

## Call for more transparency in Fata action, Yemen decision

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### Ahmed Rashid

KARACHI: While the military has now adopted a much more coherent policy in Fata, it is the political government that needs to have a strategy against militancy and be at the forefront.

This was the gist of the arguments presented by journalist and author Ahmed Rashid at a lecture titled “Apparatus of Jihad: The State of Play” in the Habib University auditorium on Friday evening.

Mr Rashid commenced his talk by stressing that Pakistan had become a friendless nation in the region. “We didn’t have an ally apart from Arab countries as the country had been a refuge for dissident groups from neighbouring countries (Afghanistan, Iran, Central Asia, Russia, etc),” he said. Members of Al Qaeda, for example, had been here since 1985 and therefore could not be called an Asia group any more – they’d settled down, had wives, learned Urdu and Pashto and set up networks recruiting Pakistani fighters, and such groups had extended their grip in the area. The Pakistani state had used jihad as part of its foreign policy allowing its people to be seduced by foreign militant groups. “No state has acted like this,” he remarked.

Expanding on the topic, Mr Rashid discussed Pakistan’s wars with India. He said that Pashtun tribesmen were used in the 1948 war, Gen Ayub Khan used jihadis in 1965, and a similar thing happened in the Kargil war pushing the two countries to the brink of a nuclear war. Among other negative effects that the policy had, it strengthened religious and extremist forces in the country, he said.

After 9/11, the remnants of Al Qaeda were allowed to come to Pakistan and build up networks in tribal areas which helped revive the Taliban in Afghanistan. This irked Hamid Karzai as he told Bush that the Taliban were the real threat, not Al Qaeda. This was the kind of tit-for-tat policies that were applied in both countries – as Pakistan gave territory to Afghan Taliban to attack Afghanistan and Afghanistan gave territory to Pakistani Taliban to attack Pakistan, he said.

Mr Rashid at that juncture mentioned three important moments which could have changed the course of history. The first one was the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan. We could have benefited from making peace instead of backing one faction [Gulbuddin Hekmatyar], he argued.

Second, the end of the Cold War made many countries realise that they couldn’t depend on US or Soviet aid any more, and had to stand on their own feet with the result that the European Union expanded and East Asia took some significant steps. But Pakistan’s policies turned the 1989 indigenous uprising in Kashmir into a jihadi struggle by sending Punjabi groups to Kashmir, he said. It was also the time which saw the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan. “Our ‘90s policy choices were more disastrous than Ziaul Haq’s,” he commented.

Third, after 9/11 a great many of Pakistan’s loans were forgiven and we received a huge aid. Pakistan had once more become an international player. But Gen Musharraf, in his first visit to Washington, instead of seeking US help to educate our people, asked for F16s, which was not even relevant to Afghanistan, but to India, he added. Mr Rashid insisted that the ongoing military action in Fata required more transparency, as to who exactly we’re fighting against and who’s calling the shots. This should be applied to the decision regarding Yemen as well (who’s making decisions), he said. Then he claimed, “The army wants to deliver.”

Highlighting the present state of things vis-à-vis Pak-Afghan ties, he said President Ashraf Ghani was insecure himself; he had a coalition government along with a sworn enemy in Abdullah Abdullah. He’s under enormous domestic political pressure, the journalist said.

Mr Rashid said the Taliban were divided; but they should be given a deadline and told to ‘go back to Afghanistan otherwise we won’t allow your businesses to flourish’. He said when one asked the Taliban why they were fighting against the army, they’d say ‘we’re fighting for our elder brothers in Afghanistan’.

Mr Rashid then touched upon a 20-point charter given to tackle extremism, and spoke on slippages in them, such as the fact that the issue of madrassahs had been sidelined. The big militant groups in Punjab, too, needed to be tackled as they were the biggest threat, he stressed.

He reiterated that Pakistan had to discuss Afghanistan with India, whether we liked it or not. With reference to the Americans, he argued, they’re the ones who should take the blame for messing up in Afghanistan. However, we couldn’t tell America to stick around in the region, hence we had to stand up on our own feet, especially on the economic front. “We need trading partners,” he said.

After the lecture, answering a question put to him by Dr Nauman Naqvi, Mr Rashid said what the military was doing in North Waziristan at present was coherent and different from the policies of Musharraf and Kiyani. “It’s up to the political leadership to come up with a proper strategy and be at the forefront,” he added.

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