

Downside of denial

Imtiaz Gul

The surrender of Swat is the latest addition to the areas characterised as "ungovernable" by the state of Pakistan itself

“Pakistan has 173 million people, 100 nuclear weapons, an army bigger than the US Army, and al-Qaeda headquarters sitting right there in the two-thirds of the country the government doesn’t control...if Pakistan went out of control, it would ‘dwarf’ all the crises in the world today.”

– David Kilcullen, advisor to CENTCOM commander Gen Petraeus. *The Washington Post*, March 23, 2009

There is much talk today of the possible disintegration of Pakistan and the airwaves are abuzz with how to stem this drift into chaos. At this point, the pessimism, for the most part, is based on the extremely controversial Swat deal leading to the Nizam-e Adl Regulation; the string of suicide attacks, about 22 so far this year; and the inability of the provincial and federal governments to arrest this slide and offer workable dialogue-development strategies to counter the militants.

Let us look at the western border. Today, 27,220 square kilometres of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas – Bajaur, Khyber, Kurram, Mohmand, North and South Waziristan, and Orakzai – are beyond Pakistan’s control. Some 5,337 sq km of Swat and the areas around it are, by virtue of the presidential approval of the Nizam-e Adl Regulation 2009, beyond the Constitution of Pakistan de jure. Sufi Muhammad of the Tehreek-e Nifaz-e Shariat-e Muhammadi made it abundantly clear on April 19, 2009 that he intends to stretch the Nizam-e Adl to Chitral (14,850 sq km) and Dir (5,280 sq km).

Simultaneously, Pakistan’s writ in most of Balochistan, a total of 452,243 sq km, or 58 percent of Pakistan’s landmass, is increasingly challenged and getting weaker by the day. Forces challenging the writ of the state stalk the roads and streets even in cities like Peshawar, Mardan, Nowshehra and Swabi, mowing down police and paramilitary forces at will, and sowing terror in the hearts and minds of security forces and people at large.

There is a litany of failures to account for, the gravest the failure to integrate FATA, and the Federally Administered Northern Areas (99,716 sq km; nearly 13 percent of Pakistan’s total landmass), since 1970 into mainstream Pakistan. The surrender of Swat is the latest addition to the areas characterised as “ungovernable” by the state of Pakistan itself.

Does it not seem logical then when voices from Washington and London suggest direct military action in areas Pakistan cannot “govern”? If an army more than half a million strong cannot take out radical militants, who are considered a threat to the entire world, then why not let US-led western forces do it for Pakistan?

This is stated by a string of analyses and studies by Washington- and London-based think tanks, maintaining that Pakistan itself is unable to handle the spiral of violence unleashed by Al

Qaeda and its local associates. If we don't help, goes the argument, the country might splinter into Taliban fiefdoms.

"Such arguments should definitely make our ruling elites – civilian as well as military – indulge in a deep introspection of their acts and words [over] the last 62 years," says one local observer. "It is their incompetence, absence of commitment and vision, as well as sheer indifference, backed up by a pliant and conniving bureaucracy, that has brought this country to the brink; [the] point where conjectures about Pakistan's survival or disintegration have become an inevitable element of discussions even at home."

The situation in vast parts of the NWFP (Swat and Buner in particular) and FATA shows clearly what preceded and followed the Taliban emergence in Afghanistan: governance broke down, central authority melted away, and the country degenerated into medieval fiefdoms controlled by individual warlords, who at times also operated in a well-knit network under one umbrella. The Taliban buried most of the population under their draconian version of Islam.

The Pakistani Taliban – whether in Waziristan or Swat – want to do the same and in fact are doing it already. Through their ruthless terror campaign against the police in particular, they have scared most of the police in the Swat and Malakand region either into hiding or resignation from the service. On April 20, the same happened in Buner, where the have Taliban established their writ.

Consider, also, declining governance in the centre and provinces, combined with the following:

The \$50 million aid package for Swat and affected areas remains unspent for lack of initiative by the government. The Balochistan government is still beset with extreme funds shortages, contrary to all assurances by the centre. Despite raging militancy all over, the entire country is manned by less than 400,000 largely underpaid, under-trained and under-equipped policemen. Similar is the case with the Frontier Corps, a force at the forefront of the questionable war against terrorism.

Power generation at Tarbela sank to a paltry 125 MW because 11 of the 14 generators became un-operational, underlining the acute energy crisis the country has been facing since mid-2007.

Islamabad has seen no new hospital built since the Japanese funded the Hospital Complex in the 1980s (the city's population has doubled in the meantime). Forget that several other cities and towns, falling into chaos at various levels, reflect a society in a continuous state of disorder.

As many as 800 government officials remained in a state of limbo following the imposition of Governor's Rule in February for almost five weeks. This is a great example of how governments and governors have handled the bureaucracy, and thereby jeopardised governance.

On the democratic front, the president and his party demonstrate little respect for the relevance of the parliament to the system. (They did, however, when they needed to pass the buck, i.e.

on the Nizam-e Adl Regulation in the presence of about a third of the National Assembly's total members.)

On the bureaucratic front, insiders insist the state of Pakistan lacks the capacity and the vision to actualise the pledges made at the Tokyo Friends of Pakistan conference on April 17, 2009. Donors, they say, are still waiting for credible and workable projects that can be turned into reality. Financial management capacity is dismal; hence lapses of billions of rupees almost every year. State corporations are in a shambles; public sector educational institutions are in disarray; and there is little oversight of private universities that are virtually selling degrees.

It came as no surprise, therefore, when the *Foreign Policy* magazine listed Pakistan among the 20 worst performing states during 2008, with its performance registering at negative 3.7.

“Will this combination of little governance, increasing insecurity and incapacity and a continuous state of denial take the country down into disintegration or still keep it teetering in instable conditions?” wonders one analyst. “The answer lies with the ruling elite: both military and civilian [elites] shall have to demonstrate unflinching resolve regarding these real and perceived threats. The crisis today warrants extraordinary unity of command to prevent Pakistan from falling apart.”

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