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Swat insurgency and inept leadership

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The military offensive in Swat is portrayed in some Western and Pakistani media as a successful effort to damage Taliban forces. It is, to the contrary, a strategic as well as humanitarian disaster. When that operation began in May President Zardari was in the midst of an extended visit to many countries where he tried to solicit foreign aid to prop up his regime. Ironically Zardari was unable or unwilling to face any of the now millions of desperate refugees. Those who fled from their homes, livestock and crops now realize their own government had no plans to provide for their welfare when that operation was conceived. Zardari's own lavish lifestyle (as with his \$ 5000 suite in Washington DC) was in total contrast to the conditions that so many homeless Pakistanis now face. When one is dressed up in expensive Italian suits with begging a bowl in hand then one is not taken seriously. War on terrorism for the Pakistani ruling class is a nicely packaged export commodity meant for making money. This so-called war is a bonanza for rulers and a bane for the people and has assumed the proverbial status of golden goose that lays golden eggs. Common sense will tell you that you do not kill the golden bird. Musharraf used war on terrorism for perpetuation of his power and personal enrichment and Zardari is doing the same. Swat operation is in full swing and IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) are getting roasted in camps, but unfortunately we do not see any clear mission and objective. For any military operation clarity of mission, allocation of commensurate resources and credible leadership are a must. The job of a national leader is to lift up the spirit of a nation during bleak hours; to inspire all and sundry where people willingly endure hardship for the collective good. A soldier can overcome moral ambivalence in the domestic front by vision of a self sacrificing leadership. Barry Bowater says: "Leaders are those who know what to do next, know why that is important, and know what appropriate resources to bring to bear on the problem at hand. Then, through effective communication they influence others to follow." Military adventures become more difficult when people who are leading the country are like Muhammad Shah Rangeela, immersed in hedonistic pastimes whose temporal orientation is reduced to the sensuality of here and now. In their intoxicated delirium, they can watch and enjoy sadistically sufferings of people with sociopathic detachment. For boosting morale a country needs credible and

believable leaders with integrity. John Wooden thinks: "Be more concerned with your character than with your reputation. Your character is what you really are while your reputation is merely what others think you are." Pakistan is unfortunately stuck with leaders who have neither character nor reputation. Furthermore, keep in mind that both Taliban and Zardari administration would like to prolong the stay of IDPs for different reasons. Zardari would like to advertise the sufferings of IDPs for collection of funds. Taliban understand that prolonged miseries and attendant anger of the refugees could be channeled in the direction of Zardari. Endless demand for funds and continuous exposure to human sufferings cannot only induce compassion fatigue but also result in desensitization. Simultaneously the urban terrorists are wreaking havoc in cities by car bombing and suicidal attacks. By infusing fear in society, they are disrupting both social and economic activities and at the same time relieve pressure in Taliban insurgency. Draconian police measures and arbitrary search and seizure in the name of security have become not only a nuisance but also money making opportunity for police. Fighting insurgency is a tricky business, and we can benefit from the insights of guerilla theoreticians in the context of Pakistan. In light of history the militants in the North West Frontier Province and the adjoining Federally Administered Tribal Area are basically succeeding in their strategy. One aspect of the Taliban insurgency is combining rural warfare with urban warfare. If we analyze the current Swat situation within the framework of Mao's theory of guerilla warfare it appears the Taliban are achieving their objectives. Mao said: "The enemy advances, we retreat. The enemy camps, we harass. The enemy tires, we attack. The enemy retreats, we pursue." Insurgents do not have the means to engage regular armed forces for a long time. Fighting against conventional forces with light weapons means defeat for the insurgents. Carlos Marighella, in his Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla, has clearly articulated this point: 1) It is an aggressive technique, or in other words, it has an offensive character; 2) As is well known, defensive action means death for us; 3) Since we are inferior to the enemy in fire power and have neither his resources nor his power force, we cannot defend ourselves against an offensive or a concentrated attack; 4) It is a technique of attack and retreat by which we preserve our forces; 5) It is a technique that aims at the development of urban guerrilla warfare, whose function will be to wear out, demoralize, and distract the enemy forces.... 6) And that is the reason why our urban technique can never be permanent, can never defend a fixed base nor remain in any one spot waiting to repel the circle of reaction. It appears from some Pakistani media that the ongoing Swat Operation Taliban forces fight where they can and retreat when it is expedient. In order to alleviate military pressure their urban fighters in concert launch daring suicide attacks that create and spread chaos. Now there are millions who have fled their homes, livestock and crops. Based on media reports those IDPs curse the Pakistani military for indiscriminate bombing and failure to plan for their situation. In this way, the Taliban are successfully aiming popular rage towards the government for a situation that the Taliban calculatedly created. Most of the people live in the here and now and their present conditions are so bad and hopeless that they blame the government for poor planning and impetuous operations. Ordinary citizens are insecure, victims of corrupt and unjust governmental agencies and are psychologically drained. Ian Welsh eloquently makes this point and writes: "You (government) need more men on the ground because you must protect the population from the guerrillas. If you (government) aren't committing enough atrocities, then the guerrillas will either try and taunt you into doing so, or they'll commit them for you; this is the method behind the apparent madness of car bombs and suicide vests. The guerrilla in this case is saying, "If you (people) ever want peace and order, if you ever want to feel safe, you will have to let me rule

because the enemy can't stop me. The only group that can stop the killing is us, because we're doing it, and the occupiers (government agencies) are too weak or incompetent to stop us." The German military theoretician Karl von Clausewitz (known for his insight that war is a result and continuation of politics) came to the same conclusion long ago. He said "the failure to provide law and order, the failure to rebuild infrastructure, the failure to provide belief in a promising future, the failure to align the interests of the occupation with the interests of the population. All of this sets up the preconditions for guerrilla warfare and rebellion." If one looks at Pakistan now, it presents a bleak picture. NWFP (Stands for what?) is has ravaged Taliban's insurgency. Balochistan is plagued by collective alienation and nationalist secessionist movements. Karachi is under the terror of MQM (Muttahida Qaumi Movement). Because of Zardari's non-inspirational and play-boyish presidency, Pakistan looks like an adrift ship in a vortex of centrifugal forces.