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## Peace Deals in Pakistan's Wild Wild North

### 1. Background:

In 2004, Pak Army was commanded to move into Waziristan. The military operation was expected to establish the writ of the State in no more than a few weeks. Four long years into the operation and Islamabad has clearly failed on almost all counts. The government's strategy, according to a senator, was "*as good as having no strategy at all as no political thinking was done and military moved in with only one thought in mind: to crush anti-Islamabad forces and retrieve.*"[1]

"FATA Civil Secretariat is a hell of unfinished projects (and) hundreds of concept papers," said a senior journalist in Peshawar.

Pak Army's military strategists have failed because their war-gaming took neither history nor culture into account. What started out as a military operation four years ago is now a war—

a war that has no end. This is not the war-game Musharraf had in mind. Washington, London and Riyadh are all extremely unhappy. Last month, Haroonur Rashid, a prominent Urdu columnist, wrote: "You cannot win a war where the army enters in a state of disbelief and half heartedness and a large cadre of both the officers and the foot soldiers of Pakistan army are not convinced to fight this war with their countrymen whom their institution once had supported" adding that "*Islamabad would eventually have to talk politics and silence the barrels.*"

Talking politics and silencing the barrels; but on what conditions? There may not be any harm in talking to the dissenting forces which have perpetrated unprecedented violence both against the individuals and the institutions of the State but who sets the pitch for the negotiations? Militants or the government? If history is to act as an example, then nearly all the peace deals from the times of Lt. Gen. Safdar, then Peshawar Corps Commander and 'Commander' Nek Muhammad, Taliban chief in Waziristan have failed. The understanding reached on paper failed on the ground with Pakistan army moving into Mehsud area with superior forces and heavier firepower and Taliban reacting on the streets of Pakistan with suicide bombings killing hundreds and sapping both the confidence of the people and government.

Government till now had struck peace deals with Baitullah Mehsud, Mullah Sufi Muhammad and nearly half a dozen of Taliban commanders across FATA and no one knows the terms and conditions of these deals.

Senior analysts and observers now question the validity of the most recent deal via a joint team of political and military leaders representing the government and the traditional delegations of the tribal elders called Jirga. "Within a week, there were two bomb blasts after both sides reached the agreement. One of them blew up a police station in Mardan and the other blew up a vehicle carrying the security personnel," a researcher working for a Western mission said. Taliban commanders plainly disowned the attacks leaving Pakistani negotiators baffled, clueless and in loss as they could not blame the Taliban, he added.

There's extremely serious skepticism *vis-à-vis* the success of the most recent peace deal reached between Baitullah Mehsud, the Taliban commander, and the Government of Pakistan. But there hasn't been any success of Islamabad's strategy of "crushing the Taliban forces as they still are a dangerous and potent resistance force on the ground and I fear that there was hardly any other option." [2] The only question is if the government would be able to keep the balance between the shots and the words. Many believe that it wouldn't.

### 2. Present Situation and Analysis:

Islamabad operates in FATA via a FATA Civil Secretariat (FCS) in Peshawar that has not pleased many among both the government and the donor community. According to an English journalist working for the largest English-daily, "It and a highly inefficient bureaucracy that is more loyal to the boss in Peshawar (Governor NWFP) than its commitment..." At the moment, there is a serious need of FSC's capacity building both of the personnel and the institution if one wishes to have any hope of FATA development. Islamabad cannot, and must not, sit back easy and must take charge to work out a doable and long term strategy that involves both the deterrence against militants and the dedication to develop the region. The political government has taken many "goodwill gestures" to essentially please the militants to set the tone that it is willing to give peace a fair chance by initiating the dialogue.

The provincial government, in consultations with the military establishment released Mullah Sufi Muhammad, founder President (Ameer) of Tehrike Nifaze Shariate Muhammadi (TNSM), along with nearly three dozen

'extremists' mainly to gain confidence for the fighting Taliban forces. It is also reported that Mullah Sufi Muhammad, who is also the father in law of Mullah

Fazalullah, the Taliban Commander in Swat, never advocated an armed struggle on the land of Pakistan. “He only wanted the implementation of Sharia in Mala Kand Agency and the Swat area and was known to stage long sit-in protests by blocking the main road till he was granted what he had wanted; a law declaring Sharia law supreme in his area in the mid 90s.”[3] The trouble began when he was arrested upon his return from Afghanistan in 2002 when he had lead a “tribal *lashkar*” to fight against the Americans in Afghanistan. He was awarded a sentence for seven years and vacuum that his absence created was filled in by more militant, hard hitting and extremist Mullah Fazalullah, his son in law, who believed in armed struggle to implement the conservative interpretation of Islamic Sharia not only in Swat but all over Pakistan. He was set to run in the wake of a military operation that started in December 2007. Mullah Sufi Muhammad, till now, has not disappointed the government as he proclaimed that he and his party wanted the supremacy of the law of Allah through peaceful means and violence against the Muslims is a major sin. [4]

Government till now had struck peace deals with Baitullah Mehsud, Mullah Sufi Muhammad and nearly half a dozen of Taliban commanders across FATA and no one knows the terms and conditions of these deals. The agreements were never brought to either the provincial or the national parliament. They were never debated, discussed and deliberated. Only a few of the top level politicians are aware of the details of the agreements and this modus operandi is not different than that of Musharraf’s. He couldn’t succeed; what are the guarantees that politicians will succeed this time around? Especially, in a situation when Pakistan cannot afford to continue indefinitely with a militant conflict on its soil.

Pakistan’s Western friends, with the exception of London, thus far have not approved of any peace deal with the Taliban and are rather skeptical of such developments. With no diplomatic and multilateral political support from the partners in Global War on Terror, this series of peace agreements is feared to fail before it really takes off. FATA has already been declared a dangerous zone in many research papers of the Western think tanks as well as the government functionaries. The pressure is also mounting strong on Pakistan to continue with the military operation and completely uproot the Taliban forces in FATA. Otherwise, there are serious dangers of unilateral strikes

that already are emotionally and terribly resented both by the people of Pakistan and FATA.

Playing peace deals without a resolute parliamentary deliberation is a dangerous game. Unfortunately, the terms of playing this game have not changed despite the “independent legislatures” at provincial and national level.

### 3. Recommendations:

Keeping in view the precarious situation in FATA, CRSS strongly recommends the following:

1. The details of the agreements must be brought on the floors of the Parliaments in Islamabad and Peshawar.
2. Government must stop pleasing the militants and should rather keep the use of force as a deterrent against the rouge forces in FATA while keeping the political options open.
3. Government must take serious and quick steps to enhance the capacity of the FATA Civil Secretariat and the interaction and control of the provincial government should also be introduced.
4. Both the political and military options should be kept in tandem with each other for maximum gains and there should be an evaluation and review of the strategy within a certain and announced time limit.
5. Strategic military option, open political dialogue, committed social development and promising political empowerment of the people of FATA must go in tandem with each other.
6. The government must issue the loss and gain analysis to the people of Pakistan.

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[1] A senator from FATA in a private discussion.

[2] Researcher in a government supported think tank in Islamabad.

[3] A senator from Jamiat-e-Ulma-e-Islam (Fazal).

[4] Mullah Sufi Muhammad’s first speech during a meeting of TNSM Shoora (Consultative Council) that he chaired.