



Descent into Appeasement. Pakistan's dangerous deals with terrorists

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The good news is that some politicians apparently do keep their promises. Immediately after being appointed Pakistan's prime minister earlier this year, Yousaf Raza Gilani promised negotiations with the Taliban, saying that his government was "ready to talk to all those who give up arms and adopt the path of peace." Regional officials echoed his sentiment. He has delivered. The bad news is that such negotiations are eroding Pakistan's security and creating an increasingly dangerous situation for Americans.

The trouncing of Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf's PML-Q party in the country's February elections signaled a repudiation of his internal policies and his alliance with the United States. Musharraf's approach to Pakistan's largely lawless tribal

regions--havens for the Taliban and al Qaeda--swung clumsily erratically between mobilizing his forces and entering into unenforceable agreements that eroded his military credibility. Neither tactic did much good, but negotiating with terrorists was the more popular of the two failed policies.

It is not surprising then that Pakistan's new government launched a round of negotiations with the country's Islamic extremists. What was unexpected, though, was the scale of the negotiations. Talks have been opened and agreements entered with virtually every militant outfit in the country. But the government has done nothing to answer the problem of the past accords and is again accepting prom-

ises that it has no means of enforcing.

The Taliban violated each of the conditions of the now-infamous September 2006 Waziristan accords. It used the ceasefire as an opportunity to erect a parallel system of government complete with sharia courts, taxation, recruiting offices, and its own police force. Al Qaeda in turn benefited from the Taliban's expansion, building what U.S. intelligence estimates as 29 training camps in North and South Waziristan alone. And, while even the Waziristan accords paid lip service to stopping cross-border attacks against Coalition forces in Afghanistan, the new negotiations often leave this consideration aside. As North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) governor Owari Ghani recently told the New York Times, "Pakistan will take care of its own problems, you take care of Afghanistan on your side."

The first in this new round of agreements was struck with the NWFP's Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (the TNSM or Movement for the Implementation of Mohammad's Sharia Law) on April 20 in the Malakand Division. The TNSM is led by Maulana Sufi Mohammed, who was imprisoned in 2002 for providing fighters to the Taliban in Afghanistan (as the TNSM continues to do to this day). The Pakistani government and the TNSM entered into a six-point deal in which the TNSM renounced attacks on Pakistan's government in exchange for the promise that sharia law would be imposed in Malakand. The government also freed Sufi Mohammed.

A month later, Pakistan inked a deal with the Taliban in the Swat district. Led by Mullah Fazlullah (Sufi Mohammed's son-in-law), they have been waging a brutal insurgency in the once-peaceful vacation spot. (More than 200 Pakistani soldiers and police have been killed since January 2007.) The 15-point agreement between the Pakistani government and the Swat Taliban stipulates that the military will withdraw its forces, and the government will allow the imposition of sharia law, permit Fazlullah to broadcast on his radio channel--which was previously banned--and help turn Fazlullah's madrassa into an "Islamic University."

Though the government extracted some concessions from the Taliban, they are so difficult to enforce that Pakistan will likely gain little more than the reintroduction of vaccination programs. (Fazlullah has campaigned against vaccinations in the past, describing them as a Western plot to make Pakistani men impotent.) The promise to close down training camps is certainly suspect.

This week, Pakistan negotiated a peace agreement with a Tehrik-i-Taliban leader in the Mohmand agency. Its terms are similar to the new accords signed with the TNSM and Swat Taliban.

In South Waziristan, the Pakistani government is in the process of negotiating an agreement with Baitullah Mehsud, the leader of the Tehrik-i-Taliban. He is a longtime adherent of the Taliban's ideology, frequently visiting Afghanistan in the mid-1990s and appointed by Mullah Omar as governor of the Mehsud

tribe. Baitullah Mehsud's forces are responsible for killing and kidnapping hundreds of Pakistani soldiers, and he has masterminded a suicide-bombing campaign throughout Pakistan. He established the Tehrik-i-Taliban in December 2007 to unite local Taliban movements throughout the tribal areas and the NWFP and is thought to be responsible for Benazir Bhutto's assassination that month.

While the agreement has yet to be signed, Pakistan's Daily Times published a draft copy. The draft states that the Tehrik-i-Taliban must eject foreign terrorists (a concession they have ignored in the past) and prohibits them from attacking government and military personnel or impeding the movement of aid workers. In exchange, Pakistan will free Taliban prisoners and withdraw its army from the region. The deal is to be signed any day.

Pakistan has also started negotiations with the Taliban in the settled district of Kohat. The leaked terms of the proposed agreement are nearly identical to those negotiated with other groups.

This strategy of accelerated appeasement only empowers groups with a history of violence who are devoted to undermining Pakistan's sovereignty. In addition to creating

breathing space for extremists (since it is the militants who determine when an agreement is broken), the accords allow a greater flow of recruits to the training camps and further violence. At best, the politicians are shunting the problems down the road--and these problems will be larger by the time Pakistan is forced to confront them.

The new accords are also a threat to the United States. Baitullah Mehsud has told journalists that "jihad in Afghanistan will continue" regardless of negotiations, a sentiment echoed by other Taliban leaders. As U.S. forces in Afghanistan face increased cross-border attacks, Americans at home should be concerned about the increase in the risk of another catastrophic terrorist attack. The 9/11 Commission Report warned that a terrorist organization requires "time, space, and the ability to perform competent planning and staff work" in order to carry out a 9/11-like attack. Pakistan's new accords provide al Qaeda and its allies with the requisite time and space.

If another major act of terror hits the United States, it will almost certainly be traced back to the al Qaeda network in Pakistan. Far from addressing the situation, Pakistan's government is only increasing the dangers that we face.

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