

Pakistan's War Within

C. Christine Fair and Seth G. Jones

Since the Obama administration took office in January the United States has, rightly or wrongly, viewed Afghanistan and Pakistan as a single theatre of operations. Key to this strategy is the defeat of Islamist militants and insurgent groups in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and other parts of Pakistan, including the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP).¹ But Washington cannot fight the war in Pakistan; it must rely on Islamabad. Can the Pakistanis succeed?

Since the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in the wake of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, Pakistan's efforts have been viewed by many in the West as desultory and ineffective. It has had difficulty holding territory and securing the population, despite some recent improvement (as evidenced by the operations in Swat in 2009). The renewed offensive against Islamist forces in FATA in October 2009 has raised hopes that Islamabad is now taking the threat seriously, but it is not clear that it has learned the lessons of failure from previous campaigns.

After 11 September, Washington encouraged Pakistan to conduct operations against militants by offering massive financial assistance (over \$2 billion per year).² US security assistance included reimbursements through

C. Christine Fair is an assistant professor at Georgetown University and a senior fellow with the Counter Terrorism Center at West Point. She is the author of *The Madrassah Challenge: Militancy and Religious Education in Pakistan* (Washington DC: USIP, 2009) and co-editor (with Sumit Ganguly) of *Treading on Hallowed Ground: Counterinsurgency Operations in Sacred Spaces* (New York: OUP, 2008). **Seth G. Jones** most recently served as Plans Officer and Advisor to the Commanding General, US Special Operations Forces, in Afghanistan, and is the author of *In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2009). The views represent those of the authors and not their employers.

coalition support funds, military aid (such as the provision of helicopters and air-assault training), and counter-narcotics programmes. Washington also provided aid through the Department of State, CIA, Department of Justice and other government agencies to support counter-terrorism, internal security and development programmes.³ In the past two years, however, American officials and commentators have questioned the terms and outcomes of this assistance, noting Pakistan's uneven commitment to the 'war on terror' and continued support for the Afghan Taliban and anti-India militant groups.⁴

Many, albeit not all, of Pakistan's hurdles are doctrinal. The army does not claim to conduct population-centric counter-insurgency operations, but rather to engage in low-intensity conflict.⁵ The difference has important operational consequences. Pakistan prefers to retain its conventional focus against India and hesitates to adopt a counter-insurgency orientation, viewing operations against internal threats as residing at the lower end of a conventional-conflict spectrum.⁶

Several factors account for the varied outcomes of operations Pakistani security forces have prosecuted against foreign and indigenous Islamist, criminal and insurgent groups in FATA and other parts of Pakistan, including NWFP, since 2001. Firstly, Pakistan has inadequate capacity to clear and hold areas and to win and sustain the support of locals. This likely stems from Islamabad's hesitance to embrace counter-insurgency doctrinally and operationally. Consequently, operations have caused significant local devastation and displacement of populations in Bajaur and Swat, in particular. Secondly, the security agencies, which are not monolithic, have been willing to conduct operations against groups that have threatened Pakistan, but not those that advance what they see as Pakistan's interests in Afghanistan and India. This policy of sustaining the 'good jihadis' has strained Pakistan's social fabric and endangered the state when erstwhile proxies have turned on it. Thirdly, domestic politics have influenced army decision-making. Public-opinion polls indicate that many Pakistanis have been wary of army operations against fellow citizens, and some have accused the government of conducting them at Washington's behest.⁷ Fourthly, Pakistani civilian and military institutions have failed to integrate economic, social and political

instruments into their operations. In Swat, for example, Pakistani security forces cleared key territory in 2007, 2008 and 2009, but the government did little to deal with grievances among the local population and there was no civil–military plan to contend with the humanitarian crisis precipitated by the operations.

Analysis of how Pakistan's forces are structured and their roles, strengths and weaknesses in key operations undertaken since 2001 may inform US engagement with the Pakistani security establishment and may identify key areas for additional training and policy attention. Such analysis may also inform the debate within and outside Washington about Pakistan's less-than-successful prosecution of its 'war on terror' and whether Pakistan's myriad shortcomings should be attributed to malfeasance, a genuine lack of capacity, or both. It may also be of value to Pakistan-based analysts; it is well known that Pakistan's armed forces neither engage in robust post-operation assessment nor institutionalise lessons that may emerge from such assessments.

Pakistan's forces

Pakistan has employed several kinds of forces in its major operations: the army, the Frontier Corps, and the Frontier Constabulary and Frontier Police.

The Pakistani army has an organisational strength of approximately 550,000 active-duty personnel and another 500,000 reservists. It has nine corps headquarters in addition to the Army Strategic Forces Command, sometimes called Pakistan's 'tenth corps', which commands all the country's land-based strategic assets.⁸ The army is a conventional force primarily geared towards a conflict with India, a configuration which it prefers. In the early months of General Ashfaq Kiyani's tenure as chief of army staff from the end of 2007, US officials were optimistic that Pakistan would formally adopt a counter-insurgency strategy. Since then, Kiyani has frequently said that the army will not become a counter-insurgency force; rather, the bulk of the army will remain deployed along the Indian border.⁹

The Frontier Corps is a federal paramilitary force that belongs to the Ministry of Interior but is under the operational control of the military. It

comprises two separate forces, FC NWFP (under operational command of XI Corps, with security duties for FATA and NWFP and headquartered in Peshawar) and FC Baluchistan (under operational command of XII Corps and headquartered in Quetta), with separate inspectors-general controlling each and a combined strength of 80,000. While the former force is overwhelmingly Pashtun, the cadres of the latter are not exclusively ethnically Baluch.¹⁰ One reason the army has been averse to conducting operations in FATA and NWFP is the hostility of residents to what appears to be its Punjabi-dominated ethnic composition. Due to this image as a 'Punjabi force', many in FATA view it as a foreign force working with the United States against them.

Over the last several years some have argued that the FC NWFP should be the force of choice for operations in the tribal areas. At first blush this has some appeal, since its cadres are recruited locally and have local knowledge, language skills and a refined sense of the human terrain. But since at least 2004 there have been consistent reports that sympathetic elements of the Frontier Corps have been helping the Taliban.¹¹

More fundamentally, the Frontier Corps has generally not been trained and equipped to be a serious counter-insurgency force. It lacks emergency medical-evacuation capabilities and other logistical capacities, and has a long history of distrusting the army to provide this sort of support. Proponents of using the corps in counter-insurgency contend that its inability to effectively conduct such operations derives from its lack of organisational capacity and the lack of support it receives from the army. US special-operations forces have launched a 'train-the-trainer' programme for the corps.

The Frontier Constabulary is a policing organisation raised to provide law and order in the settled areas outside FATA, as well as border-protection duties along the Pakistan–Afghanistan border. It currently also performs static security duties in Islamabad and throughout Punjab. It has faced the brunt of the violence in settled Pashtun areas such as Swat. Frontier Constabulary outposts have been targeted systematically by insurgents, who have also targeted police installations throughout Pakistan. Citizens generally avoid going near these outposts, fearing attack. (Frontier Corps outposts in FATA have also sustained insurgent assaults.) Frontier

Constabulary personnel are generally ill prepared for this fight because they are poorly trained and inadequately equipped, with outdated arms and little, if any, effective personal-protection equipment. They have been killed in large numbers or simply deserted.¹²

The North-West Frontier Province also has a provincial police force, the Frontier Police. Like all Pakistan's police forces, it is in dire need of better training and equipment, increases in personnel strength, and compensation reform.¹³ To bolster morale and willingness to engage the enemy, the Frontier Police have established what are effectively life-insurance benefits for the families of slain police officers.¹⁴ Like the Frontier Corps and Frontier Constabulary, the police have been a focus for insurgents who have, for example, violently taken over police stations in Swat and Buner and set up their own police operations. In spring 2009, when Mullah Fazlullah of the insurgent group Tehrik-e-Nifaze-Shariat-e-Mohammadi told the police in Swat to leave their jobs or face punishment, 700 of 1,700 officers deserted their posts.¹⁵

The key campaigns

Pakistani forces have conducted at least four major campaigns, alongside and subsuming numerous smaller operations, since 2001. As this article goes to press, it is in the middle of a fifth campaign which is being praised in some quarters as showing renewed seriousness. It is too soon to judge its real effectiveness, however, and it is not analysed in this article. The most important campaigns since 2001 include support for the US-led *Operation Enduring Freedom* (2001–02); *Operation Al Mizan* (2002–06); *Operation Zalzal* (2008); and operations *Sher Dil*, *Rah-e-Raq* and *Rah-e-Rast* (2007–09).

Operation Enduring Freedom (2001–02)

After the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, the US-led *Operation Enduring Freedom* aimed to overthrow the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and capture or kill senior members of the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Because of Pakistan's strategic location and its historical involvement in Afghanistan, Washington pressured Islamabad to assist US war efforts.¹⁶ Prior to this, Pakistani security forces had limited experience or success in waging sustained



operations on these territories, despite considerable experience fomenting low-intensity conflicts in India and Afghanistan.

Pakistan made two extremely important contributions to *Operation Enduring Freedom*. Firstly, it granted over-flight and landing rights for US military and intelligence units, allowed access to some Pakistani ports and bases, provided intelligence and immigration information, facilitated logistical supply to military forces in Afghanistan, and (temporarily) broke diplomatic relations with and cut off most logistical support to the Taliban.¹⁷ Secondly, Pakistan deployed units from the regular army, Special Services Group,¹⁸ Frontier Corps and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) directorate to the Afghanistan–Pakistan border to conduct operations along infiltration routes from Afghanistan. The regular army employed two infantry brigades for border and internal-security operations for much of 2001 and 2002 and it established two quick-reaction forces from the Special Services Group in Kohat and Wana to provide local Pakistani commanders the ability to deploy troops quickly. In addition, approximately 4,000 Frontier Corps forces were used to conduct operations in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas.¹⁹

In December 2001, Pakistan employed a mixture of forces in Khyber and Kurram tribal agencies to support US operations at Tora Bora.²⁰ In March 2002, Pakistan increased force levels in North and South Waziristan to target militants during US-led *Operation Anaconda* in the Shah-i-Kot Valley of Paktia Province in Afghanistan.²¹ Throughout 2002, Frontier Corps forces raided weapons caches in South Waziristan; the regular army assaulted al-Qaeda operatives during *Operation Kazha Punga* in South Waziristan; regular army troops entered areas in Khyber and Kurram Agencies to pursue al-Qaeda fighters fleeing Afghanistan; and Pakistani military, police and intelligence forces conducted operations against insurgents in Balochistan Province.²²

Pakistan played a major role in capturing many senior al-Qaeda operatives and foreign fighters, including Abu Zubaydah, Ramzi bin al-Shibh and Sharib Ahmad.²³ It remanded many of these to the US government, which temporarily billeted them in secret prisons in Kandahar, Bagram and elsewhere. In most cases, Pakistan retained captured Afghans or Pakistanis.²⁴

US officials widely praised Pakistani contributions in this period. But Pakistan's role was limited: Washington did not ask Islamabad to target all,

or even most, militant groups and leaders operating in and from Pakistan, including senior Afghan Taliban figures and allies such as Jalaluddin Haqqani and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Rather, Washington sought Pakistani assistance primarily in capturing or killing al-Qaeda and foreign fighters, which Pakistan saw as in its own interest.²⁵ *Operation Enduring Freedom* was partially successful in its primary objectives of overthrowing the Taliban regime and capturing some al-Qaeda fighters crossing the border. But the United States and Pakistan failed to capture some key al-Qaeda figures, including Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, who crossed into Pakistan.

Operation Al Mizan (2002–06)

Among the militants who fled into Pakistan after the collapse of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan were al-Qaeda leaders involved in the 11 September terrorist attacks. These terrorists and their allies attacked Pakistani military and paramilitary installations and US firebases on the Afghanistan–Pakistan border.²⁶ Washington pressured Pakistan to launch an offensive against the foreign fighters ensconced in FATA. *Operation Al Mizan* comprised several smaller operations, such as *Operation Kalosha II*, which took place in South Waziristan.

Pakistan employed between 70,000 and 80,000 forces in FATA. Between 2002 and 2006, Pakistan conducted nearly two dozen major operations against insurgents,²⁷ and pursued political means such as requesting South Waziristan’s political administration to identify locals harbouring foreign fighters through *jirgas* (tribal assemblies) and consultations with tribal leaders. Pakistan also obtained useful information from local informants, which enabled identification of over 70 Ahmedzai Wazir tribesmen who were supporting foreign fighters.²⁸

A number of smaller operations were critical. For example, in early 2004, Pakistan’s intelligence services collected reports of al-Qaeda activities in the Wana Valley. In March, partly in response to the ambush of Frontier Corps personnel in the area, Pakistani forces launched *Operation Kalosha II*. The army conducted a major 13-day cordon-and-search operation across a 36km² area west of Wana that had come under the command of several mili-

tants, including Nek Mohammad Wazir, Noor-ul-Islam, Haji Mohammad Sharif, Maulvi Abbas and Maulvi Abdul Aziz, who were suspected of harbouring foreign fighters.²⁹ During the operation Pakistan employed the Frontier Corps and XI Corps, based out of Peshawar, under the command of Lieutenant-General Muhammad Safdar Hussain. On 16 March, Frontier Corps forces surrounded three fortress-like houses in Kalosha village, 15km west of Wana, belonging to Nek Mohammad, Haji Mohammad Sharif and Noor-ul-Islam. Fighters from the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe in turn besieged the Frontier Corps' outer cordon. By the end of the day, 15 Frontier Corps soldiers and one Pakistani army soldier had been killed and 14 others taken hostage. Roughly a dozen army trucks, as well as pickup trucks, armoured personnel carriers and light artillery, were also immobilised, destroyed or burned. Pakistani forces also faced tough resistance in the villages of Dzha Ghundai, Shin Warsak and Karikot. The cordon around Kalosha and the surrounding villages failed to impair the mobility of the militants, some of whom dispersed through a network of tunnels.

The cordon failed to impair their mobility

The operation initially involved 700 troops, but by 19 March roughly 7,000 army and Frontier Corps soldiers were fighting at several locations south and west of Wana. On 26 March, General Hussain declared victory: 'We have accomplished the mission that was given to us'.³⁰

Operation Kalosha II was successful in that it eliminated several local and foreign fighters, disrupted a major al-Qaeda command and control centre, and captured a network of tunnels containing sophisticated electronic equipment and supplies. But it also triggered attacks against nearby Pakistan army and Frontier Corps bases.³¹ Some locals were also deeply upset at Pakistan's destructive tactics: the army demolished a number of houses and used private residences as fortifications and barracks.³² As one local lamented, 'the army took away everything from my house: jewellery, clothes, toiletries, even pillow covers and shoe polish'.³³

Another important operation took place in June 2004, when 10,000 army troops, along with US-trained Special Operations Task Force (a helicopter-mobile battalion from Special Services Group) and Frontier Corps forces, attacked what was reported to be a force of more than 200 Chechens and

Uzbeks, some Arabs and several hundred local supporters in the Shakai Valley, some 25km north of Wana. Nearly 3,000 soldiers established an outer cordon and the Pakistan Air Force struck at dawn, using precision weapons against nine compounds. Pakistan army forces used indirect artillery fire and precision rocket attacks by helicopter gunships. Helicopters dropped off Special Operations Task Force troops to search the compounds, and infantry troops initiated a simultaneous operation to clear the valley and link up with the task force. Later, an additional force of 3,000 troops was brought into the area to clear more of the valley.³⁴ Throughout 2004 and 2005, the United States and Pakistan conducted a range of precision strikes against further targets, many of which were in North and South Waziristan.³⁵

As casualties mounted, the army pursued 'peace deals' with the local militants.³⁶ The presence of the Islamist political party, the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), encouraged the government led by Pervez Musharraf to pursue peace deals. While the JUI has long been a political patron of the Taliban and other Deobandi militant groups, it was also a critical member of the clerical political alliance, Mutahidda Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), which did surprisingly well in the October 2002 parliamentary elections. The JUI formed the provincial government in the NWFP and ruled in coalition with Musharraf's party, the Pakistan Muslim League-Q, in Balochistan. The JUI and its allies in the MMA also comprised Musharraf's 'opposition of choice' in the federal parliament. Musharraf's appetite for confronting the militants, which enjoyed the support of elements of the JUI, waned for fear of alienating key leaders of the MMA, whom Musharraf needed to push through his controversial and extra-constitutional policies.

One of the first major efforts to broker a peace settlement, the Shakai Agreement, came in the aftermath of Pakistani operations in Kalosha in March 2004. The government cobbled together a 50-member *jirga* with the help of North-West Frontier Province Governor Syed Iftikhar Hussain Shah and, reportedly, with the assistance of important leaders from the JUI.³⁷ The Pakistani government demanded the unconditional surrender of foreign militants and their local supporters, as well as the release of Pakistan military personnel and administration staff who were taken hostage in the

Kalosha area on 16 March. During subsequent negotiations, the *jirga* was given three counter-conditions by the insurgents: lifting the army's siege, paying compensation for 83 houses demolished during the fighting, and releasing 163 people arrested during the operation.

The deal that was finally reached included several provisions: Pakistani army troops would not interfere in internal tribal affairs and agreed to stay in their cantonment areas; local insurgents would not attack Pakistani government personnel or infrastructure; and all foreigners would have to register themselves with the government.³⁸ There were several problems with this deal. It compensated the insurgents for their losses but did not require them to compensate their victims. They were also allowed to keep their arms. Weapons were not 'surrendered', but rather 'offered' to the military as a token, ceremonial gesture. The militants described the deal as a 'reconciliation', which is understood by tribals as the army's tacit acceptance of their opponents as equally powerful and legitimate. By forging this 'reconciliation', the army gave the insurgents previously unearned political legitimacy and permitted them to consolidate their hold over South Waziristan.³⁹

*Locals
saw the
process as
a surrender*

However, the most egregious problem was the way in which the army prosecuted the deal. Final negotiations between Nek Mohammad, Haji Mohammad Sharif and an 18-member group of the *jirga*, which also included local ulema affiliated with the JUI and some elders from the Zalikhel tribe, took place at a Deobandi madrassa not far from Wana.⁴⁰ Traditionally, *jirgas* are held in public places, not mosques or madrassas, and religious leaders have had no role in this process.⁴¹ Because the army came to meet Nek Mohammad at this madrassa, locals interpreted the process as a surrender by the army rather than the militants. Nek Mohammad characterised the transaction in exactly this way when he explained that 'I did not go to them, they came to my place. That should make it clear who surrendered to whom.'⁴² The deal fortified Nek Mohammad's confidence in his ability to contend with the Pakistani state, and he soon violated the agreement. In June 2004, he was killed by a US missile strike near Wana.⁴³ In November 2004 the Pakistani government reached a further agreement with Taliban

leaders, but that deal lasted only six weeks. Many of the subsequent deals forged by the army with militant groups had similar features to the Shakai Agreement.

During *Operation al Mizan*, Pakistan sought to kill or capture those militants who threatened the Pakistani government. Pakistan's pre-eminent targets were foreign fighters – not Pakistani fighters.⁴⁴ President Musharraf had a personal vendetta. In December 2003 al-Qaeda's deputy leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, issued a fatwa calling for Musharraf's death, and South Waziristan-based militants tried to assassinate him on several occasions.⁴⁵ Despite Pakistan's focus on domestic threats, Washington sought to eliminate al-Qaeda leaders and to curb attacks on US firebases. The operation had several successes. It resulted in the capturing or killing of several senior al-Qaeda leaders, such as Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, Abu Faraj al-Libbi, Abu Zubeida and Abu Talha al-Pakistani.

The operation, however, ultimately failed to clear North and South Waziristan of militants. The Taliban and other local groups made significant inroads in usurping the power of tribal chieftains and increasing the importance of mullahs who espoused a Taliban worldview. Pakistan's security competition with India meant that its national-security establishment, including the ISI, had a vested interest in continuing to support some militant groups directed at the Afghanistan and Kashmir fronts. In addition, Pakistani operations were not sustained over time, but rather were marked by sweeps, searches and occasional bloody battles. None of these operations employed sufficient forces to hold territory. The government's initiatives were also hindered by conservative religious parties operating in the tribal areas. These groups considered government efforts against al-Qaeda and other groups an 'American war'.

As a result of the failed peace deals and the mixed success of the military, the local Taliban gradually emerged as a parallel government in the tribal areas, which became a sanctuary for insurgent groups operating in Afghanistan and militants targeting both India and the Pakistani government. The traditional *jirga* was formally banned by the Taliban. In its place, aggrieved parties had to seek intervention by the Taliban representative in their village, who performed the functions of police officer, administrator

and judge. The Taliban banned music stores, videos and televisions, and issued edicts that men grow beards. They also continued to target pro-government tribal elders, forcing many to flee.⁴⁶

Operation Zalzala (2008)

After the death of Nek Mohammed, Baitullah Mehsud emerged as a leader of the militants in South Waziristan. In February 2005, the Pakistani government signed a peace deal with Mehsud at Sararogha. As with the Shakai deal, the army agreed to remove troops from Mehsud's territory, compensate the militants for human and material losses, and deploy Frontier Corps personnel to the five forts there. The agreement virtually handed over control of the area to Mehsud.⁴⁷ The peace was short-lived: in early 2006, Mehsud began orchestrating a suicide-bombing campaign in Pakistan, which persisted until his death in August 2009.⁴⁸ In autumn 2007, Mehsud announced that the various local Taliban groups had united under his leadership and adopted the name Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, or Pakistan Taliban.

In January 2008 Mehsud's men captured Sararogha Fort in South Waziristan and killed many members of the Pakistani security forces.⁴⁹ Mehsud declared in a rare public interview that the Pakistani army 'uses the weapons it has against the people and against Muslims. Pakistan should protect Muslims with these weapons and defy enemies with them. However, the army has harmed the people and Muslims with its weapons.'⁵⁰

That same month the Pakistani army launched the three-part *Operation Tri-Star* against the Pakistan Taliban in FATA, with *Operation Zalzala* ('Earthquake') in South Waziristan as a principal component. *Zalzala* aimed to clear several areas held by forces loyal to Mehsud. The goal was not to target groups engaged in attacks in Afghanistan or Kashmir, or even foreign fighters, but to capture or kill key individuals in Mehsud's network who threatened the Pakistani state. One was Qari Hussein Mehsud, believed to be leading a campaign of suicide bombings. Army forces destroyed his house, but failed to capture or kill him.⁵¹ The army dropped leaflets urging locals to vacate the area, and on 24 January launched attacks in several parts of South Waziristan.⁵²

Forces loyal to Baitullah Mehsud resisted and engaged in a fairly sophisticated propaganda effort, including uploading videos to YouTube, to discredit the military.⁵³ Militants also told locals that the army was composed of non-Muslims and was fighting on behalf of the United States.⁵⁴ This became an important issue because some clergy would not conduct last rites for slain security-force personnel. Over the next several months, the army cleared most of the village of Spinkai, a Mehsud stronghold, and captured a few other villages and small towns.⁵⁵

By May, the army began to withdraw, claiming victory. The 14th Division was directed to re-open road networks and consolidate tactical outposts into battalion forward operating bases in eastern South Waziristan. The army's apparent intent was to stay in the Mehsud tribal area, continue to dominate key terrain, and retain the capability to redeploy into tactically dominant positions within 48 hours should the security situation dictate.⁵⁶

*Operation Zalzal*a cleared parts of South Waziristan, at least temporarily, and apparently disrupted some planned suicide attacks.⁵⁷ The army seized computers, weapons, improvised explosive devices and propaganda material.⁵⁸ But the costs were high. According to an investigation led by senior Pakistani military, political, intelligence and tribal officials, security forces destroyed over 4,000 houses in South Waziristan in January alone. In addition, *Operation Zalzal*a displaced roughly 200,000 locals, causing significant animosity.⁵⁹ In several villages the army applied collective punishment to locals who harboured the Taliban, under the draconian colonial-era Frontier Crimes Regulation that governs FATA. The army used bulldozers and explosives to level Spinkai's bazaar, including petrol stations and even parts of a local hospital.⁶⁰

Success was fleeting

Success was fleeting. Shortly after the army's withdrawal, militants loyal to Baitullah Mehsud re-infiltrated many areas.⁶¹ Qari Hussain Mehsud reactivated the Spinkai Ragzai suicide-training camp, which the army had dismantled.⁶² Baitullah Mehsud's network continued throughout the first half of 2009 to attack Pakistani forces, which responded with limited retaliatory strikes.⁶³ Across Pakistan, there were 2,148 terrorist, insurgent and sectarian attacks in 2008, a 746% increase from 2005.⁶⁴ Pakistan's controver-

sial use of collective punishment fostered deep animosity among locals who were loath to support the government's efforts. As one shopkeeper from Spinkai noted, 'hatred against the army will increase if they destroy homes of common people'.⁶⁵

Operations Sher Dil, Rah-e-Haq and Rah-e-Rast (2007–09)

With limited success in the southern parts of FATA, Pakistani security forces began operations against militants elsewhere in the country. There was some cooperation among networks operating in northern parts of FATA and the NWFP, including those led by Faqir Mohammad, Mullah Fazlullah and Sufi Mohammad. Baitullah Mehsud provided some fighters and assistance to the insurgents in Bajaur and Swat as part of his strategy to better coordinate the insurgency through the Pakistan Taliban.

A series of attacks on government agencies, including ISI, Frontier Corps and army personnel, motivated the army to retaliate.⁶⁶ By early 2008, insurgent forces in Bajaur Agency led by Qari Zia Rahman among others had pushed government-armed local tribesmen (referred to as *lashkars* or levies) out of their checkpoints at Loe Sam. By June, more than half of the 72 checkpoints in Bajaur had been destroyed, and the civilian government had been disrupted through a major bank robbery and suicide bombings against officials. On 9 September 2008, soon after a security convoy was ambushed by local militants in Loe Sam, army and Frontier Corps units launched *Operation Sher Dil* (Lion Heart).⁶⁷

The primary objective of *Sher Dil* was to target militant groups that threatened Pakistan and to clear and hold Bajaur's population centres and lines of communication. By early December, over 1,000 militants and 63 security personnel had been killed. Pakistani forces found tunnel complexes used for hiding people and storing material such as weapons, ammunition, radio-frequency lists, guerrilla-warfare manuals, propaganda and bomb-making instructions.⁶⁸

The outcome was mixed at best. The operation was heavy handed, relying on aerial bombing, bulldozers and tanks. In the village of Loe Sam, security forces razed virtually every house connected to the extensive tunnel system that had been discovered. Local Taliban and other militants were

armed with heavy weapons and reinforced by fighters from Afghanistan, the NWFP and other parts of FATA. As one military official remarked, the militants had 'good weaponry and a better communication system [than ours] ... Their tactics are mind-boggling and they have defenses that would take us days to build. It does not look as though we are fighting a rag-tag militia; they are fighting like an organized force.'⁶⁹ The fighting caused a significant exodus of locals to Afghanistan and other parts of Pakistan. After completing *Operation Sher Dil*, army and Frontier Corps forces moved to Mohmand Agency to conduct additional operations.

In nearby Swat District in Malakand Division, security forces conducted operations against the Tehrik-e-Nifaze-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM) militant group.⁷⁰ In the first phase of *Operation Rah-e-Haq* in late November 2007, local police led cordon-and-search operations to clear militants operating in the Swat Valley, but the militants gradually re-infiltrated into key cities. The second phase began in July 2008 and continued through the remainder of the year. Fighting was initially heavy in the northern part of the valley, and later spread to southern areas.⁷¹ In January 2009, the army launched a third phase of *Operation Rah-e-Haq*, imposing 'shoot-on-sight' curfews in major cities in Swat. TNSM forces responded by destroying schools and attacking security forces.

The fighting ended in February with an agreement between the government and the TNSM, the Malakand Accord, which institutionalised a disputed form of Islamic law in Malakand Division and part of Hazara Division.⁷² By late April 2009, however, militants had begun to occupy shops and government buildings in Mingora, the largest city in Swat, and to move into parts of Swat and neighbouring districts. They also attacked police stations, ambushed Frontier Constabulary personnel, robbed government and NGO offices, destroyed several schools and set up checkpoints along key roads.⁷³

In May, Pakistan launched *Operation Rah-e-Rast* to clear areas of Swat and capture or kill key Pakistan Taliban and other militant leaders.⁷⁴ Fighting began in Mingora between Special Services Group commandos and about 300 militants positioned in deserted buildings, and continued until a major Pakistani offensive retook much of the city in late May, along with several nearby towns. On 30 May the military announced it had regained control

of all of Mingora (though small pockets of resistance remained on the city's outskirts) and had destroyed concrete bunkers and confiscated arms, ammunition and explosives hidden in caves.⁷⁵

The heavy fighting and the military's destructive practices in Swat and nearby districts triggered a flood of internally displaced persons. Refugee organisations estimated that over three million people were displaced because of the fighting.⁷⁶ Some went to camps, but most found refuge with host families, rented accommodations or makeshift shelters. Local militants took advantage of the displacement to enlist popular support, provide assistance to internally displaced people, and recruit locals.

Operation Sher Dil involved much better cooperation than previously between the Frontier Corps and the army, and between Pakistan and the United States. Khan regularly briefed US officials on the operations, and the US Agency for International Development's Office of Transition Initiatives provided development assistance, including relief supplies to internally displaced persons and reconstitution assistance. The US military also provided information to Pakistan forces along the Afghanistan–Pakistan border, where they conducted intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance operations around major passes.

For many Pakistani civilians, however, US assistance was heretical. Maulana Abdul Khaliq Haqqani, chief patron of the Gulshan-i-Uloom madrassa in Miramshah, said he would meet Pakistani or US operations with suicide bombers and remote-controlled bombs, noting that US attacks 'were carried out in the presence of the Pakistan Army; we cannot ignore our army's cooperation with foreign forces in actions that kill innocent people'.⁷⁷ In addition, despite support from local tribes, Pakistan was unable to hold on to territory over the long run, and the practice of razing villages and collective punishment contributed to growing frustration with the army.

Popular support?

These operations placed a significant burden on the Pakistani army.⁷⁸ In April 2008, one officer explained that he disliked killing Pakistanis and that he had joined the army to kill Indians. In 2007, Musharraf ordered military personnel not to wear their uniforms off base, as they were under active

threat from the Pakistan Taliban and suffered substantial, sustained and degrading abuse from the population.⁷⁹

Animosity towards army personnel was likely due in part to Musharraf's increasing unpopularity and to deep popular ambivalence towards the offensives in FATA and the NWFP. According to a survey of nearly 1,000 urban Pakistanis in September 2007, 48% approved of the FATA operations either strongly or somewhat, while 34% disapproved somewhat or strongly.⁸⁰ In the same survey, pollsters offered respondents three statements about FATA and asked 'which comes closer to your view?':

Statement A: Pakistan's government should exert control over FATA, even if it means using military force to do so

Statement B: The government should not try to exert control over FATA but should try to keep the peace through negotiating deals with local Taliban

Statement C: The government should withdraw its forces from FATA and leave the people alone

The plurality (46%) believed Statement B best represented their view. Nearly one in four picked Statement A, only 12% picked Statement C, and 18% declined to answer. This suggests that the least-objectionable aspect to Pakistanis of the government's policy towards FATA has been its deals with the militants. Pakistanis were somewhat more accepting of military action when the target was al-Qaeda. Some 44% of respondents favoured the army entering FATA to pursue and capture al-Qaeda fighters, with 36% opposed. Similarly, 48% of respondents favoured allowing the army to pursue and capture Taliban insurgents who crossed into Pakistan, while 34% opposed the idea. There was strong opposition (80%) to allowing American or other foreign troops to enter Pakistan to pursue and capture al-Qaeda fighters, with 77% opposing such action in pursuit of the Taliban.⁸¹

Other surveys of rural and urban Pakistanis, conducted at intervals between September 2007 and March 2009, revealed similar popular ambiv-

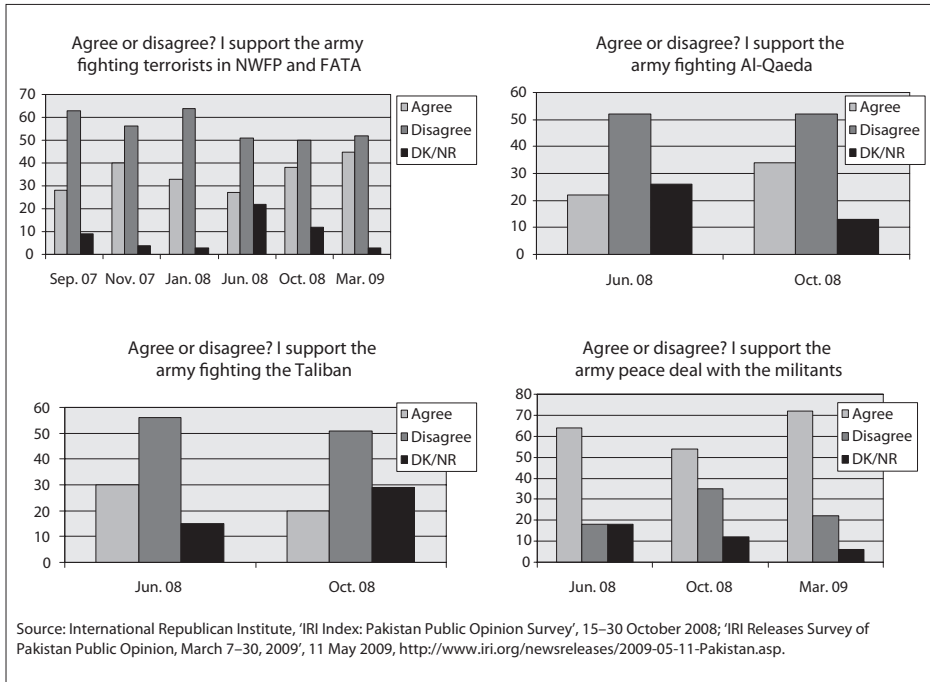


Figure 1. Pakistani views of military strategies against militant groups

alence about the best way to handle the perceived threats.⁸² Respondents were asked whether they agreed with four statements:

- I support the army fighting terrorists in NWFP and FATA
- I support the army fighting al-Qaeda
- I support the army fighting the Taliban
- I support the army peace deal with the militants

The results indicated that most Pakistanis did not support the army fighting in NWFP and FATA as of autumn 2008, although opposition had generally declined since the previous September, and a growing minority supported such fighting. A similar majority opposed fighting al-Qaeda and the Taliban in June and October 2008 (Figure 1).

A majority of Pakistanis generally supported the 'peace deals with extremists', although the strength of this support fluctuated between 52% and 72%. When asked specifically in March 2009 about the Swat deal, 80%

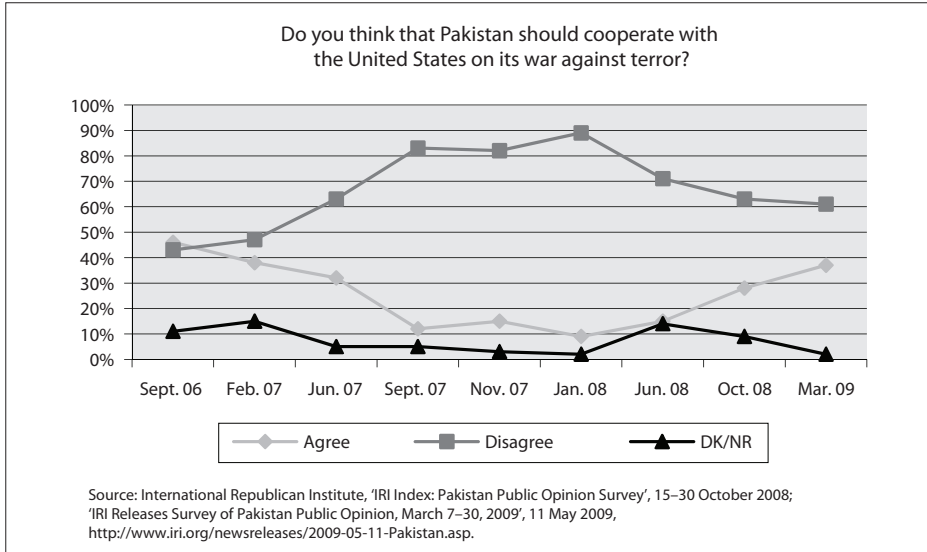


Figure 2. Pakistani views of cooperation with the United States

supported it while 16% did not. Moreover, 74% believed that the deal would actually bring peace.⁸³

Pakistanis show similar ambivalence towards their country's cooperation with the United States, which is widely seen as compelling the Pakistani army to conduct operations against its own citizens. Rejection of cooperation with the United States in its 'war on terror' declined from a high (since the question began to be polled in autumn 2006) of 89% in January 2008 to 63% in October (Figure 2). While Pakistanis generally believe that a wide array of militant groups threaten their nation's security, they remain generally opposed to cooperation with the United States and even to their own army acting against such groups.

While the military component of the government's policy may be unpopular, Pakistanis tend to support political reform in FATA. Only 8% of respondents favoured leaving the colonial-era Frontier Crimes Regulation unchanged, while 46% favoured modifying it slowly over time, and more than one in four favoured abolishing it altogether. The fall of Buner may have mobilised greater public support, but whether this will be enduring remains to be seen.⁸⁴ The Pakistani armed forces operate in a challenging social and political environment where there is deep ambivalence about

the government's policy of military action and cooperation with the United States, while appeasement of the militants seems quite palatable.

* * *

Prior to 2001, Pakistan had limited experience countering domestic militants. Today, the Pakistani army still prefers to focus on a potential war with India rather than against sub-state actors. Nonetheless, there have been noted improvements since 2001, and throughout 2009 Islamabad has demonstrated increasing resolve to defeat militants challenging the writ of the state. Earlier operations such as *Al Mizan* revealed serious deficiencies in the ability to conduct cordon-and-search operations and to hold territory. In the later operations in Bajaur and Swat, however, the Frontier Corps and army forces showed an improved capability to clear territory and integrate operations with local tribes.

But Pakistani doctrine remains inconsistent with recent population-centric innovations in counter-insurgency warfare. Pakistan's commitment to a conventional orientation and the hardware most appropriate for fighting India has poorly equipped it to deal with the burgeoning domestic threat.

The army has long contended that it is the sole institution that can protect Pakistan. During successive regimes, both military and civilian, Pakistani police and other institutions supporting the rule of law have languished. Moreover, the United States has disproportionately funded the army and Frontier Corps, while paying scant regard to the police and civilian investigatory institutions.⁸⁵ Yet the counter-insurgency literature consistently finds that civilian-led rather than army-led approaches ultimately prevail.⁸⁶

Islamabad continues to distinguish among militant groups operating in FATA and the NWFP, and to use the tribal areas for training proxy groups destined for Afghanistan or India. Not only does Pakistan refuse to target some militant organisations, some are even backed by elements in the ISI, Frontier Corps and military. This practice of supporting some proxy organisations and broader religious, political and financial networks has created an environment conducive to militancy and has undermined the ability of the government to maintain law and order.

Pakistan's federal and provincial bureaucracies have failed to provide development and other aid to conflict-afflicted areas, offer adequate assistance to internally displaced persons, or engage in other efforts to secure the support of locals for the government and military operations. This has exacerbated the army's reliance on heavy force and concomitant destruction in places such as South Waziristan, Bajaur and Swat, which has alienated some locals and fostered anger throughout Pakistan.

Finally, the army and government have not been successful in mobilising the country against the militant threat, although there is some evidence that this could be changing following the Taliban's seizure of Buner in the wake of the latest peace deal with militants in Swat in April 2009. Without popular support, military action, long-term holding operations and dedication of national resources are unlikely to be enough to defeat the Pakistan Taliban and other militant groups and rebuild areas affected by conflict.

Notes

- 1 In March 2009, for example, US President Barack Obama contended that Pakistan's border region had 'become the most dangerous place in the world' for Americans, and General David Petraeus noted that it was 'the headquarters of the al Qaeda senior leadership' who were planning attacks in the West. See Yochi J. Dreazen, 'Al Qaeda's Global Base Is Pakistan, Says Petraeus', *Wall Street Journal*, 11 May 2009. British Prime Minister Gordon Brown warned that 'three-quarters of the most serious plots investigated by the British authorities have links to al-Qaeda in Pakistan'. Sam Coates and Jeremy Page, 'Pakistan "Linked to 75% of All UK Terror Plots"', Warns Gordon Brown', *Times*, 15 December 2008.
- 2 Craig Cohen and Derek Chollet, 'When \$10 Billion Is Not Enough', *Washington Quarterly*, vol. 30, no. 2, Spring 2007, pp. 7–19.
- 3 On US aid to Pakistan see C. Christine Fair and Peter Chalk, *Fortifying Pakistan: The Role of U.S. Internal Security Assistance* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2006). The Coalition Support Funds, which were technically reimbursements, have been controversial because of poor oversight and Pakistani misuse. Neither Pakistani nor American officials can account for the funds. For several critical reviews, see US Government Accountability Office, 'Combating Terrorism: U.S. Oversight of Pakistan Reimbursement Claims for Coalition Support Funds', GAO-08-932T, 24 June 2008, <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-08-932T>; US Government Accountability Office, 'The United

States Lacks Comprehensive Plan to Destroy the Terrorist Threat and Close the Safe Haven in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas', GAO-08-622, April 2008, <http://nationalsecurity.oversight.house.gov/documents/20080417120235.pdf>; Craig Cohen, *A Perilous Course: U.S. Strategy and Assistance to Pakistan* (Washington DC: CSIS, 2007).

- 4 Cohen and Chollet, 'When \$10 Billion Is Not Enough'; Greg Miller, 'Pakistan Fails to Aim Billions in U.S. Military Aid at al Qaeda', *Los Angeles Times*, 5 November 2007, p. A1; Kathy Gannon, 'Billions in US Aid Never Reached Pakistan Army', *Washington Post*, 4 October 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/10/04/AR2009100401260.html>.
- 5 In recent months, Pakistani officials have increasingly begun adopting the term 'counter-insurgency' to describe their low-intensity conflict operations. This is likely in response to US focus upon this concept. However, their operational concepts remain consonant with low-intensity conflict even though they have begun to describe these efforts as counter-insurgency.
- 6 Author discussions with Pakistani senior military officers about their doctrine. In bilateral forums, Pakistani officers will often adopt the language of 'population-centred' counter-insurgency, at least in part because it is expected and in part to defuse accumulating US concerns about Pakistani efficacy, over which the military leadership has become very defensive. See, for example, 'Pak Army Needs No Foreign Training: COAS', *The Nation*, 16 May 2009, <http://www.nation.com.pk/pakistan-news-newspaper-daily-english-online/Regional/Islamabad/16-May-2009/Pak-Army-needs-no-foreign-training-COAS>.
- 7 A June 2009 poll (in which one of the authors, CF, collaborated) suggests that, after the fall of Buner, Pakistani opinion appears to have changed. See Clay Ramsay, Steven Kull, Stephen Weber and Evan Lewis, *Pakistani Public Opinion on the Swat Conflict, Afghanistan, and the US* (Washington DC: PIPA, 2009).
- 8 Each corps has two or three divisions and is commanded by a lieutenant-general. Each division holds three brigades and is commanded by a major-general. A brigade is commanded by a brigadier and has three or more battalions. A battalion has roughly 600 to 900 soldiers under the command of a lieutenant-colonel. See IISS, *The Military Balance 2009* (London: Routledge, 2009); Federation of Atomic Scientists, 'Pakistan [sic]: Total Military Force', <http://www.fas.org/programs/ssp/man/militarysumfolder/pakistan.html?formAction=297&contentId=165>.
- 9 Ahmed Rashid, 'Pakistan's Worrisome Pullback', *Washington Post*, 6 June 2008, p. A19.
- 10 See Hassan Abbas, 'Transforming Pakistan's Frontier Corps', *Terrorism Monitor*, vol. 5, no. 6, 30 March 2007.
- 11 David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 57. For an account from 2004 involving the Tochi Scouts, see M. Ilyas Khan, 'Mixed

- Signals', *Herald*, March 2004, pp. 63–5. For recent revelations about Frontier Corps complicity and a recent US attack on Frontier Corps positions firing on US troops in Afghanistan, see Peter Beaumont and Mark Townsend, 'Pakistan Troops "Aid Taliban": New Classified US Documents Reveal that Mass Infiltration of Frontier Corps by Afghan Insurgents is Helping Latest Offensive', *Observer*, 22 June 2008.
- 12 Author interviews in Pakistan in February and April 2009.
- 13 Hassan Abbas, *Police and Law Enforcement Reform in Pakistan: Crucial for Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism Success*, Report of the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, April 2009, http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/18976/police_law_enforcement_reform_in_pakistan.html?breadcrumb=/experts/850/hassan_abbas.
- 14 See Frontier Police, 'Incentive for Martyred Families', <http://frontierpolice.gov.pk/PoliceWelfare/index.php>.
- 15 Paul Wiseman and Zafar M. Sheikh, 'Pakistani Police Underfunded, Overwhelmed', *USA Today*, 5 May 2009, http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2009-05-05-pakistancops_N.htm.
- 16 These objectives were ironed out during negotiations in September 2001. Washington used both carrots and sticks: it agreed to waive sanctions and provide military and non-military aid, promised to forgive \$2 billion of Pakistan's debt, and doled out millions of dollars in 'prize money' for the capture of al-Qaeda members, but also issued a veiled threat of military force if Pakistan did not cooperate. Following blunt messages from US Secretary of State Colin Powell and his deputy Richard Armitage, then President and Chief of Army Staff Pervez Musharraf acknowledged that he 'war-gamed the United States as an adversary'. He concluded that 'our military forces would be destroyed'. See, for example, Cohen and Chollet, 'When \$10 Billion is Not Enough'. See also Pervez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir* (New York: Free Press, 2006), pp. 201–2.
- 17 Author interview with Wendy Chamberlin, US ambassador to Pakistan, 27 August 2008. See, for example, the negotiations as outlined in Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), p. 59. Also see Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire*, pp. 201–7.
- 18 An elite special-operations force within the army, the Special Services Group, was created in 1956 with active US support.
- 19 For detailed accounts of Pakistan's assistance, see C. Christine Fair, *The Counterterror Coalitions: Cooperation with Pakistan and India* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2004) and Gary Berntsen and Ralph Pezzullo, *Jawbreaker: The Attack on Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2005), p. 305. Berntsen commanded the CIA team in Afghanistan in late 2001, taking over from Gary Schroen.
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- 21 On *Operation Anaconda* see, for example, US Air Force, Office of

- Lessons Learned (AF/XOL), *Operation Anaconda: An Air Power Perspective* (Washington DC: Headquarters United States Air Force AF/XOL, February 2005); Paul L. Hastert, 'Operation Anaconda: Perception Meets Reality in the Hills of Afghanistan', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, vol. 28, no. 1, January–February 2005, pp. 11–20; and Sean Naylor, *Not a Good Day to Die: The Untold Story of Operation Anaconda* (New York: Berkley Books, 2005).
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- 23 Zaffar Abbas, 'Operation Eyewash', *Herald*, August 2005, p. 64.
- 24 Author interview with Robert Grenier, CIA station chief in Islamabad, Washington DC, 6 November 2007.
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- 26 In June 2002, for example, al-Qaeda militants attacked the Pakistani army in Azam Warsak, near Wana in South Waziristan, killing nearly a dozen soldiers. 'Descent Into Anarchy', *Herald*, March 2004, p. 62.
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 ICG, *Pakistan's Tribal Areas*, p. 14.
- 29 Amir Mohammad Khan, 'Spiralling into Chaos', *Newsline* (Pakistan), March 2004, p. 34–6.
- 30 M. Ilyas Khan, 'Who Are These People?', *Herald*, April 2004, pp. 60–68.
- 31 Khan, 'Spiralling Into Chaos'.
- 32 Khan, 'Who are these People?'; Sailab Mahsud, 'Caught in the Crossfire', *Herald*, April 2004, p. 66–7.
- 33 Mahsud, 'Caught in the Crossfire'.
- 34 Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire*, pp. 269–70.
- 35 Rahimullah Yusufzai, 'Whose Country is it Anyway?', *Herald*, February 2006, pp. 27–32; 'Hit and Run', *Herald*, February 2006, p. 58; Intikhab Amir, 'Waziristan: No Man's Land?', *Herald*, April 2006, p. 78.
- 36 The Pakistani army tried to depict these deals as part of long-standing precedent in the region, noting that the British negotiated with local Pashtun tribes in the North-West Frontier Province during their rule (see, for example, Christian Tripodi, 'Peacemaking through Bribes or Cultural Empathy? The Political Officer and Britain's Strategy towards the North-West Frontier, 1901–1945', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 31, no. 1, March–April 2008, pp. 123–51). However, the Pakistani deals differ in many serious ways from those of the British.
- 37 Author discussions in Pakistan.
- 38 Locals denied the existence of the last clause, and argued that they did not agree to register all foreigners with the government.
- 39 Mariam Abou Zahab, 'Changing Patterns of Social and Political Life Among the Tribal Pashtuns in Pakistan', unpublished paper, 2007. As Zahab notes, weapons were not surrendered but rather 'offered', and after the recent deal 'exchanged'.
- 40 Khan, 'Who are these People?'; Owais Tohid, 'The New Frontier', *Newsline* (Pakistan), April 2004; Ismail Khan, 'Five Militants Pardoned for Peaceful Life: Aliens Asked to Surrender by 30th', *Dawn*, 25 April 2004, <http://>

- www.dawn.com/2004/04/25/top1.htm.
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- 43 Ismail Khan and Dilawar Khan Wazir, 'Night Raid Kills Nek, Four other Militants', *Dawn*, 19 June 2004; Khattak, 'I Did Not Surrender'.
- 44 Pakistan Army, General Headquarters, Military Operations Directorate, *Record on Pakistan's War on Terror as of 28 December 2006*.
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- 47 'Accord in Bajaur to Curb Terrorists', *Dawn*, 31 May 2005; 'The Bajaur Massacre', *Dawn*, 1 November 2006; Mohammad Ali, 'Peace Deal in Bajaur Soon, Says Aurakzai', *Dawn*, 24 February 2007.
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- 51 'Taliban Chief Ideologist Survives "Zalzala"', *Daily Times*, 26 May 2008.
- 52 *Ibid.*; Iqbal Khattak, 'Army in Waziristan Better Equipped, More Relaxed', *Daily Times*, 21 May 2008.
- 53 Iqbal Khattak, 'Pakistan: Mehsud says Local Taliban to begin Media War; Slams Reporter's Murder', *Daily Times*, 27 May 2008.
- 54 Khattak, 'Army in Waziristan Better Equipped'.
- 55 Zaffar Abbas, 'Taliban Ousted, but Spinkai is now a Ghost Town', *Dawn*, 19 May 2008.
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- 64 Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies, *Pakistan Security Report 2008* (Islamabad: Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies, 2009), p. 3.

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- 68 Anthony Lloyd, 'Captured Battle Plan Shows Strength and Training of Taleban Forces', *Times*, 11 November 2008.
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- 70 The NWFP government and the TNSM had signed an agreement in May 2007 permitting a TNSM leader, Maulana Fazlullah ('Mullah Radio'), to continue FM broadcasts, while Fazlullah agreed to support government efforts to maintain law and order, education for girls and polio vaccination. Akhtar Amin, 'Government Moves Additional Army Contingents to Swat', *Daily Times*, 19 October 2007.
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- 74 Zahid Hussain, 'From Much Sought After to "Most Wanted"', *Dawn*, 31 May 2009.
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