

SWATTING AT FLIES: PAKISTAN'S USE OF COUNTERINSURGENCY

A thesis
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Foreign Service
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts
in Security Studies

By

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Washington, DC
April 16, 2010

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ABSTRACT

Since September 11, 2001, the Taliban and al Qaeda have taken up sanctuary in Pakistan's tribal areas that border Afghanistan, and addressing this sanctuary may be the most essential step to defeating them. So far, Islamabad has failed to deny safe haven to militant groups in this region. Two major factors dictate whether Pakistan will eliminate this sanctuary. The first is Islamabad's willingness to combat these insurgent and terrorist groups, and the second is its ability to do so. Examining Pakistan's willingness to fight militant groups is moot, however, if Pakistan is unable to wage counterinsurgency successfully. Therefore, the second major factor – Pakistan's capacity for conducting a counterinsurgency campaign – comprises the central question of this paper. This paper seeks to examine the extent to which Pakistan is actually engaging in counterinsurgency best practices and to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses in doing so. Through a case study of the summer 2009 *Operation Rah-e-Rast* in Swat District and an examination of Pakistani learning since then, this paper analyzes Pakistan's effectiveness in counterinsurgency operations and suggests policies to improve its capabilities in the future.

*To Amy for the help,
To Kevin for the coffee,
And most of all to my parents for their constant love and support.*

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Introduction

History demonstrates that insurgencies which enjoy sanctuary are nearly impossible to suppress. A plethora of historical examples provide evidence that insurgencies that have a safe haven outside of the counterinsurgent's reach cannot be quelled. The Viet Cong had a sanctuary in Cambodia and Laos, Hezbollah has a sanctuary in Lebanon, and the Kurdistan Workers' Party has long had a sanctuary in northern Iraq. Since September 11, 2001, the Taliban and al Qaeda have taken up sanctuary in Pakistan's tribal areas that border Afghanistan – a region that President Obama calls “the most dangerous place in the world.”¹ The international community has devoted eight years, billions of dollars, and thousands of lives to fighting the Taliban and al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Yet addressing the sanctuary that these groups enjoy in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) may be the most essential step to defeating them.

After the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, its remnants fled to Pakistan. By drawing on common ethnicity and popular resentment against a foreign invader in Afghanistan, the Taliban found refuge on the Pakistani side of the Durand Line.² Today, various militant groups use their safe haven in the NWFP and FATA “as a base from which to launch attacks in Afghanistan, facilitate the movement of weapons and narcotics, plan operations worldwide, train and recruit followers, and disseminate propaganda.”³ Militant groups, under the umbrella organization

¹ Akbar Ahmed, “With Obama at the World's ‘Most Dangerous Place,’” *The Huffington Post*, 28 March 2009, available at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/akbar-ahmed/with-obama-at-the-worlds_b_180371.html

² Cohen, Stephen P. and Shujah Nawaz, “Mastering Counterinsurgency: A Workshop Report,” The Brookings Institution, 7 July 2009, 5, available at http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2009/0707_counterinsurgency_cohen.aspx

³ Boucher, Richard A., Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs. Testimony before the U.S. House Armed Services Committee. United States Congress, 29 April 2009. http://armedservices.house.gov/pdFC/FC042909/Boucher_Testimony042909.pdf

known as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP),⁴ have conducted terrorist attacks throughout Pakistan since December 2007. In response to army operations against foreign fighters and the Taliban, militants began to target the Pakistani government itself in an attempt to preserve their sanctuary.⁵ Militants now pose a threat to the stability of the Pakistani state.

Although Islamabad intensified its counterinsurgency efforts in 2008, its record in combating and controlling militant groups has been mixed. Frustration over increasing economic hardships and poor governance has led to greater radicalization and the loss of government authority. In July 2009, Director of National Intelligence Dennis C. Blair testified to Congress that, “No improvement in Afghanistan is possible without Pakistan taking control of its border areas and improving governance and creating economic and educational opportunities throughout the country.”⁶

To date, Pakistan has conducted numerous operations in the NWFP and FATA in an effort to root out these militant bases.⁷ So far, Islamabad has failed to deny safe haven to militant groups in this region, as demonstrated by the continued Taliban and al Qaeda presence.⁸ Two major factors dictate whether Pakistan will eliminate this sanctuary. The first is Islamabad’s willingness to combat these insurgent and terrorist groups, and the second is its ability to do so.

⁴ Abbas, Hassan, *Pakistan’s Troubled Frontier*, Washington, D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2009, 8.

⁵ Cheema, Pervaiz Iqbal, “Challenges Facing a Counter-Militant Campaign in Pakistan’s FATA,” *NBR Analysis*, National Bureau of Asian Research, Aug 2008, 23, available at <http://www.nbr.org/publications/element.aspx?id=154>

⁶ Information in this paragraph is taken from Blair, Dennis C., Director of National Intelligence. Transcript: “House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence Holds Hearing on ‘Worldwide Threats,’” February 25, 2009, found in Kronstadt, K. Alan, “Pakistan-U.S. Relations,” Congressional Research Service report for Congress, 1 July 2009, 12, available at <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/127297.pdf>

⁷ For a thorough discussion and evaluation of Pakistani military campaigns since 9/11/2001, see Fair, C. Christine and Jones, Seth G. “Pakistan’s War Within,” *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 6, Dec 2009 - Jan 2010, available at http://home.comcast.net/~christine_fair/pubs/51-6-13_Fair_and_Jones.pdf

⁸ For a comprehensive overview of militant groups operating in and their effect on NWFP/FATA, see Abbas, Hassan, *Pakistan’s Troubled Frontier*, Washington, D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2009.

Scholars, policymakers, and the media routinely question Pakistan's willingness to fight the Afghan Taliban and its allied groups.⁹ Contributing to this lack of willingness is the fact that insurgencies in the NWFP and FATA are low on Pakistan's list of priorities. For most of Pakistan's history, it maintained a hands-off attitude toward the FATA and to some extent toward the NWFP. According to U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, Pakistan historically governed the FATA by making "deals with the tribes, playing them against one another, or occasionally using military force."¹⁰ Islamabad prefers to leave the FATA to its own chaos and, instead, focus its attention on problems that are of greater strategic importance. This attitude contributes to Islamabad's calculation that India poses a much greater threat to the Pakistani state than the internal threat posed by various militant groups operating in the tribal areas.

Many scholars and experts go further in questioning Pakistan's willingness to fight militants: they assert that Pakistan actually supports select groups. Counterinsurgency expert David Kilcullen noted in his testimony to Congress that the U.S. has seen "continuing complicity by some elements of the Pakistani military and intelligence services with terrorists and insurgents in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and elsewhere."¹¹ Indeed, Islamabad uses parts of the NWFP and FATA to train proxy militant groups destined for Afghanistan or the war against India, according

⁹ See for example Fair, C. Christine and Jones, Seth G. "Pakistan's War Within," *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 6, Dec 2009 - Jan 2010, 167-8, available at http://home.comcast.net/~christine_fair/pubs/51-6-13_Fair_and_Jones.pdf

¹⁰ Gates, Robert M., U.S. Secretary of Defense, Testimony, *Hearing to Receive Testimony in Review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2010 and the Future Years Defense Program*, Senate Armed Services Committee, Washington D.C., 14 May, 2009

¹¹ Kilcullen, Dr. David J. Testimony before the House Armed Services Committee Hearing on HR 1886, the Pakistan Enduring Assistance and Cooperation Enhancement (PEACE) Act 2009, 111th Cong., 1st sess., April 23, 2009. http://armedservices.house.gov/pdFC/FC042309/Kilcullen_Testimony042309.pdf

to Christine Fair and Seth Jones.¹² South Asia expert Ahmed Rashid blames current perceptions of Pakistan's support to insurgent groups on its historical use of militants to accomplish foreign policy goals. The Frontier Corps – the security force responsible for the FATA – supported the mujahideen during the Russian occupation of Afghanistan; Kashmiri militants fighting in Indian Kashmir; and Afghan Taliban during the Taliban regime's fight against the Northern Alliance.¹³ Rashid posits that, "for a force that was told for three decades that supporting jihad in Afghanistan and India was part of state policy, it is naturally proving contradictory for them now to be told that the same jihadists are enemies of the state."¹⁴ Pakistan's historical support for insurgencies provides additional fodder for academics and experts to question Islamabad's willingness to combat the Taliban and al Qaeda.

Examining Pakistan's willingness to fight militant groups is moot, however, if Pakistan is unable to wage counterinsurgency successfully. Therefore, the second major factor – Pakistan's capacity for conducting a counterinsurgency campaign – comprises the central question of this paper. Conventional wisdom holds that Pakistan is failing to wage population-centric counterinsurgency in the NWFP and FATA and is instead using destructive conventional methods that prevent long-term success.¹⁵ This paper seeks to examine the extent to which Pakistan is actually engaging in counterinsurgency best practices and to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses in doing so.

¹² Fair, C. Christine and Jones, Seth G. "Pakistan's War Within," *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 6, Dec 2009 - Jan 2010, 181, available at http://home.comcast.net/~christine_fair/pubs/51-6-13_Fair_and_Jones.pdf

¹³ Rashid, Ahmed, "Pakistan's Continued Failure to Adopt a Counterinsurgency Strategy," *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 2, Issue 3, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, March 2009, 8, available at <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/sentinel/CTCSentinel-Vol2Iss3.pdf>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ A more detailed discussion follows. For more on conventional wisdom see Rashid, Ahmed, "Pakistan's Continued Failure to Adopt a Counterinsurgency Strategy," *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 2, Issue 3, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, March 2009, available at <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/sentinel/CTCSentinel-Vol2Iss3.pdf> and Fair, C. Christine and Jones, Seth G. "Pakistan's War Within," *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 6, Dec 2009 - Jan 2010, available at http://home.comcast.net/~christine_fair/pubs/51-6-13_Fair_and_Jones.pdf.

Through a case study of the summer 2009 *Operation Rah-e-Rast* in Swat District and an examination of Pakistani learning since then, this paper analyzes Pakistan's effectiveness in counterinsurgency operations and suggests policies to improve its capabilities in the future.

Why Swat?

Summer 2009 military operations in Swat District present an excellent case study to examine Pakistan's ability to wage counterinsurgency because Islamabad's willingness in this instance is not in question. Unlike other operations in NWFP and FATA, Pakistan was motivated to defeat the militant group and retake and hold the territory in the long term. Regaining control of Swat District was of strategic importance to Pakistan because the idea of losing it was unacceptable. Swat is a vacation destination characterized by wealthy land owners; it is in the NWFP rather than in the FATA; it is a largely settled area; and it is much closer to Islamabad and the Punjab than Waziristan is; therefore, it enjoys greater strategic importance for the Pakistani state.¹⁶ Until the TTP overreached into Buner District in early 2009, Pakistanis tended to believe that the militant problem would stay contained to the chaotic tribal areas and that militant groups like the Taliban and Tehrik-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM) would not "seek to expand their sphere of influence east of the Indus river."¹⁷ However, the TTP's encroachment on territory within 60 miles of Islamabad caused alarm throughout Pakistan and prompted a serious response. Given Swat's strategic and historical importance, the military moved in with tenacity and the intention to permanently reclaim Swat from the Taliban.

¹⁶ Information in this paragraph comes from discussions with Department of Defense personnel at United States Army Special Operations Command at Ft. Bragg, NC, on 12 March 2010.

¹⁷ Fair, C. Christine, "[Pakistan's Own War on Terror: What the Pakistani Public Thinks.](#)" *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 63, No. 1, Fall/Winter 2009, 48.

The Swat TTP posed an existential threat to the writ of the Pakistani government, which also contributed to Pakistan's unique commitment to root out militants. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan view the Durand Line as a porous border and see militant infiltration from the neighboring country as a threat. Afghanistan feels threatened by the cross-border flow of militants from Pakistan in the south, particularly the Waziristan area, into Afghanistan. Conversely, Pakistan feels threatened by the flow of militants from Afghanistan into the northern parts of Pakistan, including Swat. Islamabad viewed the Taliban in Swat as a threat to the government of Pakistan itself, forcing it to commit completely to clearing the district of militants and maintaining long-term control.¹⁸ The clarity of Pakistan's motives and intentions in Swat make it an ideal case study to assess Pakistan's ability to wage counterinsurgency operations.

Examining Pakistan's Use of Population-Centric Counterinsurgency

Conventional wisdom and current literature suggest that Pakistan does not currently practice population-centric counterinsurgency in its operations in the NWFP and FATA. Instead of addressing local grievances, Islamabad responds to insurgents by sending the military into villages with overwhelming conventional force, causing damage and alienating the population.¹⁹ Academics argue that rather than protecting the local population, Pakistan's preferred practice is

¹⁸ Information in this paragraph comes from discussions with Department of Defense personnel at United States Special Operations Command at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, FL, on 11 March 2010.

¹⁹ White, Joshua, "Applying Counterinsurgency Principles in Pakistan's Frontier," *Counterinsurgency and Pakistan Paper Series*, No. 2, The Brookings Institution, 25 June 2009, available at http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2009/0625_counterinsurgency_white.aspx. See also Rashid, Ahmed, "Pakistan's Continued Failure to Adopt a Counterinsurgency Strategy," *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 2, Issue 3, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, March 2009, available at <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/sentinel/CTCSentinel-Vol2Iss3.pdf> and Fair, C. Christine and Jones, Seth G. "Pakistan's War Within," *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 6, Dec 2009 - Jan 2010, available at http://home.comcast.net/~christine_fair/pubs/51-6-13_Fair_and_Jones.pdf

to capture and kill the enemy with little regard to the destruction that results. Rashid argues that Pakistan's heavy-handed tactics have been largely ineffective, as the military's methods are the complete opposite of the best practices prescribed by counterinsurgency literature and doctrine.²⁰ Further, Pakistan's efforts are hampered by the conventional make up of the Pakistani military, which produces a heavy-handed approach.²¹ In particular, "the absence of a comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy involving the civil administration, political leadership, and the military has meant that whatever tactical military successes they might have had were largely ineffective in the long run. A vacuum of civil order in the wake of military action frequently allows the insurgents to regain control."²² As a result, Pakistan's failure to employ a population-centric counterinsurgency strategy could overshadow short term gains and could lead to failure in the long run.

To sustain victories over insurgents over time, Pakistan should not focus solely on military force, according to Pakistan expert Pervaiz Cheema. Instead, it needs to adopt other measures to focus on the political and socio-economic well-being of the local population.²³ For this reason, experts agree that Pakistan should adopt a population-centric counterinsurgency strategy. In April 2009, Kilcullen made this argument in his testimony to the House Armed Services Committee. He urged members of Congress to consider "specifying what types of counterinsurgency activity we seek to see in Pakistan," as a condition of aid. Specifically, he argued that, "rather than the

²⁰ Rashid, Ahmed, "Pakistan's Continued Failure to Adopt a Counterinsurgency Strategy," *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 2, Issue 3, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, March 2009, 8, available at <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/sentinel/CTCSentinel-Vol2Iss3.pdf>

²¹ Fair, C. Christine and Jones, Seth G. "Pakistan's War Within," *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 6, Dec 2009 - Jan 2010, 181, available at http://home.comcast.net/~christine_fair/pubs/51-6-13_Fair_and_Jones.pdf

²² Cohen, Stephen P. and Shujah Nawaz, "Mastering Counterinsurgency: A Workshop Report," The Brookings Institution, 7 July 2009, 2, available at http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2009/0707_counterinsurgency_cohen.aspx

²³ Cheema, Pervaiz Iqbal, "Challenges Facing a Counter-Militant Campaign in Pakistan's FATA," *NBR Analysis*, National Bureau of Asian Research, Aug 2008, 23, available at <http://www.nbr.org/publications/element.aspx?id=154>

heavy-handed violent tactics that have alienated the people and lost ground, we need to see the evidence-based best practices that we have seen in successful counterinsurgency elsewhere.”²⁴

Experts therefore agree that while Pakistan does not use a population-centric counterinsurgency strategy, it should. Yet, to date, no one has comprehensively evaluated the extent to which Pakistan engages in the best-practices prescribed by existing population-centric counterinsurgency literature. This case study rectifies this gap in the literature by applying the Galula model of population-centric counterinsurgency to Pakistan’s performance in *Operation Rah-e-Rast* and its aftermath.

Model of Analysis

Experts note that Pakistan lacks a formal counterinsurgency doctrine of its own from which to measure its progress. Therefore, David Galula’s widely accepted population-centric counterinsurgency model, or a modified version thereof, is the best perspective from which to evaluate Pakistan. Galula’s model is the current gold standard for population-centric counterinsurgency upon which the counterinsurgency doctrines of the U.S, Great Britain, and to a lesser extent France, are all based. Galula’s theory is meant to be universally applicable to all militaries charged with defeating an insurgency, albeit with room for adaptation based on local circumstances.

Galula lays out an eight-step operational plan for waging a successful counterinsurgency. He further claims that if a counterinsurgent is successful in each step, he will be successful overall:

²⁴ Kilcullen, Dr. David J. Testimony before the House Armed Services Committee Hearing on HR 1886, the Pakistan Enduring Assistance and Cooperation Enhancement (PEACE) Act 2009, 111th Cong., 1st sess., April 23, 2009. http://armedservices.house.gov/pdFC/FC042309/Kilcullen_Testimony042309.pdf

“The expected result – final defeat of the insurgents – is not an addition but a multiplication of these various operations; they are all essential and if one is nil, the product will be zero.”²⁵ The steps include: 1) destruction or expulsion of the insurgent forces; 2) deployment of the static unit; 3) contact with and control of the local population; 4) destruction of the insurgent political organization; 5) local elections; 6) testing of the leaders; 7) organizing a party; and 8) winning over or suppressing the last guerillas.²⁶ These steps are fluid and can, to some extent, occur simultaneously. The cumulative success or failure in each of these steps determines the extent to which the counterinsurgent is successful.

This paper modifies the Galula model slightly to maximize its applicability to the Pakistani case. Because of the unique governance structures of the NWFP and the FATA, it lumps together steps 5-7 into something called ‘reestablishing a legitimate local government.’ This relatively small geographic area encompasses several governance structures that include various political authorities and security forces.²⁷ Due to the tribal nature of these societies, democratic governance structures involving formal elections may not apply for all aspects of the government, and Pakistan certainly has not professed that western-style democracy is a goal here. Therefore, judging Pakistan’s success or failure in its counterinsurgency based on elections

²⁵ Galula, David. *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 2006, 61.

²⁶ Ibid, 75-94.

²⁷ “There is perhaps no other region in Pakistan in which coordination of local security efforts is as complex as in the NWFP/FATA frontier areas. Within a relatively small geographic space, the government has to work across a number of divergent and historically-conditioned systems of governance: 1) the “settled” system that predominates in the NWFP, in which the state levies taxes and provides services common to modern systems of governance; 2) the FATA system under the Frontier Crimes Regulation, in which a political agent essentially bargains on behalf of the state, and has wide, extra-legal latitude to represent state interests; 3) the Frontier Regions (FR) system which sits (geographically) between settled and FATA regions, and resembles the latter but with reporting authority through the former; 4) and the various Provincially Administered Tribal Area (PATA) systems, which are hybrids of the settled and FATA models, and in which only limited government services and citizen tax obligations apply.” From White, Joshua, “Applying Counterinsurgency Principles in Pakistan’s Frontier,” *Counterinsurgency and Pakistan Paper Series*, No. 2, The Brookings Institution, 25 June 2009, 3, available at http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2009/0625_counterinsurgency_white.aspx

that comprise only a small portion of its governance structure would be useless. Further, this paper does not evaluate Pakistan on Step 8 of the Galula model – winning over or suppressing the last guerillas.²⁸ The insurgency in the FATA and NWFP is still ongoing, and the militants in Swat District fall under the umbrella TTP organization. Since Swat is not insulated from the wider insurgency, it would be impossible for Islamabad to have won over or suppressed the last guerillas. Therefore, it would be unfair to evaluate Pakistan’s ultimate performance in Swat based on this step.

The Case Study: Insurgency in Swat District and Operation Rah-e-Rast

To understand insurgency and counterinsurgency in Swat, it is important to first understand the nature of the militant group that threatened the writ of the Pakistani government in early 2009. The insurgency in Swat is part of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which was created by the now-deceased Baitullah Mehsud in late 2007.²⁹ The umbrella organization TTP has representatives from each of FATA’s seven tribal agencies and from some of the settled districts in NWFP. Its three main goals are: “(1) to unite disparate pro-Taliban groups active in the FATA and NWFP; (2) to assist the Afghan Taliban in its conflict across the Durand Line; and (3) to establish a Taliban-style Islamic state in Pakistan.”³⁰ Although this group professes to have

²⁸ Galula, David. *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 2006, 75-94.

²⁹ Yusufzai, Rahimullah, “A Who’s Who of the Insurgency in Pakistan’s North-West Frontier Province: Part One – North and South Waziristan,” in Abbas, Hassan, *Pakistan’s Troubled Frontier*, Washington, D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2009, 32-37. For reports of Baitullah Mehsud’s death, see for example Shah, Pir Zubair, Sabrina Tavernise, and Mark Mazzetti, “Taliban Leader in Pakistan is Reportedly Killed,” *New York Times*, 7 August 2009, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/08/world/asia/08pstan.html>

³⁰ Kronstadt, K. Alan, “Pakistan-U.S. Relations,” Congressional Research Service report for Congress, 1 July 2009, 16, available at <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/127297.pdf>

unified goals, it is characterized by factionalism and localization.³¹ The disparate groups that make up the TTP have no central direction, but take some of their direction from the Afghan Taliban and possibly receive support from al Qaeda, according to the Brookings Institution.³² Since this group is so factionalized, each Pakistani military operation is unique. Therefore, to analyze *Operation Rah-e-Rast*, it is vital to first understand the history of Swat District and its relationship with TTP.

Swat District is part of the North West Frontier Province that, until fighting broke out between government security forces and religious militants, was a widely reputed vacation destination, colloquially known as the Switzerland of Pakistan.³³ Until the 1947 creation of Pakistan, it was an autonomous princely state. This legacy shapes the people's views of governance, instilling a tradition of personal rule that the militant leadership exploited by developing cults of personality.³⁴ The influence of militants spread throughout the district in the early 1990's, eventually linking up with the broader movement that permeated the region after the Taliban regime fell in Afghanistan.

³¹ White, Joshua, "Applying Counterinsurgency Principles in Pakistan's Frontier," *Counterinsurgency and Pakistan Paper Series*, No. 2, The Brookings Institution, 25 June 2009, 1, available at http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2009/0625_counterinsurgency_white.aspx

³² Cohen, Stephen P. and Shujah Nawaz, "Mastering Counterinsurgency: A Workshop Report," The Brookings Institution, 7 July 2009, 4, available at http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2009/0707_counterinsurgency_cohen.aspx

³³ Sultain-i-Rome, "Swat: A Critical Analysis," *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies Research Papers*, No. 18, New Delhi: January 2008, 2, available at http://ipcs.org/pdf_file/issue/1542140255RP18-Rome-Swat.pdf. This article provides an in depth discussion of the history of Swat, its judicial system, how it came under its current governance structure within Pakistan, the history of TNSM, and calls for sharia law.

³⁴ Khan, Mukhtar, "The Return of Shari'a Law to Pakistan's SWAT Region," in Abbas, Hassan, *Pakistan's Troubled Frontier*, Washington, D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2009, 206.



Source: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8072291.stm

The Swat chapter of the TTP evolved from the militant group Tehrik-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM),³⁵ which Sufi Muhammad established in 1992 with the goal of implementing a strict version of sharia law in the Malakand region, including Swat, Burner, Upper Dir, and Lower Dir Districts. TNSM's influence spread throughout Swat in the 1990's at the same time that the Taliban was establishing itself in Afghanistan. Over the years, Sufi Muhammad and, by extension TNSM, established strong ties with the Taliban, paving the way for the TNSM to join the Pakistani Taliban umbrella group (TTP) in 2007. When the government of Pakistan arrested Sufi Muhammad in 2002 for openly inciting and recruiting militants to cross the border into Afghanistan and attack NATO and U.S. troops, his son-in-law

³⁵ For more information on militants in Swat, their leaders, Pakistani efforts in Swat, and the failed peace deal, please see Abbas, Hassan, *Pakistan's Troubled Frontier*, Washington, D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2009, 198-233.

Maulana Fazlullah took over leadership of the group.³⁶ Fazlullah is known as “Mullah Radio” because he draws much of his support from the incendiary broadcasts he issues on his illegal radio station. In these sermons, he promotes “fundamental Wahabbi/Taliban values” including the complete covering of women, banning female education, and the prohibition of music, dancing, and television.³⁷ He too attempted to implement a strict version of sharia law, but the Pakistani government took action to prevent him from doing so.

In late 2007, Pakistan launched *Operation Rah-e-Haq*, the predecessor to the operation analyzed in the case study, to counter the growing militant influence in Swat District. The first phase began in November 2007 and involved police action to round up militants, but, over time, the latter re-infiltrated Swat’s cities, including the key city of Mingora. In July 2008, the second phase witnessed fighting that was initially heavy in the northern parts of the valley before spreading south. The third and final phase began in January 2009, and the army imposed “‘shoot-on-sight’ curfews” in Swat’s major cities. Militants “responded by destroying girls’ schools and attacking security forces.”³⁸ Unfortunately for the Pakistani government, the last phase, much like the first two, was unsuccessful in rooting out the TTP from Swat District. In response, it signed a peace accord with the militants.

The Malakand Accord, signed in February 2009, institutionalized sharia law in the Malakand region, which includes Swat District, but the militants quickly violated the agreement, causing a

³⁶ Information in this paragraph is taken from Ali, Imtiaz, “From Militant to Peace Broker: A Profile of the Swat Valley’s Maulana Sufi Muhammad,” in Abbas, Hassan, *Pakistan’s Troubled Frontier*, Washington, D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2009, 198-202.

³⁷ Khan, Afzal, “Revolt in Pakistan’s NWFP: A Profile of Maulana Fazlullah of Swat,” in Abbas, Hassan, *Pakistan’s Troubled Frontier*, Washington, D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2009, 217.

³⁸ Information in this paragraph is taken from Fair, C. Christine and Jones, Seth G. “Pakistan’s War Within,” *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 6, Dec 2009 - Jan 2010, 176, available at http://home.comcast.net/~christine_fair/pubs/51-6-13_Fair_and_Jones.pdf

major backlash and prompting Pakistan to take military action. Militants failed to uphold their end of the deal by attacking government security forces, destroying schools, and setting up checkpoints and training camps.³⁹ Additionally, they used their position in Swat “as a springboard from which to launch further forays” into Buner District.⁴⁰ The Pakistani government received widespread criticism for what much of the international community saw as capitulation to the militants.⁴¹ The accord did, however, provide Islamabad the moral authority to move in by force when the militants violated it. In May 2009, the Pakistani military launched *Operation Rah-e-Rast* to clear out TTP militants in Swat District.

Clearing Swat: *Operation Rah-e-Rast*

The first step of counterinsurgency operations – destruction or expulsion of the insurgent forces – requires the counterinsurgent to clear a given area of militants. Guerillas “have the special ability to grow again if not all destroyed at the same time,” so the goal at this stage is to prepare the area for further counterinsurgent action.⁴² Pakistan does not have to destroy all TTP fighters to achieve success in this step. Rather, success comes when Pakistan, rather than the TTP, controls the territory and does so in a way that minimizes complications for the subsequent steps.

On 26 April 2009, Pakistan launched a full-scale offensive, called *Operation Rah-e-Rast*, to clear TTP militants out of Swat District and neighboring areas, including parts of Buner, Shangla, and

³⁹ Fair, C. Christine and Jones, Seth G. “Pakistan’s War Within,” *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 6, Dec 2009 - Jan 2010, 176, available at http://home.comcast.net/~christine_fair/pubs/51-6-13_Fair_and_Jones.pdf and Kronstadt, K. Allen. Pakistan-U.S. Relations. Congressional Research Service Report for Congress. 1 July, 2009, 20 and 21. <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/127297.pdf>

⁴⁰ Kronstadt, K. Allen. Pakistan-U.S. Relations. Congressional Research Service Report for Congress. 1 July, 2009, 22. <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/127297.pdf>

⁴¹ For an overview of the negative international reaction to the peace deal, see Kronstadt, K. Allen. Pakistan-U.S. Relations. Congressional Research Service Report for Congress. 1 July, 2009, 21. <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/127297.pdf>

⁴² Ibid., 75.

Lower Dir Districts. Residents reportedly left the area by the thousands in preparation for this offensive,⁴³ and they took up refuge in IDP camps or with host families in neighboring districts. Pakistan deployed seven brigades, two armored units, two or three artillery regiments, and logistical elements – who had all undergone counterinsurgency training – to fight in Swat.⁴⁴ These totaled more than 20,000 troops backed by “extensive air support.”⁴⁵ The plan was to move through the region with strength, first defeating the Taliban in outlying areas “where air support could be used extensively without causing civilian casualties,” and finally retake the town of Mingora, a site of significant Taliban presence.⁴⁶

To understand the fighting in Swat and the difficulties that the military encountered, it is important first to understand the region’s geography and centers of gravity. The population-centers in Swat are concentrated in the south and are principally situated along the Swat Valley, the region’s main valley that runs north-south. The capital is Saidu Sharif,⁴⁷ but the main town is considered Mingora, which has a population of about 300,000.⁴⁸ Swat also has numerous side valleys, including the Peochar Valley, which was a sparsely-populated Taliban stronghold.⁴⁹ The mountainous terrain in Swat favored the TTP insurgents and ensured a difficult battle for the military.⁵⁰

⁴³ Gall, Carlotta, “Pakistani Army Poised for New Push into Swat,” *New York Times*, 5 May, 2009, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/06/world/asia/06pstan.html>

⁴⁴ Cloughley, Brian, “Swat team – Pakistan targets militants in tribal areas,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, 17 July 2009, 4.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

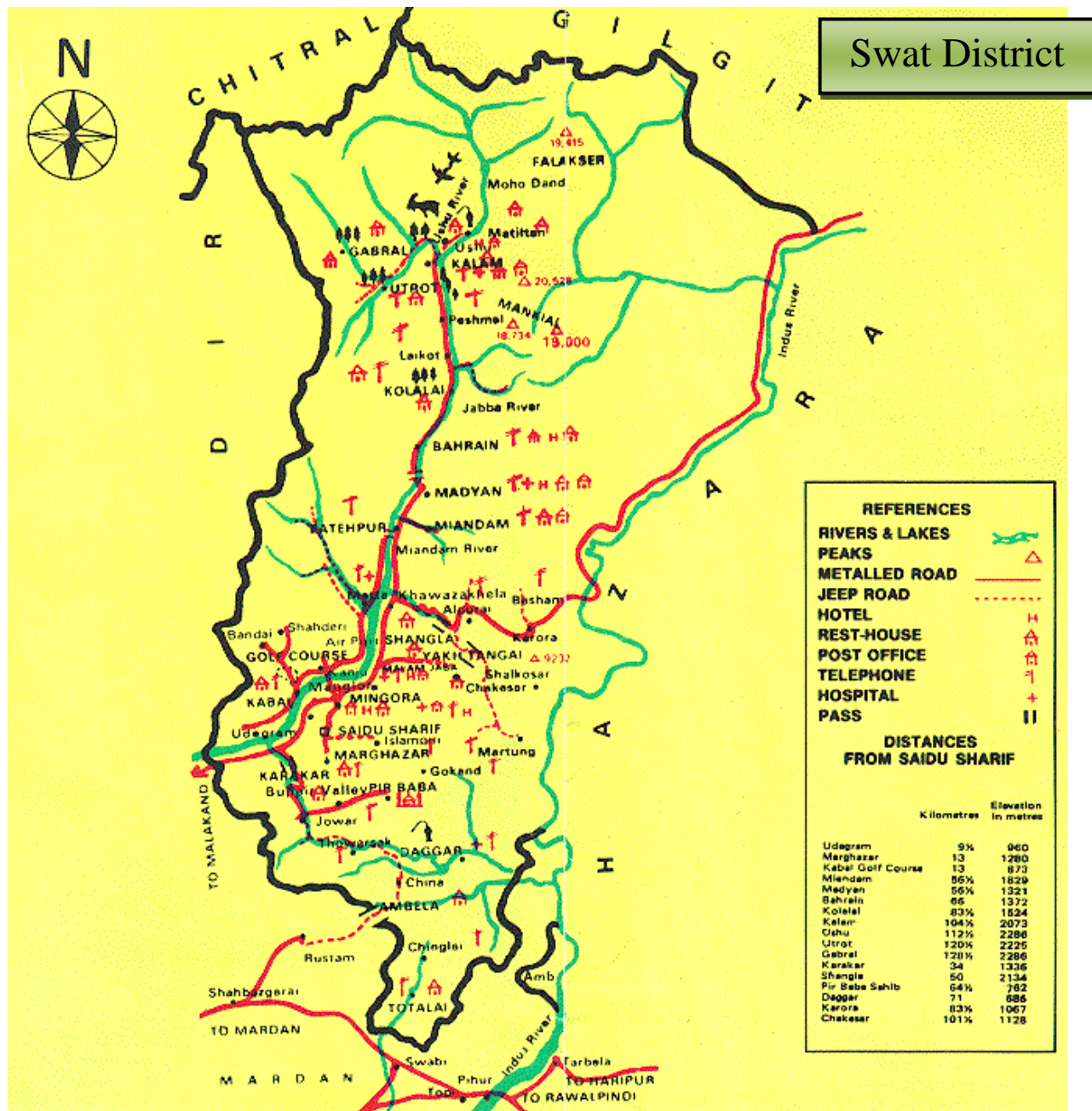
⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ “Geography / NWFP – Swat Valley,” *Global Services Pakistan*, website, accessed 28 March 2010, available at http://www.globalservices.pk/tourism/geography/nwfp_swat_valley.html

⁴⁸ Cloughley, Brian, “Swat team – Pakistan targets militants in tribal areas,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, 17 July 2009, 4.

⁴⁹ “Pakistan raids Taleban stronghold,” *BBC News*, 12 May 2009, available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8045275.stm>

⁵⁰ Bokhari, Farhan, “Pakistan Army expands Swat operations,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, 8 May 2009



Source: <http://www.swatvalley.com/swat/map.htm>

The offensive itself first began in Lower Dir, then spread to Buner, and finally started in Swat itself on 8 May. Army intelligence identified sites for preparatory air strikes, but these proved ineffective because the militants took refuge “in well-protected cave and bunker systems” and in

“civilian-occupied buildings.”⁵¹ Special Services Group commandos, Pakistan’s special forces, attempted to prevent militants from using mountain passes to enter and exit the Swat Valley to the north of Mingora.⁵² Although the plan had been to use air support in unpopulated areas to minimize collateral damage, the military engaged in destructive tactics that included the use of “attack helicopters” to engage militant hideouts in Mingora.⁵³ The military also used gunship helicopters to engage a “tunnel” that served as a “hideout of miscreants at Qamber Ridge” on 11 May.⁵⁴ Operations reached their height in mid-May, when the military reported up to 200 militants killed by security forces in a single day.⁵⁵

Nearly a month after operations began, the military entered Mingora on 23 May, starting the “most important phase of *Operation Rah-e-Rast*.”⁵⁶ Security forces spent one week “moving from street to street” to secure the city.⁵⁷ On May 30, “the military announced it had regained control of all of Mingora (though small pockets of resistance remained on the city’s outskirts), had destroyed concrete bunkers, and had confiscated arms, ammunition and explosives hidden in caves.”⁵⁸ The army and Frontier Corps had also retaken various other cities in Swat, though subsequent activities continued around the district, particularly in the Peochar Valley. By early

⁵¹ Cloughley, Brian, “Swat team – Pakistan targets militants in tribal areas,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, 17 July 2009, 4.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Inter Services Public Relations Website, Press Release, 9 May 2009, available at http://www.ispr.gov.pk/front/main.asp?o=t-press_release&date=2009/5/9

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Inter Services Public Relations Website, Press Release, 10 May 2009, available at http://www.ispr.gov.pk/front/main.asp?o=t-press_release&id=633

⁵⁶ Inter Services Public Relations Website, Press Release, 23 May 2009, available at http://www.ispr.gov.pk/front/main.asp?o=t-press_release&date=2009/5/23

⁵⁷ Inter Services Public Relations Website, Press Release, 24 May 2009, available at http://www.ispr.gov.pk/front/main.asp?o=t-press_release&id=661

⁵⁸ Fair, C. Christine and Jones, Seth G. “Pakistan’s War Within,” *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 6, Dec 2009 - Jan 2010, 176-7, available at http://home.comcast.net/~christine_fair/pubs/51-6-13_Fair_and_Jones.pdf

June, however, the military concluded the bulk of clearing operations, and Islamabad's official body count estimates that about 1700 militants were killed.⁵⁹

Significantly, Pakistan gave command and control of military operations to the Frontier Corps rather than to the Army. The Frontier Corps (FC) is a relatively effective counterinsurgency force, but has experienced historical friction with Pakistani military. In Swat operations, however, the military put army brigades under the command of the FC for the first time rather than putting the FC under the command of the army.⁶⁰ This highlights the extent to which Swat operations were unique in comparison to other operations in NWFP and FATA.

Though Pakistan was ultimately successful, clearing operations required more time and effort than might be expected for a modern, well-equipped military to crush a group of militants. The FC and army both took a lot of casualties, with an estimated 85 killed and 200 wounded.⁶¹ The major reason for the military's difficulties in retaking Swat District was the fact that the Malakand Accord, which was in effect from February to the beginning of May, gave the insurgents nearly four months to build up their defenses. They dug caves and tunnels and built fortifications, and were able to procure enough supplies and light arms to make themselves a formidable enemy, though they were not as well-equipped as government security forces.⁶² In spite of these difficulties, Pakistan was able to successfully clear Swat of militants by capturing them, killing them, or forcing them to flee.

⁵⁹ Kronstadt, K. Allen. Pakistan-U.S. Relations. Congressional Research Service Report for Congress. 1 July, 2009, 20 and 21. <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/127297.pdf>

⁶⁰ Discussions with Department of Defense personnel at United States Special Operations Command at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, FL, on 11 March 2010.

⁶¹ Cloughley, Brian, "Swat team – Pakistan targets militants in tribal areas," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 17 July 2009, 5.

⁶² Information in this paragraph is based on discussions with Department of Defense personnel at United States Army Special Operations Command at Ft. Bragg, NC, on 12 March 2010.

The methods that Pakistan used to clear these militants undermined the military's success in clearing operations. It employed relatively heavy-handed, brutal tactics in *Operation Rah-e-Rast*, which devastated many villages and created a flood of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Some refugee organizations estimated that these destructive methods displaced over three million people.⁶³ Militants saw this as an opportunity to gain popular support by taking advantage of IDP displeasure with the government's brutal methods.⁶⁴ This complicated Pakistan's efforts in both the short and the long term.

Although clearing operations disrupted the locals' lives, popular support for *Operation Rah-e-Rast* and displeasure with the Taliban to some extent enhanced the population's tolerance for the negative consequences of military action.⁶⁵ The Pakistani military did a particularly good job of using effective information operations to mobilize support for moving into Swat, according to military officials at U.S. Army Special Operations Command.⁶⁶ In addition, it initially took care of IDPs with relative success. Islamabad quickly set up IDP camps in neighboring districts and provided food and other relief aid to the displaced locals. This competency created enough public support for military operations that Pakistan was able to continue them.

In *Operation Rah-e-Rast*, Pakistan was relatively successful in clearing Swat of insurgents, though the methods that it employed undermined its effectiveness by creating the long-term

⁶³ Fair, C. Christine and Jones, Seth G. "Pakistan's War Within," *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 6, Dec 2009 - Jan 2010, 177, available at http://home.comcast.net/~christine_fair/pubs/51-6-13_Fair_and_Jones.pdf

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Discussions with Department of Defense personnel at United States Special Operations Command at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, FL, on 11 March 2010.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

problems of IDPs and devastation. The goal in this initial step is to either destroy the insurgents by capturing or killing them or to force them to relocate in order to retake control of a given area. Since insurgents, by nature, tend to flee rather than stand and fight, the real purpose of the first step is to prepare the territory for further counterinsurgency operations.⁶⁷ In regaining control of Swat District from the insurgents through military operations, Pakistan completed this stage relatively successfully.

Holding Swat

Pakistan also proved to be relatively successful at Step 2 – deployment of the static unit – though it remains to be seen whether it has the ability to hold Swat District in the long term. This phase requires Pakistan to track the remaining TTP insurgents “through small-scale operations and ambushes,” though it must shift the main focus to protecting and winning over the population.⁶⁸ Because of the fluid nature of these steps in counterinsurgency operations, it is impossible to discern a date when Pakistan moved on to this step from its previous clearing operations.

An important indicator of success at this step is the absence of violent incidents. The existence of fighting implies that insurgents retain the ability to operate, and it is difficult to win over the local population when people’s daily lives are interrupted by violence. By August, the military was conducting multiple cordon and search operations in various parts of Swat District every day with the help of local lashkars, or tribal militias.⁶⁹ In the process, it captured or killed militants, destroyed their hideouts, and found weapons and supply caches. In addition, reports of violent

⁶⁷ Galula, David. *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 2006, 75.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 76.

⁶⁹ “See, for example “Update Operation (Rah e Rast) 5th August 2009,” Inter Services Public Relations website, Press Release, 5 May 2009, available at http://www.ispr.gov.pk/front/main.asp?o=t-press_release&date=2009/8/5

incidents severely decreased from numerous reports per day in May to approximately one or two reports per week by late-August.⁷⁰ Like most insurgents who are unable to retake territory from a counterinsurgent by fighting conventionally,⁷¹ the TTP fled the area rather than standing up to fight the Pakistani military. Although there have been left over militant strongholds and pockets of resistance that have caused occasional violent incidents, they have not threaten Pakistan's control over Swat since clearing operations ended in June.⁷²

It appears that Islamabad has also had some success in Step 3: establishing contact with and control over the local population – a vital component of the holding operations. The population represents the center of gravity in counterinsurgency operations, making this step vital because it enables the counterinsurgent to shift from a military to a political focus. The transition involves “re-establishing the counterinsurgent’s authority over the population,” by isolating the guerillas from the local population. This allows government forces to gather the intelligence that will allow them to destroy the insurgent political organization (which is the next step).⁷³ The central role of intelligence collection at this stage makes it inherently difficult to judge success or failure.

⁷⁰ This information comes from trends in Pakistani military public affairs reporting over time from May through August 2009. These reports can be found at: Inter Services Public Relations. Website. http://www.ispr.gov.pk/front/main.asp?o=t-main_page

⁷¹ Mao Tse-tung instructs insurgents to scatter rather than stand and fight conventionally until the third phase of the insurgency, which involves conventional warfare to retake territory from the counterinsurgent. His book is one of the seminal works on how to wage a protracted, political insurgency. See Tse-tung, Mao. *On Guerilla Warfare*. Trans. Samuel B. Griffith. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2005.

⁷² Discussions with Department of Defense personnel at United States Army Special Operations Command at Ft. Bragg, NC, on 12 March 2010.

⁷³ Galula, David. *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 2006, 81.

There are, however, indicators that point to partial success. Although it is impossible to comprehensively measure Pakistani intelligence collection, it is notable that military press releases routinely announce that “Security Forces” arrested one or more terrorists “on a tip off.”⁷⁴ Moreover, the military regularly asked the people of Swat to come forward with information on TTP fighters and activities,⁷⁵ which indicates an understanding of the importance of obtaining information from the local population in waging counterinsurgency operations. After the 17 September arrest of one the key leaders of the Swat TTP and 23 other militants, a *Jane’s Defence Weekly* report highlighted Pakistan’s successes. It claimed that, “the arrests demonstrated that the Pakistani military had significantly improved its intelligence-gathering techniques in Swat and may have also successfully established information-gathering sources among the Taliban.”⁷⁶ Additionally, the Pakistani authorities engaged in population control measures by placing Swat under a curfew,⁷⁷ and the military routinely established security checkpoints and engaged in door to door searches. Although there are many other measures that Pakistan could have undertaken to execute this step more effectively, the large number of IDPs required Islamabad to concentrate its efforts elsewhere.

Given that the military’s destructive tactics created millions of IDPs, one of the biggest difficulties Pakistan faced was gaining the trust of the population. People’s lives had arguably been more stable under TTP rule than they became after the military created widespread chaos

⁷⁴ See for example “Update Operation (Rah e Raast) 5 June 2009,” Inter Services Public Relations Website, 5 June 2009, available at http://www.ispr.gov.pk/front/main.asp?o=t-press_release&date=2009/6/5

⁷⁵ See for example Inter Services Public Relations Website, Press Release, 15 May 2009, available at http://www.ispr.gov.pk/front/main.asp?o=t-press_release&date=2009/5/15

⁷⁶ Bokhari, Farhan, “Pakistan highlights intelligence-gathering advances in Swat arrests,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, 18 September, 2009.

⁷⁷ Bokhari, Farhan, “Pakistan Army expands Swat operations,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, 8 May 2009

when it conducted operations and destroyed numerous villages throughout the district.⁷⁸ Many who thought their lives would improve when the Pakistani military kicked out the TTP were disappointed upon their return to Swat in August,⁷⁹ making it difficult for the government to effectively win over and establish contact with and control of the local population. Unfortunately, Pakistan's shortcomings in the rebuilding (addressed in detail below) did little to alleviate this problem.

Pakistan also had limited success in Step 4: destruction of the insurgent political organization, which would serve to further delegitimize the Taliban's attempt to rule the people of Swat by "eradicating the insurgent political agenda from the population."⁸⁰ According to Galula, this step requires a police crackdown in which the counterinsurgent arrests the major political agents in the insurgent organization. Informants are vital to providing the necessary information to identify the major figures in the insurgency and to find where they are located.

Since the clearing operations began in early May, Pakistan has lauded the arrest or death of numerous key figures in the Swat TTP organization, which is an important part of this step. Important figures that security forces arrested include Sufi Mohammad, founder of the organization that became the Swat TTP, and Muslim Khan, its spokesman.⁸¹ There is, however, little evidence that the military has rendered the group unable to spread its message and influence to the population. Its inability to counter illegal FM radio broadcasts "that created support for

⁷⁸ Discussions with Department of Defense personnel at United States Special Operations Command at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, FL, on 11 March 2010.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Galula, David. *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 2006, 86.

⁸¹ "Swat Taliban leader close to being captured," *Jane's Intelligence Weekly*, 14 September 2009.

insurgents while demoralizing the army and its allies” is an indicator of this difficulty.⁸² This is especially important in light of the fact that the leader and chief propagandist of the Swat TTP, Maulana Fazlullah, gathered so much of his support through the radio. Furthermore, Fazlullah remains at large, in spite of having a 50-million-rupee (approximately \$600,000) bounty on his head.⁸³ Regardless of partial gains made during the military and police crackdowns, Pakistan’s success at destroying the insurgent political organization has been limited.

Rebuilding Swat

Similarly, Pakistan had difficulty in carrying out Step 5 of counterinsurgency operations – the creation of a legitimate local government that is able to provide for the local population, is answerable to the people, and lays the groundwork for a functioning society. Islamabad’s biggest problem at this stage came from its difficulties in planning that kept it from providing for the people beyond the immediate consequences of *Operation Rah-e-Rast*. Initially, Islamabad quickly set up IDP camps, and the army provided significant amounts of rations and other relief goods to the population.⁸⁴ By mid-August, however, IDPs were returning to Swat in droves, and many of them found that their homes had been partially or completely destroyed.⁸⁵ The government and the military did not plan for these issues in advance. Yet the population’s

⁸² Cohen, Stephen P. and Shujah Nawaz, “Mastering Counterinsurgency: A Workshop Report,” The Brookings Institution, 7 July 2009, 6, available at http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2009/0707_counterinsurgency_cohen.aspx

⁸³ “Senior Taliban Commander Killed in Swat Clash,” *Dawn.Com*, 1 March 2010, available at <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/news/pakistan/03-senior-taliban-commander-killed-in-clashes-ss-07>

⁸⁴ Inter Services Public Relations website, Press Release, 13 May 2009, available at http://www.ispr.gov.pk/front/main.asp?o=t-press_release&date=2009/5/13

⁸⁵ For a visual representation of destruction of homes from the fighting, see “Total Damaged Kacha Houses: Swat District,” *UN Habitat*, [http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/fullmaps_sa.nsf/luFullMap/CA2EC62DDEF273ADC12576B00037B696/\\$File/map.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/fullmaps_sa.nsf/luFullMap/CA2EC62DDEF273ADC12576B00037B696/$File/map.pdf?OpenElement)

expectations began to rise once the military cleared TTP militants and IDPs started returning to their homes.⁸⁶

Pakistan failed to quickly return the population to normal life and minimize disruption because it was not able to help the people rebuild. For example, there were no measures in place for providing temporary schools while the permanent ones were rebuilt. The military did quickly restore gas and electricity and provide generators to run water pumping stations to Mingora city.⁸⁷ However, the government did not provide the equipment and materials, such as bulldozers and lumber, that were necessary for rebuilding infrastructure.⁸⁸ Pakistan's failure to meet the basic needs of the people undermined popular support for the government and caused a great deal of concern about the radicalization of refugees.

Pakistan had a number of difficulties inherent in rebuilding that hindered its efforts. First, although Islamabad did a relatively good job of taking care of IDPs while they were in the camps, it had no mechanism in place to take care of them once they had returned home. The government bureaucracy was structured in a way that ensured that these people would fall through the cracks.⁸⁹ Second, building infrastructure is not usually under the purview of the military; however, as the only organization with access to a given area, it is often forced to assume that responsibility. Many of the tasks involved in providing for the population are civilian functions, so it is vital for the civilian government to be as committed to rebuilding as

⁸⁶ Discussions with Department of Defense personnel at United States Special Operations Command at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, FL, on 11 March 2010.

⁸⁷ Inter Services Public Relations website, Press Release, 30 May 2009, available at http://www.ispr.gov.pk/front/main.asp?o=t-press_release&date=2009/5/30

⁸⁸ Discussions with Department of Defense personnel at United States Special Operations Command at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, FL, on 11 March 2010.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

the military.⁹⁰ This was not the case in Swat. These structural problems contributed to Pakistan's relative failure to rebuild Swat and provide for the local population.

Islamabad was relatively effective, however, in engaging the locals, indicating at least a basic level of attempting to meet the needs of the population. In the wake of operations in Swat, Pakistan empowered local leaders. The Frontier Corps and government representatives met with the local leadership to determine how to effectively restore services, examine exactly what services were needed, and ensure that requests were reasonable and uncorrupt. The goal was to ask the local leadership what the problems were in order to identify legitimate civil needs. This civil engagement required the government to minimize the "say-do gap" by delivering the goods and services that it promised the people, which posed a major challenge.⁹¹

Pakistan's Lessons from Swat

The Pakistani Army and Frontier Corps (FC) learned a great deal from *Operation Rah-e-Rast* and its aftermath. Since Swat operations, the military has already improved its tactics in clearing operations and planning for reconstruction and stabilization after counterinsurgency campaigns. Prior to *Operation Rah-e-Rast*, in operations in Bajaur in 2008, military forces flattened villages completely, but by the time they entered South Waziristan in October 2009, they were much more surgical in their approach. The military learned to conduct operations that included meeting with the local Mehsud tribesmen to convince them that it was only targeting specific

⁹⁰ Discussions with Department of Defense personnel at United States Army Special Operations Command at Ft. Bragg, NC, on 12 March 2010.

⁹¹ Information in this paragraph comes from discussions with Department of Defense personnel at United States Special Operations Command at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, FL, on 11 March 2010.

militants. Additionally, the army engaged in more ground operations vice destructive air operations, advanced more slowly, and was more cautious in declaring that operations were over in their efforts in South Waziristan.⁹²

Two main driving factors contributed to Pakistan's adoption of lessons from Swat to inform subsequent operations. The first was that Pakistan wanted to avoid creating more droves of IDPs. In light of the troubles they encountered in Swat, the army and FC knew that they did not possess the capacity and the advanced planning capabilities to be able to deal with them effectively. The second driving factor was resource scarcity. The bulk of the Pakistani military's resources and talent go toward the eastern border with India because Islamabad perceives this as the main threat. As a result, despite the fact that Pakistan has one of the largest armies in the world, its forces were stretched thin by other counterinsurgency operations in the NWFP and FATA.⁹³ Analyzing the effectiveness of Pakistan's counterinsurgency operations subsequent to *Operation Rah-e-Rast* is beyond the scope of this paper; however, these developments indicate a positive trend in Pakistan's capabilities.

Following *Operation Rah-e Rast*, Pakistan also demonstrated improvements in planning for the reconstruction and stabilization that comes after military operations. Due to the plethora of problems that the military encountered after the IDPs returned to their villages that had been decimated, it recognized the need to engage the population and start planning for civil affairs

⁹² Discussions with Department of Defense personnel at United States Special Operations Command at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, FL, on 11 March 2010.

⁹³ This paragraph is informed by discussions with Department of Defense personnel at United States Special Operations Command at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, FL, on 11 March 2010.

projects up front.⁹⁴ Within one operational cycle, military leaders began making these plans.

The civilian government is in the process of internalizing these lessons so future efforts are more smoothly managed.⁹⁵

Both the Army and FC clearly learned a great deal from the experience provided by *Operation Rah-e-Rast*. Indeed, even in prior counterinsurgency operations, learning has been an important factor in improving Pakistan's performance. The military has gained extensive experience since the international effort against the Taliban and al Qaeda began in 2001.⁹⁶ In these operations, Pakistani military personnel have "had to confront and adapt to fighting an elusive Taliban force," and over time, the Frontier Corps and army showed improvements in this new kind of fighting.⁹⁷ After a conference on counterinsurgency with Pakistani officials, experts at the Brookings Institution, Stephen Cohen and Shuja Nawaz, were relatively hopeful about the military's ability to learn from previous operations: "it became clear that Pakistani officers who had served until recently in FATA had intuitively absorbed some of the lessons of counterinsurgency that the United States had learned the hard way over several years in Iraq."⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Discussions with Department of Defense personnel at United States Special Operations Command at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, FL, on 11 March 2010.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ For an analysis of Pakistani operations from 2001 to 2009, see Fair, C. Christine and Jones, Seth G. "[Pakistan's War Within](http://home.comcast.net/~christine_fair/pubs/51-6-13_Fair_and_Jones.pdf)," *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 6, Dec 2009 - Jan 2010, available at http://home.comcast.net/~christine_fair/pubs/51-6-13_Fair_and_Jones.pdf

⁹⁷ Fair, C. Christine and Jones, Seth G. "[Pakistan's War Within](http://home.comcast.net/~christine_fair/pubs/51-6-13_Fair_and_Jones.pdf)," *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 6, Dec 2009 - Jan 2010, 181, available at http://home.comcast.net/~christine_fair/pubs/51-6-13_Fair_and_Jones.pdf

⁹⁸ Cohen, Stephen P. and Shujah Nawaz, "Mastering Counterinsurgency: A Workshop Report," The Brookings Institution, 7 July 2009, 2, available at http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2009/0707_counterinsurgency_cohen.aspx

Findings and Limitations

Pakistan's counterinsurgency efforts in Swat during Operation Rah-e-Rast clearly demonstrate that Pakistan is at least trying to wage population-centric counterinsurgency, and is in fact succeeding in some areas. In the initial stages, Pakistan used an information operations campaign to mobilize support for military operations quite effectively, and it was relatively successful in providing for IDPs. A major problem was the fact that destructive military tactics caused a flood of IDPs, which infinitely complicated efforts throughout the rest of the process. In later stages, Pakistan had numerous problems with rebuilding and helping IDPs return to normal life. These issues stemmed largely from Islamabad's weaknesses in advanced planning. After Swat operations the military attempted to improve in this area, but the bureaucratic structure hindered its effectiveness. There is no real mechanism in the Pakistani government for the reconstruction and stabilization piece that is vital to population-centric counterinsurgency, indicating that broader institutional changes would be helpful in the future.

Although this paper has challenged the conventional wisdom regarding Pakistan's ability to wage effective counterinsurgency, it provides limited lessons for Pakistani operations against the Taliban as a whole and for future operations. Swat District – which is settled, has a reputation as a tourist destination within Pakistan, and has many wealthy land owners – is very different from South Waziristan. The relative importance that Pakistan places on the NWFP versus the FATA means that Pakistan's commitment to different operations may fluctuate from region to region, and lessons from Swat may not be universally applicable. Pakistan's motivations also vary depending on Pakistan's views of the militant group it is fighting. It is conceivable that these

attitudes cause the government to engage with varied levels of tenacity and commitment to long-term success.

Some would also challenge the findings of this study by countering that there is another counterinsurgency strategy – namely, an enemy-centric one – that has proven effective in limited cases and could be applied to Pakistan. However, the majority of today’s counterinsurgency literature agrees that a population-centric strategy is most effective. Moreover, there is no model of best practices for waging enemy-centric counterinsurgency, nor should there be, because this strategy essentially involves waging genocide against the population in which the insurgent movement lives and operates. Islamabad does not expressly target the population in its military campaigns in the NWFP and FATA. In fact, shortly after operations began in Swat, Chief of Army Staff Kiyani instructed his troops to “ensure minimum collateral damage even at the expense of taking risks.”⁹⁹ The destruction that resulted from these operations was a byproduct of the military’s tactics rather than a strategic goal. Therefore, critics of a population-centric approach would first have to address the fact that currently, Pakistan has not actively adopted an enemy-centric strategy

Since Swat: Counterinsurgency in Pakistan Today and in the Future

To maximize its ability to improve its counterinsurgency capabilities in the future, Pakistan should consider institutional and strategic-level changes and additional training efforts. The international community can also play an integral role in aiding Pakistan’s transformation into

⁹⁹ Inter Services Public Relations website, Press Release, 13 May 2009, available at http://www.ispr.gov.pk/front/main.asp?o=t-press_release&date=2009/5/13

the most competent counterinsurgency force possible. Pakistan is only able to commit limited resources to this effort “due to its longstanding focus on conventional war with India.”¹⁰⁰ Given the vital importance that the international community places on Pakistan denying safe haven to the Taliban and al Qaeda, it needs to provide aid to Pakistan in the most effective way possible. In the end, however, it is Pakistan’s strategic decision to fully engage in a counterinsurgency campaign against militant groups in the NWFP and FATA. Therefore, this aid should seek to complement a Pakistani decision to improve its counterinsurgency capabilities.

First and foremost, in order to make the necessary institutional changes, Pakistan might consider assessing the relative importance of counterinsurgency versus conventional military operations, highlighting the latter, and officially recognize this paradigm shift by adopting a formal doctrine. In spite of Pakistan’s pervasive problem with militant groups operating in the NWFP and FATA and the numerous operations that the military carried out in recent years, Islamabad has not yet adopted a formal counterinsurgency doctrine. The Pakistani military does not claim to engage in population-centric counterinsurgency; instead, it calls these operations low-intensity conflict.¹⁰¹ This may explain its conventional tactics in Swat, which caused widespread devastation and a flood of IDPs and complicated the military’s efforts in reconstruction and stabilization. As a result, in subsequent operations in South Waziristan, Islamabad realized that the consequences of these tactics made them untenable. This development, however, does not indicate an institutional shift.

¹⁰⁰ Fair, C. Christine, “Should Pakistan Get a Nuke Deal?” *Foreign Policy*, 23 March 2010, available at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/03/23/should_pakistan_get_a_nuke_deal

¹⁰¹ Fair, C. Christine and Jones, Seth G. “Pakistan’s War Within,” *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 6, Dec 2009 - Jan 2010, 162, available at http://home.comcast.net/~christine_fair/pubs/51-6-13_Fair_and_Jones.pdf

Chief of Army Staff General Ashfaq Kiyani has made it clear that the Pakistani Army does not intend to transform into a counterinsurgency force. Instead, he plans to continue devoting the bulk of his forces toward the primary mission of countering the threat posed by India.¹⁰² The strategic priority given to the threat posed by India, Pakistan's historical enemy, is the major factor that prevents the Pakistani military from developing into a hybrid force that conducts both conventional and counterinsurgency operations. This view is pervasive among Pakistani officials, despite repeated assertions by experts and non-Pakistani policymakers that internal militant groups, rather than India, pose the greatest threat to the security of Pakistan.¹⁰³ In fact, the Pakistani Army has insisted that "a conventional war with India was the major threat..." to Pakistan, "and any such defensive war would still be fought on the plains of Punjab and Sind rather than in the mountains of Waziristan."¹⁰⁴ This indicates that the top military leadership in Pakistan has not made a formal commitment to becoming a more effective counterinsurgency force. Although lower level officers have learned a great deal and made significant progress, a high-level, strategic commitment would capitalize on recent improvements to the greatest extent possible. Since the problem of militancy in the NWFP and FATA shows no signs of dissipating in the near future, the army leadership might consider reassessing its counterinsurgency strategy. In the same way that the U.S. needed a formal counterinsurgency doctrine to wage this form of warfare effectively in Iraq and later in Afghanistan, Pakistan would likely benefit from a formal doctrine for its operations in NWFP and FATA.

¹⁰² Ibid, 163

¹⁰³ See for example Levin, Carl, "Opening Statement of Senator Carl Levin," Chairman, Senate Armed Services Committee, *Hearing to Receive Testimony in Review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2010 and the Future Years Defense Program*, Senate Armed Services Committee, Washington D.C., 14 May, 2009. Also see Rashid, Ahmed, "Pakistan's Continued Failure to Adopt a Counterinsurgency Strategy," *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 2, Issue 3, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, March 2009,7, available at <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/sentinel/CTCSentinel-Vol2Iss3.pdf>

¹⁰⁴ Rashid, Ahmed, "Pakistan's Continued Failure to Adopt a Counterinsurgency Strategy," *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 2, Issue 3, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, March 2009,7, available at <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/sentinel/CTCSentinel-Vol2Iss3.pdf>

The Pakistani military also could benefit from a mechanism to institutionalize lessons learned. Modern counterinsurgency literature asserts that militaries need to be learning organizations in order to be effective. Col. John Nagl, who helped author the U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine, argues that militaries that wage counterinsurgency need to institutionalize lessons across the entire organization rather than simply on a piecemeal basis.¹⁰⁵ Although Pakistan's military has displayed a great ability to learn by doing, its efforts to improve its counterinsurgency capacity are hampered by a failure to engage in comprehensive post-operation analyses and to institutionalize lessons from previous experiences.¹⁰⁶ Instead of developing "institutional memories of past anti-insurgency operations... there has been a reliance on mythology and denial, with insurgencies blamed more often than not on a 'foreign hand.'"¹⁰⁷ Islamabad failed to institutionalize lessons learned from the military's experience in the former East Pakistan (which is now Bangladesh), and, as a result, it is poised to repeat the same mistakes in its efforts in the FATA.¹⁰⁸ Although the Pakistani military has made great strides in waging counterinsurgency campaigns in the last year, it could incur further benefits by engaging in self critical analysis of operational and institutional challenges.

Another institutional change that could increase Pakistan's counterinsurgency capability would be to elevate the status of the Frontier Corps. The FC – which for the first time, took the lead in

¹⁰⁵ Nagl, John, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

¹⁰⁶ Fair, C. Christine and Jones, Seth G. "Pakistan's War Within." *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 6, Dec 2009 - Jan 2010, 163, available at http://home.comcast.net/~christine_fair/pubs/51-6-13_Fair_and_Jones.pdf

¹⁰⁷ Cohen, Stephen P. and Shujah Nawaz, "Mastering Counterinsurgency: A Workshop Report," The Brookings Institution, 7 July 2009, 2, available at http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2009/0707_counterinsurgency_cohen.aspx

¹⁰⁸ For more on this, see: Ashraf, Tariq Mahmud, "Military Operations in FATA: Eliminating Terrorism or Preventing the Balkanization of Pakistan?" in Abbas, Hassan, *Pakistan's Troubled Frontier*, Washington, D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2009, 234-241.

Swat – proved it is a very capable counterinsurgency force, although historical friction between the army and the FC has inhibited past operations.¹⁰⁹ The latter was never “trained and equipped to be a serious counter-insurgency force,” and it lacked “emergency medical-evacuation capabilities and other logistical capacities.”¹¹⁰ Additionally, it could not trust the army to provide this support.¹¹¹ There have, however, already been two positive shifts with respect to this issue. The first is that under the leadership of Major General Tariq Khan, the FC began promoting officers from within its own ranks into leadership positions rather than appointing officers from the army.¹¹² This is an important step toward creating expertise within the FC leadership on counterinsurgency in the NWFP and FATA. The second shift came from the help provided by U.S. Special Operations Forces, who “have launched a ‘train-the-trainer’ programme for the corps.”¹¹³ As a result, the FC is developing into a competent counterinsurgency force.¹¹⁴

Increasing the capacity of the police could also enhance Pakistan’s counterinsurgency capability. According to Galula, to dismantle the insurgent political organization, the civilian police, informed by intelligence from the local population, are supposed to lead a crackdown on the remaining insurgent leaders.¹¹⁵ In other words, the police play a vital role once clearing

¹⁰⁹ Discussions with Department of Defense personnel at United States Special Operations Command at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, FL, on 11 March 2010.

¹¹⁰ Fair, C. Christine and Jones, Seth G. “Pakistan’s War Within.” *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 6, Dec 2009 - Jan 2010, 164, available at http://home.comcast.net/~christine_fair/pubs/51-6-13_Fair_and_Jones.pdf

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Discussions with Department of Defense personnel at United States Special Operations Command at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, FL, on 11 March 2010.

¹¹³ Fair, C. Christine and Jones, Seth G. “Pakistan’s War Within.” *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 6, Dec 2009 - Jan 2010, 164, available at http://home.comcast.net/~christine_fair/pubs/51-6-13_Fair_and_Jones.pdf

¹¹⁴ Discussions with Department of Defense personnel at United States Special Operations Command at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, FL, on 11 March 2010, and at United States Army Special Operations Command at Ft. Bragg, NC, on 12 March 2010.

¹¹⁵ Galula, David. *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 2006, 86.

operations are over. In Swat, however, this was not the case. Moreover, according to David Kilcullen's testimony to Congress, the police have two major advantages over the military in conducting counterinsurgency in Pakistan. First, "unlike the army and ISI, the police force is the only element of the Pakistani security forces which, as an institution, has a greater stake in upholding law and order, preventing state collapse and combating extremism, than in preparing to fight India." Just as importantly, "The police also lack the institutional tradition of cooperating with extremists that exists in the army and intelligence service."¹¹⁶ Based on these assumptions, additional training and equipment would only bolster the Frontier Police's capacity to maintain law and order.

Similarly, additional tactical training could enhance the Army's and FC's counterinsurgency performance. As of March 2009, this process had already begun because, with time, it became clear to Pakistan's military leadership that "soldiers and officers were not used to the emerging battles in unfamiliar terrain." As a result, the military developed a "three-part course of battle inoculation" to prepare the troops for fighting in FATA.¹¹⁷ Admiral Mullen's May 2009 testimony to Congress noted that, although the Pakistani military still has a heavy focus on India, it does recognize the threat that the Taliban poses. Moreover, during his visit to Pakistan, he observed "some fairly effective counterinsurgency training that General Kiyani has put throughout all of his divisions."¹¹⁸ Additionally, the military could benefit from building

¹¹⁶ Kilcullen, Dr. David J. Testimony before the House Armed Services Committee Hearing on HR 1886, the Pakistan Enduring Assistance and Cooperation Enhancement (PEACE) Act 2009, 111th Cong., 1st sess., April 23, 2009. http://armedservices.house.gov/pdFC/FC042309/Kilcullen_Testimony042309.pdf

¹¹⁷ Cohen, Stephen P. and Shujah Nawaz, "Mastering Counterinsurgency: A Workshop Report," The Brookings Institution, 7 July 2009, 5, available at http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2009/0707_counterinsurgency_cohen.aspx

¹¹⁸ Mullen, Michael, Admiral, U.S. Navy, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Testimony, *Hearing to Receive Testimony in Review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2010 and the Future Years Defense Program*, Senate Armed Services Committee, Washington D.C., 14 May, 2009

formations that are capable of executing small unit tactics, which in turn would bolster troop confidence in executing their missions.¹¹⁹

In addition to tactical training, more effective decision-making processes would enable greater success in counterinsurgency operations. As in most hierarchical organizations, lower level officers tend avoid making decisions without consulting their superiors for fear of disciplinary action, but this is counterproductive in counterinsurgency.¹²⁰ Empowering low-level officers to take the initiative and make decisions during military operations likely would enable them to adapt to changing circumstances on the ground, increase fighting efficiency, and allow for more flexibility in planning and executing operations.¹²¹ Furthermore, the top-down nature of decision-making had a negative impact on planning in Swat – particularly the long-term planning that is so vital for reconstruction and stabilization.¹²²

Realistically, Pakistan likely will persist in devoting fewer resources toward counterinsurgency operations in NWFP and FATA in deference to its strategic focus on India; at the same time, the US and the international community likely will continue to assist Pakistan in developing competent counterinsurgency forces. Aid that enhances the FC's capabilities might include "personal soldier equipment, vehicles to help provide medical attention to those wounded in action, and communications equipment to help improve the Frontier Corps command, control,

¹¹⁹ Discussions with Department of Defense personnel at United States Special Operations Command at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, FL, on 11 March 2010.

¹²⁰ Discussions with Department of Defense personnel at United States Army Special Operations Command at Ft. Bragg, NC, on 12 March 2010.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

intelligence, and surveillance capabilities.”¹²³ Additional aid might go directly to the Frontier Police. Today’s counterinsurgency literature “consistently finds that civilian-led rather than army-led approaches ultimately prevail,” yet the U.S. “has disproportionately funded the army and Frontier Corps.”¹²⁴ Thus, future aid discussions might consider Kilcullen’s suggestion to drastically increase support to the Frontier Police by helping Pakistan increase the size of the force and ensure that it is better equipped, trained, supported, and paid.¹²⁵ The international community, which regularly pressures Pakistan to engage in increased counterinsurgency efforts against the Taliban and al Qaeda, needs to enable Pakistan’s advancing capabilities. Ultimately, however, only Islamabad can make the strategic decision to create a dedicated and competent counterinsurgency force.

Conclusion

Understanding Pakistan’s capacity to wage counterinsurgency is vitally important. Insurgent and terrorist groups that enjoy sanctuary in the NWFP and FATA pose a serious threat to both the Pakistani government and the international effort in Afghanistan. The likelihood that Pakistan will deny safe haven to the Taliban and al Qaeda depends on two factors – its willingness and its ability to do so. In *Operation Rah-e-Rast*, where Pakistan’s willingness to fight the Swat TTP was obvious, the FC and army proved relatively successful. Contrary to conventional wisdom, they made a concerted attempt to engage in population-centric counterinsurgency and enjoyed

¹²³ Boucher, Richard A., Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs. Testimony before the U.S. House Armed Services Committee. United States Congress, 29 April 2009.

http://armedservices.house.gov/pdFC/FC042909/Boucher_Testimony042909.pdf

¹²⁴ Fair, C. Christine and Jones, Seth G. “Pakistan’s War Within,” *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 6, Dec 2009 - Jan 2010, 181, available at http://home.comcast.net/~christine_fair/pubs/51-6-13_Fair_and_Jones.pdf

¹²⁵ Kilcullen, Dr. David J. Testimony before the House Armed Services Committee Hearing on HR 1886, the Pakistan Enduring Assistance and Cooperation Enhancement (PEACE) Act 2009, 111th Cong., 1st sess., April 23, 2009. http://armedservices.house.gov/pdFC/FC042309/Kilcullen_Testimony042309.pdf

relative success, particularly in the initial steps prescribed by the Galula model. Furthermore, in subsequent operations, the FC and army showed evidence of learning from their mistakes. Whether they will be able to hold Swat in the long term, indicating true victory in counterinsurgency operations, remains to be seen. Although Islamabad has made vast improvements in its capabilities, strong challenges remain.

The international community has a critical interest in Pakistan's ability to effectively wage counterinsurgency because Coalition Forces in Afghanistan are fighting an insurgency that enjoys sanctuary outside of their reach. History indicates that the mission in Afghanistan is heavily dependent on Pakistan to deny safe haven to the Taliban and al Qaeda. Therefore, Pakistan's alliance is essential but success may ultimately depend on a strategic decision by Pakistan to continue bolstering its counterinsurgency capability and transforming its military into a hybrid force capable of competently engaging in unconventional warfare. This is because according to Galula, "conventional operations by themselves have at best no more effect than a fly swatter."¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Galula, David. *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 2006, 81.

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