

Multi-pronged strategy needed to end terrorism in Pakistan

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Ahmed Rashid

KARACHI: The ongoing military operation in North Waziristan is in the right direction with seemingly clear-cut policy to destroy militants' bases to end terrorism throughout the country, but it should be supported equally by political leadership with a comprehensive strategy.

The army is determined to clean up militancy in the country which will broadly well for the future of the state but if the country might face unimaginable consequences if the operation fails to generate it results.

This was opined by Ahmed Rashid, renowned expert and journalist while speaking on the topic of 'Apparatus of Jihad: The State of Play' at Habib University here on Friday. The civil society, NGOs and media should be given access to the areas where operation is continued for eliminating concerns of transparency in the whole drive because the previous record of the operation was not favourable for the state reputation. The present leadership of the country—army and political— should develop a multi-pronged strategy that will be based on social, economical and political basis to wipe out militancy throughout the country. Evidently, there is a violent reaction erupted as a result of operation including on the grounds of sects which hampers the entire process.

Even, the recent activism of the Law Enforcement Agencies (LAEs) in Karachi will not work if the leadership does not devise on long-term plan to counter terrorism and militancy. There is a greater need of reforms in the educational methodology and curriculum of religious seminaries and schools as well. Besides, media and intelligentsia should play a crucial role for social mobilization.

The leadership should identify the breeding grounds of the militants such as Punjabi Taliban and some groups active in Karachi though it will be difficult. He further added that Pakistan should involve neighbouring countries to bring peace in the region because every country knows its influence in the Afghanistan and its crucial role for the security of the region. Our leadership has a very short time to settle down things to stable the state affairs on track because the regional dynamics are going to be changed with the resolution of Nuclear issue of Iran, and investment and economic growth might make their ways there instead of Pakistan.

Pakistan needs trading partners, foreign investment and technological transfer instead of allies such as USA and Saudi Arabia.

THE NEWS.

Has the romance between Pakistan and jihad come to an end?

Fatima Zaidi

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Karachi

Have the country's ruling elite finally gotten their heads around to contain the rot known as the Taliban who stemmed out of the country's dreaded foreign policy during the Soviet-Afghan war; or do they need to put in more whole-hearted efforts than the 20-point agenda devised in the aftermath of the APS Peshawar attack?

The fog was lifted on these questions to some extent by Ahmed Rashid, a renowned journalist and author of several books on the Af-Pak jihad and the accompanying US and Nato policies in the region, during the first lecture of the Habib University Dean's Lecture Series on Friday titled, "Apparatus of Jihad: The State of Play".

Rashid said Pakistan was the most friendless state in the region.

"The country let itself become a safe haven for refugees and insurgents where all kinds of militants received training, be it the Punjabi Taliban, the Uzbeks, militants of Turkish origin, Chechens as well as the Uighurs of China," he explained.

Labelling al Qaeda an Arab group was also factually wrong, he noted, as its militants not only took refuge in the country but also married local women.

As far as the foreign policy is concerned, he said Pakistan was a country, which instead of focusing on matters such as the cotton exchange in Central Asia, chose to build jihadist groups to throw its weight around in the region. "Most of the wars were fought by tribal groups given weapons and trained by the State instead of the conventional armies," Rashid observed.

"Pakistan's tribes, initially used for protecting al Qaeda, became rich and furthered the agenda of radicalisation." However, he added that three golden chances had come the country's way to pull itself out of the mess. First, it was after the withdrawal of the Soviets from Afghanistan, "Had we sent the refugees back, the conditions would have been far better."

The second chance was the end of the Cold War era when the global politics was undergoing a realignment of sorts with regional blocs coming together to make themselves self-sufficient. "But we chose to revive the Taliban in Afghanistan."

The third opportunity came following the 9/11 attack. “We went after a resurgence of jihad in Kashmir instead” Rashid said Pakistan could have fared well had it built a camaraderie with Afghanistan and deprived the militants operating within the country of their ideological ally, the Afghan Taliban. Speaking of the National Action Plan, Rashid said there was enormous slippage already with respect to the goals meant to achieve through it. He also pressed for greater transparency of the military operation, Zarb-e-Azb. Another interesting aspect dominating our foreign policy, Rashid pointed out, was the ‘bogey’ of India which kept rearing its head every now and then. He suggested going around the issue by discussing Afghanistan with India instead of trying to strong-arm our way out of it.

“India is here [in Afghanistan] to stay, whether we like it or not. Their embassies were attacked but they have stuck around.” During a conversation, Noman Naqvi, the dean of the school of arts, humanities and social sciences at the Habib University, asked Rashid as to whether or not there was a change in policy in the offing. “It has been over 40 years since we embroiled ourselves in the mess, but the changes have to be extremely drastic,” he responded.