came from the 'educated' part of the Pakistani population, and from the Western capitals.

At this stage, the Pakistani population at large willingly accepted the Nizam-e-Adl deal. Quite a number of papers and programs hosted opinion leaders who endorsed this government initiative. While the practical implementation of the treaty was in full swing (basically meaning that the few remaining government services and servants ceased their activities altogether), public justice the Taliban way was filmed with a mobile phone camera and sent around Pakistan and, indeed, the world.

Suddenly, all media reported the whipping of a 17 year old girl, instantaneously causing a public wave of indignation. Apparently, this was the 'wake up call' the Pakistani needed. Although (scandalous) attempts damage control by ANP leaders was desperately attempted, the genie was out of the bottle; chances that the peace treaty and the introduction of the Nizam-e-Adl would be fully implemented got slim. Subsequently, when the Taliban moved into neighbouring Buner practically undisturbed, thus arriving at only 100 kilometres from the capital Islamabad, a military offensive was unleashed against them by a frightened government.

On July 1, prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani came up with some good news. He stated that 'The army operation in Swat and Malakand Division will soon be over and the internally displaced persons (IDP's) will return to their homes with respect and dignity'.⁸³ The provincial president of the ruling Awami National Party, Afrasiyab Khattak, in the second week of July even declared victory in Malakand Division, lauding what was, in his view, a successful military campaign in Swat, Buner and Dir. Although the Pakistan army 'ad absurdum' claims victory over the 'militants' in the North West of the country as well, differing signals and sounds are emerging.

Undoubtedly, the Taliban had been forced into hiding, were on the run and being killed. But claiming

⁷⁹ BBC News, Monday 16 February 2009

⁸⁰ James Lamont (New Delhi) and Farhan Bokhari (Islamabad), 'US warns Pakistan of security threat', in: [Financial Times](#), February 16, 2009

⁸¹ 'Sharia "justice" comes to Swat again?', Editorial in [Daily Times](#), February 16, 2009

⁸² Kunwar Idris, 'Swat accord is not surrender', in: [Dawn](#), 22 February 2009

⁸³ 'Operation in Swat to end soon: Gilani', in: [Dawn](#), July 2, 2009

victory over and over again, as was done by Pakistan's chief military spokesman Major General Athar Abbas, for instance, was not exactly reassuring. Remarkably, not a single militant leader of major importance (there are about 21 of them in the region) had been killed or captured. Independent information was hard to get; the ISPR (Inter-Services Public Relations) of the Army was the only source, since independent journalists could not enter the area as long as search and destroy operations were in full swing. Another case in point was the unexpected re-emergence of TNSM-leader Sufi Muhammad in Peshawar. He and five of his sons have been living in Punjab province for a month, apparently into government custody.

The few reports that emerged outside the mighty reach of the ISPR, however, consequently suggested a less rosy state of affairs. The military's campaign so far had not been decisive; the Taliban had managed to avoid major fights, only waiting to return when the army had moved on.⁸⁴ Military intelligence itself gave a realistic assessment on July 15, 2009; it admitted that a sizeable contingent of fighters was still left in Swat Valley, perhaps as many as 40% of an estimated number of 5.000.⁸⁵ Major population centres like Mingora and roadsides have been cleared from Taliban presence. At the same time, ANP workers still got killed, houses of journalists and their families were burnt to the ground.⁸⁶

Failure by the Pakistan Army to decisively defeat the Taliban, whether intentionally⁸⁷ or out of sheer incapability or impotence, will carry a high cost; a resurgent, stronger Taliban movement in the North West Frontier Province would at least require serious power-sharing negotiations between politically antagonistic provincial and national governments, if not worse.

Unanswered questions

Although since May 7, 2009 Pakistan's military are on the offensive against militancy once again, urged on by Washington, hardly any attention is being paid to the causes of the apparent successes of the TNSM, TTP and numerous other groups. Where are the state institutions of Pakistan; and even more important, where will they be when the military withdraw again, leaving the field to renewed militant offensives?

If 'state failure' is thrown up in Washington or NATO-headquarters again, it certainly can be vividly illustrated by developments in FATA and PATA. Undoubtedly, people are scared; but they also have lost what little trust they may have had left in Pakistani state facilities, or in renewed promises by political parties and leaders, for that matter. Obviously, people prefer to live and be left in peace, even if that means accepting an oppressive regime like that of the Taliban. Thus, Pakistan's population in the North Western agencies and districts have developed a similar frame of mind as most Afghan people. Regaining their adherence to the state of Pakistan will be difficult.

However many agreements Pakistani governments may have concluded with the TNSM and other militant groups, they never addressed the basic question: will the government correct the unjust handling of the common property and reform the once oppressive, now largely decayed, state machinery in Swat and Dir? Swat, Dir and Chitral were administratively incorporated in the Pakistani state only in 1969. As early as the mid-70s, small peasants and the landless revolted against the increasing social inequality; Pakistani rule favoured the well-to-do khans and nawabs in the former princely states.

Introducing sharia law is not the prescription needed to cure social illness. The government obviously sought to pacify the militants, instead of improving basic services as electricity, gas and water supplies. What certifies that militancy will stop here? As

⁸⁴ Jane Perlez and Pir Zubair Shah in 'The New York Times', as quoted in: Hiranmay Karlekar, 'Dubious offensive against Taliban', in: The Pioneer, July 4, 2009

⁸⁵ 'Pakistan successfully averted disaster', in: Dawn, July 16, 2009. The number of 5.000 fighters replaces earlier estimates, which were put at 3.000. Deceivingly simple arithmetic might lead one to conclude that at most 1.000 fighters have been killed, forced to flee, etcetera. Since the Pakistani Army claims to have killed more than 1700 Taliban fighters in Swat and Buner alone, independent reporting would be welcome.

⁸⁶ Rahimullah Yusufzai, 'Claiming 'victory' too early', in: The News International, July 14, 2009. From July 2007 till July 2009, over 150 ANP workers have been killed just in Swat.

⁸⁷ Being forced to make this reservation only serves to underline that it still is unclear whether Pakistani Intelligence and politicians finally have severed all ties with the Taliban movement and other radical Islamic groups. Apparently, President Zardari does know. In an interview with the British daily 'The Daily Telegraph' he stated that operations would in the future target the figures who were the military's assets: "I don't think anybody in the establishment supports them anymore. I think everybody has become wiser than this". Quoted in: The News International, July 7, 2009

much as such was acknowledged, unintended, by provincial president of the ANP Afrasiab Khattak: "The demand for speedy justice might be the reason for the conflict in Swat at some stage, but now the dynamics of and motives behind militancy have changed. New actors are firing the shots, not the TNSM".⁸⁸

As the struggle between the TNSM and the TTP with the Pakistani army and government continues, both local militant leaders like Sufi Muhammad, Fazlullah, spokesman Ameer Izzat of the TNSM and TTP-spokesmen like Muslim Khan continued to invent a whole new kind of Islam. It is subsequently used to justify each and every decision or act by the militants and its leadership, no matter how preposterous it may be.

The sharia is formally founded on the revealed divine truth as put down in the Koran and on exemplary stories from the Hadith (the sayings and doings of the Prophet). However, both the Koran and the Hadith have been constantly reinterpreted by Islamic scholars, giving new leases on live to old traditions, or establishing new ones. Through the ages, many divergent views have deeply divided the ulama (religious scholars and teachers). It is precisely on the basis of these 'new readings' that many present-day Islamists further their cause. Small wonder that a commentator in Dawn asked, when confronted with another 'Islamic law'; whose sharia?

Within certain quarters of the Pakistani army sympathy, whether opportunistic or idealistic, has always been felt for the Taliban and their struggle. After all, the Afghan Taliban owed a considerable part of their initial successes to Pakistani intelligence and military support. As the Mumbai-attacks in November 2008 illustrated anew, there still existed narrow bonds between military and militants. For instance, in the wake of the attacks in India the Taliban pledged all support to the Pakistani army in case of (an apparently hoped for) war with India. The million dollar question remained: to which extent do Pakistani military actually sympathise with militant groups? Will large groups of soldiers, instead of today's small numbers, one day join the ranks of the Taliban? Whenever that occurs, Islamabad will rapidly be under siege indeed.

Additions

On July 28, a beheaded body of a kidnapped policeman was found near Mingora. Also, a number of bodies from civilians, killed in recent weeks, have been discovered. They were suspected by the Taliban of being informants for the Pakistani military.⁸⁹ One day later, about fifty Taliban-fighters stormed the home of pro-government militia leader Khalilur Rehman in Shangla district and killed him. These fresh killings should unambiguously underline the fact that the Taliban in Malakand Agency, despite the huge offensive against them since the end of April and the continued presence of over 20.000 Pakistani soldiers in the region, still were a force to be reckoned with.

It should also silence the triumphant announcements about 'victory' as made by people like Interior Minister Rehman Malik. These murders took place amidst a flood of returning refugees, indicating that their suspicions about the 'successful clearance' of the area were only too well-founded. Obviously, the refugees are being sent back to southern Swat way to early; although the government wishes to empty the refugee camps as soon as possible, it should not do so out of propagandistic motives. Long lines of vehicles are seen waiting to get into the heavily guarded town of Mingora; since the start of bringing back the inhabitants of Malakand Agency, in two weeks time about 575.000 refugees have been repatriated.⁹⁰

Perspectives

It may now be concluded - with the huge advantage of hindsight - that the decision of the Musharraf-regime in July 2007 to clear the Lal Masjid mosque in Islamabad of militants by force initiated a new phase in the 'war on terror'. Belatedly and reluctantly, Musharraf and his Supreme Command had begun to rise to the militants' challenge. Instead of obligingly fighting America's war, Islamabad now had to fight its own battle, as practically the entire North West Frontier Province turned into a battleground. For the whole of Pakistan the stakes soon proved to be much higher; nothing less than the very survival of the nation seemed to be at stake.

The ensuing violent escalation between military and 'Islamic' militants effectively put an end, at least for

⁸⁸ Quote in: Aimal Khan, 'Experimentation at best', in: [The News International](#), 22 February 2009

⁸⁹ Pir Zubair Shah, 'Police Officer Found Dead in Swat Valley of Pakistan', in: [The New York Times](#), July 29, 2009

⁹⁰ 'Pakistan's dilemma. Music returns to Swat, but the beat may not go on for long', in: [The Globe and Mail](#), July 30, 2009

the time being, to the previously existing narrow ties and trust between them.⁹¹ Pakistan's militant groups from now on could no longer be relied upon to harass Indian troops in Kashmir, or to serve as a reliable backbone for creating 'strategic depth' for a Pakistani army that was still primarily posed to combat India. Increasingly, both Pakistan's home-grown and foreign militants, actively supported by Al-Qaeda, aimed fire on targets in their own country.

On the other hand, the rapidly widening gap between the erstwhile brothers in arms considerably increased the pace of U.S. brokered 'reconciliation' between a beleaguered military regime and Pakistani politicians in exile, like Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. From now on, every future Pakistani government, military or civilian, saw itself forced to fight its own battle against an increasingly menacing militant force on its own soil.

Perhaps remarkably, Islamic violence against Pakistani society and its military continued unabated, in spite of the facts that: unpopular General Musharraf was succeeded by General Kayani as Chief of the Army on 28 November 2007; that free national elections held on 18 February 2008 resulted in a unique, broad-based national civilian government led by PPP-Prime Minister Gilani and a peace-talking ANP-led provincial government in the NWFP; that a politically isolated Musharraf had to step down as president on 18 August 2008 to be succeeded by Asif Ali Zardari, Benazir Bhutto's widower; or that deposed Supreme Court Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry and a number of his colleagues were restored to their previous positions on 16 March 2009, after a 'long march' on Islamabad had begun.

All this, once again, serves to underline a few highly disturbing facts. Firstly, militant Islamic leaders are speaking in full earnest when they utter their wish to create a system of governance in the whole of Pakistan, the world's sixth most populous country, that will turn the country into an emirate or caliphate. Political parties, parliament, the present constitution and the judicial system will be abolished. To complete the seclusion of the country, newspapers and mobile phones probably will be banned as well.

Secondly, once the present Islamic Republic of Pakistan has been turned into the Emirate of Pakistan, making its soil 'dar-ul Islam' (righteously Islamic) instead of 'dar-ul harab' (un-Islamic, to be conquered), it will serve as point of departure for similar conversions of neighbouring countries and areas. Far-fetched as this may seem, considering the low level of general public support for a Taliban-led regime, at the same time the Pakistani population at large hardly seems to be bothered by developments in the North-West of their country, even as the Taliban are making their presence increasingly felt in Punjab province. Only after the beating up in public of a 17-year old girl in Malakand Agency by three Taliban was filmed with a mobile phone and got widely published, a public outcry finally began to be heard against religious extremism.

Thirdly: concessions to militant groups did not and do not yield the desired results, on the contrary. Instead of bringing peace to a region and pacifying and containing militant organizations, they readily spread out from their newly acquired bases. If one considers their Islamic credentials, and carefully listens to what the leadership propagates, this needs not come as a surprise. Clearly, Islamic militancy must be primarily countered with mainstream Islamic teachings.

The often announced review of U.S. strategy by the Obama-administration towards Afghanistan and Pakistan, intended to formulate both short- and long-term goals and how to achieve them, is based on two key facts: the war in Afghanistan could not and cannot be won just by military means, rather economic support and diplomacy should prevail over military action; secondly, neighbouring Pakistan, being a safe haven for militants and under militant threat itself, needed to be fully integrated into a regional approach.

Ultimately, Washington seeks to deny al Qaeda any safe haven in the region, or in the world, for that matter. But in order to achieve this America and its allies, but also countries like Russia, China and India, first of all will have to develop a viable formula for politically and economically stabilising Afghanistan and Pakistan. Offering realistic perspectives to the populations in these countries, and finding ways to develop and implement an 'islamised democracy of sorts' - at best - are preconditions.

⁹¹ For further evidence on the close links and cooperation between the Pakistani military and militant groups, consult David Sanger, *The Inheritance. The World Obama Confronts and the Challenges to American Power*, Washington 2009. However, as recent as May 2008, a phone call by General Ahsfaq Pervez Kayani, former Director of Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) and successor as army chief to Musharraf on November 28, 2007, was intercepted in which he named prominent Taliban leader Jallaludin Haqqani 'a strategic asset'.

POSTED on February 10, 2014

