

Taliban: A physical Entity, a mind set, or both?

Lost my parents at the hands of a fundamentalist; I hit rock bottom in my life. That which does not kill you makes you stronger, I rose from the ashes much stronger as I had nothing to lose anymore.

I sincerely believe that Pakistan has hit rock bottom. It has sunk to its lowest level possible. It has lost the vision of its creators; it has lost its integrity, its real character, and not mention, its economics, intellectual abilities, freedom, tolerance towards others, human rights and religious freedoms. The very foundations of its creation and existence.

There is only one way to go from here. It is time to rise above our personal interests, party politics; to rise above our ethnic, religious and gender divides and be one nation. The sovereignty of our nation cannot be compromised at the hands of extremist's elements, the Taliban, or the vested interests of other nations.

It is useless to get into the rhetoric of who created the Taliban's, these monsters; whether they were our dictators, the Russians or the Americans or everybody. What matters is that the very foundations of our country's existence are being shaken and this cannot be tolerated or be beneficial to anyone, anymore.

Taliban in today's Pakistan are not only a physical entity, but are as much a part of a mind set. It is much easier to physically root out the Taliban but much harder to counter the mind set.

The citizens of Pakistan do detest the physical presence of the Taliban's, who are imposing jazia on non Muslims, blowing up girls schools, publicly executing people by cutting their heads off, controlling national assets, destroying basic infrastructures and deeming the parliament and judicial systems an un-Islamic. Killing thousands of people through suicide bombings.

These Taliban's are promoting a rigid, hypocrite, staunch and inflexible ideology. An ideology which manipulates the believers, promoting an identity which is purely based on their interpretations of Islam. For me the Taliban are anti progress, anti minority, anti women, and last but not least anti Islamic.

The physical elimination of the Taliban's has begun in the Swat valley and for the first time in our history is being backed by the civil society of Pakistan. Even though the process is very painful, but not going through with it has even more serious repercussions. The people of Pakistan do not buy this brand of Islam as this nation was not created to be a theocratic state. The government and the people should keep this momentum of trust and build alliances amongst each other. Build confidence and provide assistance to the millions of displaced people and rehabilitate them.

The physical presence of the Taliban's has started to be challenged but the Taliban's mindset still needs serious consideration. The Taliban agenda has slowly crept in the very fabric of our society; it is present in our government, the army, and educational institutions. For me it is easy to understand and fight the male rigid Taliban but to encounter sophisticated well educated women spreading that radical version of Islam is a totally different ball game. Women are relatively a new entrant in this game and now are even heading madrasas. They are shrinking the already small space that women with progressive Islamic views have in this country.

Manifestations of these trends can be seen in the use of language, emphasis is much more on the rituals rather than the essence of Islam, and the list is endless. I think we were a much more tolerant society before, much more humane; in short, much better Muslims in the true spirit.

Even teachers in some educational institutions are propagating this ideology to young impressionable minds. The rank and file in the army and even political parties has hidden agendas when it comes to manipulating peoples sentiments. It is much easier to fight an enemy that can be identified easily, but fighting extremism at these levels is a much harder undertaking.

The politicized religion, lack of education, having no visionary leadership, extreme poverty, and unstable institutions are the key factors for the promotion and strengthening of Taliban ideology amongst the general masses. I believe a three pronged strategy can be adopted to combat and defeat this ideology.

First our government needs to separate state from the religion, build and strengthen democratic institutions, fight extreme poverty and provide a secular ideology which is mandatory for any stable state and society.

Secondly it is the responsibility of our intellectuals, thinkers, and politicians to start a movement owned by our people including the faceless / voiceless minorities, women and other marginalized groups. It was people power that brought back the Chief justice, and it gives me great hope that the same power will oust the Taliban's too. The struggle will have to be fought at the political, social, economic, and intellectual levels to shun this alien concept of Islam which has been largely negated by the people of Pakistan.

We the people have to make our government responsible, fight the menace of feudalism and a corrupt bureaucracy. We as a nation should also rise above our interests, fight with ourselves and decide whether we want a rigid conservative, theocratic state or fight for a secular Pakistan as envisioned by its founders.

Last but not least we have to make the entire international community including the west particularly, to understand that all of Pakistan is not the Taliban; we are an extremely hospitable, dignified and respectful people in the process of finding ourselves once again.

We not only ask for the financial assistance for the millions of displaced people, the so called “collateral damage” of this unwarranted war, but to have a relationship with us based on dignity and mutual respect and want them to strengthen our people , government and give us the assurance that they are with us.

It does not make sense to be wasting finite resources of this planet on issues that have long been resolved in the west. There are bigger issues at stake facing our planet. All that we want is to rise above our troubles and be a part of the global village and play our part in resolving the larger issues facing humanity. We have the potential and the will to be a part of the solution.