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Answer to Question

Swat peace deal

Question: On February 15 2009, the Pakistani government announced that it had reached an agreement with the supporters of Pakistani Taliban, Tehrik Nifaz-i-Shariat Muhammadi (TNSM). The agreement contained provisions to enforce of Sharia law under the guise of Nizam-i-Adl Regulation' in the Malakand region of Swat. In response the Taliban declared a truce to study the proposals. The Swat Taliban spokesman Muslim Khan said, "Taliban have declared a unilateral ceasefire for 10 days as a goodwill gesture. Our fighters will not attack security personnel and government installations." However, he added that the militants would hold their positions and defend themselves if attacked. The deal has drawn much criticism both at home and abroad.

So what lies behind the deal? Will it bring lasting peace to Swat?

The answer: This is not the first time TNSM has entered into a deal with the Pakistani government to bring about Sharia law to Swat. Similar accords have been signed between the TSNM and the Pakistani government in 1994, 1999 and 2007. But the longevity of each agreement has proved short-lived, and the Pakistani government has used each accord to serve its own interest. This time, it appears that the government has no intention of honoring the accord, but wants to use it to achieve a number of objectives.

First, the Pakistani army does not want to be embroiled in a situation where it is heavily involved in fighting militants in Swat and simultaneously waging war against Al-Qaeda and Baitullah Mehsud's Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in FATA. Hence striking an agreement at this stage, allows the Pakistani army to regroup and shift resources elsewhere if required.

Second, the Pakistani government plans to use the accord to divide the so called Taleban of Swat and those Taliban allied with Al Qaeda. While explaining why Islamabad made a pact with the militants, Husain Haqqani, the Pakistani ambassador in Washington said, "We are attempting to drive a wedge between Al Qaeda and the militant Taliban on the one hand, and Swat's indigenous movement that seeks to restore traditional law in the district. This is part of a pragmatic military and political strategy to turn our native populations against the terrorists, to isolate and marginalize the terrorists."

Third, and more importantly, the US is planning a fresh spring offensive in Afghanistan and has sent an extra 17,000 troops to the country. The extra troops will increase the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan by more than 40 percent. The new forces will include a Marine expeditionary brigade of some 8,000 troops and an Army brigade of 4,000 soldiers equipped with Stryker armored vehicles, plus 5000 support staff. These troops will be used to curtail a surge in fighting—which usually peaks in the summer months— improve security in provinces surrounding Kabul,

protect the ring-road that girdles the country's capital and, above all, to reinforce NATO's faltering effort in southern Afghanistan ahead of the upcoming presidential elections scheduled for August 2009.

Forth, to aid, America's plan to stabilize Afghanistan, America has instructed the Pakistani army to strike a deal with the militants in Swat as a temporary measure and refocus its energies on FATA. To ensure that Pakistan is fully onboard and not distracted by its border with India, America told her loyal agent Rehman Malik the Interior advisor to the prime Minister to admit partial culpability of Mumbai attacks. A few days before the Pakistani government's announcement, BJP's Chief Minister of Gujarat Narendra Singh Modi poured scorn on Congress Party's attempts to increase tensions with its neighbors. He said," If we single out that one incident (of Mumbai attacks) and ask any person in this country, even with basic information and knowledge they will say that such a big terror attack on India cannot take place without any internal help from the nation itself." Both of these American agents helped cool tensions between the Zardari government and Congress led government in India, which was pushing for military action against Pakistan. The stage is now set for a joint operation between the US and the Pakistani in FATA area.

Fifth, regarding the mixed American statements on the Swat deal, it is noteworthy that the deal was announced soon after Holbrook's departure. It is inconceivable that the US was unaware of the deal and it happened without its knowledge. Furthermore, the initial statements from US officials were favorable as opposed to statements from NATO and Britain. The US State Department's, deputy spokesman Gordon Duguid echoed what Pakistani officials had said while defending the Swat agreement. He said, "The Islamic law is within the constitutional framework of Pakistan. So I don't know that that is particularly an issue for anyone outside of Pakistan to discuss, certainly not from this podium." When a reporter described the agreement as a peace treaty between the Taliban and the government of Pakistan, Mr Duguid said: "I'm not sure about your characterization of what has gone on in Pakistan. I refer you to the government of Pakistan for a better readout of that." This was in stark contrast to the statement from Britain's High Commission in Islamabad which said: "Previous peace deals have not provided a comprehensive and long-term solution to Swat's problems. We need to be confident that they will end violence, not create space for further violence."

Sixth, the stern remarks from Holbrook and other officials are intended to assuage the concerns raised by NATO, India and other countries. At the same time they also underscore Washington's desire to send a strong message to the Pakistani army that the militants in Swat will have to be eventually uprooted and America will not stand for a repeat of 2006, when similar pacts was used by militants in FATA to regroup and wage cross-border incursions. For this purpose the PK army didn't withdraw his force from swat in spite of the agreement.

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