



War in Waziristan: Implications for Pakistan and India

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The Shakai 'Agreement': An arrangement that never was

The last week of April 2004 witnessed an understanding between the militants (tribal and alien) in the Wana region and the government of Pakistan. The government agreed to 'pardon' the five most wanted militants including Nek Mohammad (who was later killed in June 2004) and Maulvi Mohammad Abbas. The local tribal militants agreed to "live peacefully and not use Pakistani soil against any other country," whereas the aliens (foreign militants) were to be registered with the government.

The agreement was significant, for both its serious and bogus contents. First, though the agreement was unwritten, there was no mention about any 'surrender' from the militants' side. However, in accordance with tribal traditions, the local militants 'presented' weapons including Kalashnikovs as a token gesture. Second, there were no foreign militants among those who surrendered. Neither Nek Mohammad nor the local MNAs, who helped the government in reaching the agreement accepted that there were foreign militants in the region.

During this entire surrender/agreement ceremony, tribesmen armed with Kalashnikovs and even rocket launchers, who had earlier fought with the Pakistan Army were sitting on the roofs of Jamia Arabia Ahsanul Madaris, where the jirga took place. Clearly, the agreement meant only a token surrendering of weapons though it included even rocket launchers, kalashnikovs, anti-tank missiles, bombs and landmines. While the question ? where did the tribals get these sophisticated weapons from, would appear childish, it needs to be probed, how many

weapons they have in their backyards? While it is true that a Pashtun would never like to part with his beard and his weapon (which has been continuously upgraded from daggers to 303 rifles to Kalashnikovs), should his kitty include even rocket launchers and anti tank mines? Who would be the intended target of these weapons? Are they part and parcel of the tribal culture and traditions? If yes, from when have they become so? The agreement did not touch this crucial issue of de-weaponizing the area and also the tribal communities, which is essential for the security and stability of the entire region starting from Kabul to Kashmir.

To Register or Not to

One of the main understandings of the April Agreement was the registration of militants, especially the foreigners in the region. An estimated 400 militants mainly from Afghanistan and other Central Asian countries including Uzbekistan and Chechnya are believed to be in the South Waziristan Agency. Many of them have married and settled in the region, while some of them have come recently. Strangely, the agreement while talking about registration, did not focus on foreign militants quitting the area. Neither did the government contemplate a safe passage. Perhaps it did, but the tribals did not agree to it, as the foreigners have no place to go.

The deadline, initially set for 30 April was extended by a week, as not even a single foreign militant surrendered. Later, the registration period was further extended to 10 May, as there were 'procedural' differences. The government wanted the registration to be done along with photographs, which is unacceptable to the militants. The militants were willing only for either of the following: to send

their photographs for registration or to take part in the registration process, without getting photographed. Clearly, they feared that their photographs would be circulated to other governments, including the US. They also feared that once their photographs reach the hands of American troops, they would be linked with the al Qaeda and ultimately end up in Guantanamo Bay.

Though the tribal leaders initially agreed to the registration process, later they backed out, perhaps due to the fear that Pakistan government would hand over the foreign militants to the American troops. On the other hand, they demanded compensation from the government for the human and material loss during the military operations. The Pakistani troops subsequently released most of the tribesmen who were arrested during the earlier operations.

The Fighting Resumes

In the first week of June, another jirga of tribal elders unanimously decided to launch yet another tribal lashkar, this time a force of 4000 tribal volunteers to initiate combing operations against the foreign militants in the region. The tribals were willing to let their house be searched, but with a

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condition that the search would only be one time effort and would not be repeated. During the same period, being frustrated with the militants hide and seek approach and the jirga's inability, the security forces of Pakistan started mobilizing troops for economic and military operations. When the tribal lashkar failed to nab even a single foreign national, stating that all they could find was some caves, where dozens of foreigners could have lived, the government initially threatened to close down the Wana bazaar, as a part of economic sanctions.

The security forces were also upset and annoyed

with Nek Mohammad's backtracking after the Shakai agreement. After Shakai agreement, not even once did Nek Mohammad agreed even to state that he has given up militancy. In fact even after the agreement, Nek Mohammad was giving interviews claiming the Taliban leader Mullah Omar as the Amirul Momineen and "the leader of all the Muslims." Though there were discussions on renewing military operations against the tribal militants, the government was hesitating to do so, fearing adverse public opinion in the region and also counter militant attacks.

Nek Mohammad resolved government's dilemma to resume military operations, by initiating the attacks. Nek underestimated Pakistan's resolve and perhaps the American pressure and over estimated his strength, when he resumed the fighting on 9 June 2004. He called up the Daily Times and have reportedly told "who else can attack the army but for me?" With neither the tribal jirgas nor Nek Mohammad led militants observing the agreement, the government had no other option other than to resume the fighting.

The security forces did not have any other option other than to respond, when they were attacked first. Nearly 25 people were killed on 9 June, which included four foreign militants, seventeen security forces personnel and four local tribesmen. Subsequently the security forces stepped up military operations using bombers and gunships including F-7 bombers and Cobra helicopters. Nearly for ten days, the fighter planes of Pakistan's Air Force and attack helicopters of the military were used, before Nek Mohammad was finally killed in a missile attack on 18 June 2004.

Crucial Questions

New questions need to be raised. Has the time come for Pakistan to get rid of the colonial system of linking the tribal agencies through a political administrator? Should the local MNA be given more responsibilities, instead of the government appointed political agent? The fact that the Shakai deal was brokered by two local MNAs? Maulana Abdul Malik Wazir and Maulana Muhammad Mirajuddin and not by the political administrator should be taken into consideration. In fact, the political administrator of South Waziristan became the first casualty of the Shakai agreement. Muhammad Azam Khan, the former administrator was replaced by Asmatullah

Gandapur just before the agreement.

Second, are the tribal elders powerful and respected, as they were in the past? Is the new generation in the tribal agencies have their own beliefs and value systems? Nek Mohammad was around 30 years when he was finally killed and continuously refused to honour the arrangements made between the jirga leaders and the government. The Kalashnikov wielding youths ? who are they likely to listen ? the Nek Mohammads or the tribal elders?

Third, the government seems to have realized the importance of development activities in the tribal regions. Lt. Gen. Safdar Hussain, the Corps Commander, at the end of the jirga announced building of 177 kms of roads, five schools, two water supply schemes and 50 hand pumps. How long can the government sustain this? Will it be serious in implementing these development schemes or will it collapse once the crisis over?

Fourth, are the Americans satisfied with what has been achieved? The entire operations since May 2002, was undertaken due to American pressure. Flushing out the militants and integrating the tribal areas are only excuses to carry out the American demands, so that the strain on US troops in Afghanistan would be considerably lessened. Were the recent incursions of American troops into Pakistani territory a deliberate message?

Fifth, with Nek Mohammad being killed, is the problem finally over in the region? Is Nek an individual freak or does he represent a new phenomenon in the highly neglected but selectively exploited tribal regions? Though the tribal militants were initially upset, they seem to be regrouping. They have already appointed Haji Mohammad Omar as the successor to Nek Mohammad. Haji Omar has reportedly told the News "We don't want to fight Pakistan Army. We want peace with our soldiers. Even we fight, eventually we have to come around to the negotiation table to resolve our disputes peacefully." He has also stated "I consider my new position as a challenge. I have taken part in jihad all my adult life and was wounded four times. I fought against the Soviet occupation troops in Afghanistan and later joined the Taliban to fight the Northern Alliance and the US invaders."

Implications for India?

What is happening in Waziristan has direct implications for India. Nek Mohammad announced during the agreement that "it was a mistake to fight each other. We are loyal to Pakistan and ready to fight in Kashmir or anywhere else if asked by the government. It was propaganda that we were militants." He reiterated later that the tribesmen are the "second atom bomb" of Pakistan and Islamabad could use them anywhere and for any purpose. Nek was fighting along with the Taliban and has been reported to have brought along with him a number of militants of Chechen and Uzbek origins into South Waziristan to fight against American troops in Afghanistan. Worse, the religious right in Pakistan, led by the MMA, consider them neither terrorists nor aliens, but mujahids.

What would the Pakistan Army do, if there is an agreement between the state and these 'mujahids'? Would it divert these mujahids to Jammu and Kashmir? Where else could they go? Can they give up fighting and lead a normal life? As Nek Mohammad have quoted, these tribes would be happy to fight for the cause of Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir.

Second, the Pashtuns have a history of fighting in Jammu and Kashmir from 1947. They initially formed the 'tribal lashkar' and later were exploited by the Pakistan's security forces to forcefully annex Jammu and Kashmir. In the 1990s, especially during 1992-1995, the Pashtuns formed the bulk of "Afghan mujahideen" fighting in Jammu and Kashmir. Besides, the Pashtuns do consider Kashmir as their unfinished job. Kashmir is a subject that is often discussed by the tribal elders in their jirgas, especially the role played by

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the brave Pashtuns of the previous generation. The subject is also used by the older generation to ridicule the current generation for their un-Pashtun like character.

Third, the Pashtun fighters, whether Pakistani or Afghan are battle hardened and know the terrain of Kashmir well, as they have spent a significant part of their 'jihad' in Jammu and Kashmir. Most of their fighting space is restricted to Afghanistan and Pakistan since the emergence of Taliban and later the offensive against the US needed them,. If Pakistan is to reach an agreement with the Pashtuns or the Pashtuns feel the need to shift their area of operations due to military pressure from the American and Pakistani security forces, the obvious outlet would be Jammu & Kashmir.

Until serious development activities take place in the tribal regions of Pakistan, religious extremism is bound to permeate the already backward society. The Nek Mohammads and Abbas Ansaris and the continuing war in Waziristan pose a serious threat to India as they are to moderate society in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

(This Issue brief is second in the series on Waziristan. The first one, *Military Operations in South Waziristan* was published in January 2004. The website also carries a two part article on the subject written by Dr Razia Sultana, focusing on status of tribal areas, culture and politics of the tribals and the operations.)



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