

review

the week

the big idea



A soldier crouches on a mountaintop near Kotkai two weeks into the campaign against Taliban and al Qa'eda fighters in South Waziristan. Nicolas Asfouri / AP Photo

Start a war

As the Pakistan Army turns its guns on Waziristan, Manan Ahmed argues that the dysfunctional state remains its own worst enemy

On May 11, Rehman Malik, the ubiquitous and consistently enervated Pakistani interior minister, declared the military's ongoing operation against the Taliban in the Swat Valley a resounding success. "We haven't given them a chance," he boasted. "They are on the run. They were not expecting such an offensive". He added that the operation, then barely a week old, had already killed 700 Taliban. Over the summer the declarations of victory continued: prime minister Yousaf Raza Gilani called the conflict "a great success"; the Pakistan Army spokesman, Major Gen Athar Abbas announced that "we have beaten the Taliban decisively in Swat".

Since the army maintained a media blackout in the region, there were few voices to dissent from these cries of victory. But the extent of the army's achievement remains unknown: areas of Swat are still under Taliban control, and many militants simply fled the territory for more favourable terrain elsewhere. What is clear, however, is that the army campaign – waged with heavy artillery and aerial strikes – forced some three million civilians to flee.

After declaring victory in Swat, and under pressure from the Americans to "take the fight to the Taliban", the Pakistan army announced that it would soon proceed towards Waziristan, the hunting-ground for the Tehrik-i Taliban Pakistan (TTP), whose founder and leader, Baitullah Mehsud, was assassinated by a US drone in early August. The targets struck back with a wave of terrorist attacks in October, many directed against the state itself – killing over 250 Pakistanis and injuring hundreds more.

The violence of the Taliban reprisal blew away the smokescreen of success that had been proclaimed in Swat: it was clear that the offensive, whatever its other accomplishments, had done nothing to undermine the capacity of the Taliban to organise and execute terrorist attacks anywhere in Pakistan – from Islamabad and Peshawar to Lahore. In fact, the self-appointed Taliban in Swat had always been imports from Waziristan, who established a bulwark in Swat by capitalising on local frustration with the federal state – and they easily slipped back into Waziristan as the army began to bombard the valley.

The military has now started to shell South Waziristan with the same fury. The exodus of civilians is under way – more than 250,000 have been displaced. As before, this human cost does not figure in the army's calculus. The humanitarian crisis will be left to fester for municipal authorities and the private sector. Already, we have an early declaration of "suc-

cess" from the Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, who says the Taliban are "on the run". But on the run to where, exactly? Crossing over the border to southern Afghanistan, perhaps – the neighbouring province of Zabul is already a crucial zone of conflict between Nato troops and the Afghan Taliban. But it is more likely that they will head south toward Baluchistan and its border city, Quetta – and that, soon enough, the deadly game will continue, this time with Baluchistan in the crosshairs of a new army offensive.

The Taliban are indeed a murderous lot, intent on disrupting and destroying civil society and cowering helpless civilians to their particularly offensive version of piety. But their success in finding a foothold and destabilising Swat relied not on any appeal to a religious cause or tribal brotherhood but on exploiting existing political and judicial imbalances in the region. Pakistan's federally administered areas have never been integrated into the state apparatus – after 62 years, they lack basic infrastructure, any accountable civil administration, working courts or police, and have very few rights in Islamabad. The inhabitants of these regions have long experienced corrosive resource exploitation at the hands of the centre without receiving any benefit to their own communities.

The 3.5 million or more inhabitants of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, of which Waziristan is a component, only received the adult franchise in 1997 – 50 years after the creation of Pakistan. This area, with the highest poverty and lowest literacy rates in Pakistan, is still governed according to the brutal British colonial legal code: a family or even a village can be punished for the crime of a single individual, there is no protection from multiple sentences for

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the same offence, and most damnable, the state has no obligation to show cause for imprisonment. Most damaging is the utter lack of a judicial system that can adjudicate civil disputes – one reason for the persistent calls to impose Sharia within the region. The Pakistani state has yet to resolve these issues and, in the meantime, segments of the discontented population have resorted to armed aggression against the centre – which has taken both secular and religious forms. Decades of frustration allowed the Taliban a foothold in Swat, and the same conditions exist in Baluchistan.

So when the Taliban flee south from Waziristan into Baluchistan, they will find another populace suffering, denied their share of the national resources and embroiled in a long conflict with the state. They are likely to find sympathetic ears to their message of chaos and hate – and the military is sure to take this opportunity to move in and crush the existing secularist Baluchi nationalist movement, which has been waging a guerrilla war against the state since 2005.

Of the five provinces that became Pakistan in 1947, Baluchistan was unique in one crucial respect. Since 1876 the tribes of Baluchistan, under their titular leader, the Khan of Kalat, had a direct treaty relationship with London, whose terms guaranteed that the British would respect Baluch sovereignty. At partition, however, British Baluchistan was given to Pakistan. Immediately, Prince Agha Abdul Karim revolted and the Pakistani army was sent to quash the insurrection in 1948. Karim tried to involve Afghanistan, Iran and the USSR in his struggle against Pakistan but failed. Baluchistan remained under military rule until Pakistan's first general elections in 1970.

In that election, a secular and progressive party won a plurality in Baluchistan's state legislature on a platform that sought more state rights and a greater share of the federal budget. Nationally, the East Pakistan-based Awami League emerged as the largest party in Parliament – before the army stepped in, voided the results, and sent troops into Dhaka. Their subsequent brutality led to the 1971 war with India and the secession of Bangladesh.

After having lost East Pakistan, the new government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was in no mood to deal with another state-rights issue. In 1973, Bhutto dismissed the local government of Baluchistan, imprisoned most of the Baluchi leaders on charges of sedition, reimposed central rule and dispatched 70,000 troops to the province. Aided by American arms and Iranian soldiers, Bhutto waged a

brutal crackdown on Baluchi separatists for the next four years, until the military dictator Zia ul Haq, who had deposed and killed Bhutto, reached a truce with Baluchi tribes in 1977.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the subsequent US involvement made the territory of Baluchistan the epicentre of these frontier badlands. The border city of Quetta, the port of Gwadar and the fields of Makran were all staging and training grounds for mujahideen and, thus, vital pawns in the global struggle against Communism.

In 2004, Baluchistan erupted in another revolt against the Pakistani state. The causes were the both the everyday injustices of the military regime – the rape of a Baluchi medical doctor by an Army captain – and the widespread exploitation of Baluchistan's resources by the army. General Musharraf retaliated with intense military force. The army launched aerial bombardments of Baluchi villages and carried out missile attacks that killed Baluch leaders like Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti – a former governor of Baluchistan and the head of the largest Baluchi tribe. Not only did these assassinations propel the insurgency forward, they also created a power vacuum in the region which was filled by both Taliban and Taliban-like groups.

The true crisis facing Pakistan is not the Taliban: it is the rupture between the federal state and its constituent parts, and Islamabad's refusal to accede to the legitimate needs and demands of its citizens in places like Swat and Baluchistan. It is a rupture, indeed, that is written into the very fabric of the state, and the reason why Bangladesh seceded from West Pakistan in 1971, after it was denied political legitimacy by the military regime and then brutalised by an oppressive army operation aimed at quashing any opposition.

But the Pakistan Army learnt exactly the wrong lesson from Bangladesh: since 1971 it has been determined to move as rapidly and violently as possible against any sub-nationalist movement elsewhere in Pakistan. The spectre of Taliban conquering Islamabad and the state's American-backed resolve to press on in a series of wars against its own people have effectively ended any chance for political consideration of the Baluchistan issue. Instead Baluchistan will be, once again, merely an empty badland where Taliban are hiding, waiting, plotting. It awaits yet another military operation. And we await another declaration of success.

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the tangled web

US ambassador mistranslated?

The US Ambassador to Poland, Lee Feinstein, has been caught up in diplomatic controversy after his comments on Polish TV station TVN24 on October 24.

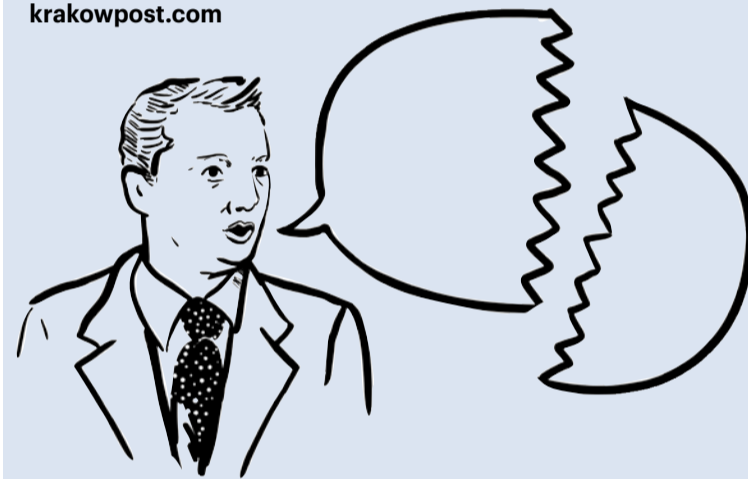
In an interview on that station, the ambassador responded to a question about the presence of Polish soldiers in Afghanistan. His answer was translated live into Polish by TVN24 as: "The president and prime minister declared that not only would they be keeping Polish soldiers in Afghanistan, but they would also enlarge the contingent. This is something for which we are very grateful."

After the ambassador's comment was quoted in nearly every Polish newspaper, Poland's National Defence Minister Bogdan Klich denied Feinstein's claims. Klich said, "The ambassador committed a blunder, since neither the prime minister, nor the minister of foreign affairs, nor the minister of national defence made any declarations to the American side about an increase in the contingent. But please remember that these are the ambassador's first days at a new post."

However, the confusion reached another level when Feinstein's statement was quoted by the *Washington Times* in the US. That prompted the US Department of State to claim that the ambassador was mistranslated by TVN24. The Department of State stated that Feinstein never said that the Polish government promised to send more troops to Afghanistan, but that Polish officials plan to "enhance their presence" in Afghanistan.

TVN24 has since corrected the translation, but its spokesman Karol Smolag claimed that the station does not feel responsible for the mistranslation. He said: "We maintain that the translation precisely evoked the spirit of the ambassador's statement on our station, although the translator needlessly added the word 'soldiers', which did not appear directly in the ambassador's statement." He added: "Taking into consideration that the ambassador used the formulation 'actually to enhance its presence' as an answer to a question about the presence of our soldiers in Afghanistan, putting responsibility for the whole confusion on us is a misunderstanding."

The Krakow Post
krakowpost.com



Botched Afghan translation allegations being probed

Defence Minister Peter MacKay has ordered officials to look into allegations that innocent Afghans may have been sent to jail because of botched translations by Canadian military interpreters.

MacKay's statement in the House of Commons on Monday came as a counterinsurgency expert said US forces have been plagued with the same concerns.

A former language and cultural adviser to the Canadian Forces said he witnessed at least two instances where innocent people were wrongly labelled as Taliban supporters because Afghan-Canadian interpreters did not understand what had been said.

NDP Leader Jack Layton said it's a troubling development and demanded to know what the Conservative government was going to do.

Thomas Hammes, a retired US Marine colonel with combat experience in Iraq, said US forces are facing the same problems and concerns in Afghanistan.

"We're willing to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to make sure ice cream and steak is there," Hammes said in an interview from Washington. "And I would trade all of that for my entire tour if I could have one decent translator."

"Many times I'd trade body armour for a translator."

There have been a steady stream of complaints from US army and marine units about the quality of their interpreters and concerns about what impression they're leaving with local Afghans.

The Canadian Press
cbc.ca

Translation of Dan Brown novel stolen

Police are looking for someone who might be reading the Icelandic translation of Dan Brown's new novel, *The Lost Symbol*.

A burglar who broke into the offices of the Bjartur publishing house on Tuesday got away with the first proof copy of the translation.

"Possibly the burglar gave up on his English copy of the long novel and in his desperation decided to get a copy of the Icelandic translation before anyone else," Gudrun Vilmundardottir, chief of publishing for Bjartur, said Wednesday.

The burglar apparently fled after being disturbed by a photographer arriving for work, she said.

Vilmundardottir said another copy of the translation was sent to the proofreader, and she wasn't worried about the translation leaking out on the internet or some other form.

"Although you have to wonder a little, seeing as the burglar did take a computer scanner as well," she said.

Associated Press
ap.com

Illustrations by Sarah Lazarovic for The National