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Pakistani Fight Against Taliban Continues

"Jet fighters on Friday started bombing suspected locations of Taliban militants in South Waziristan," said an intelligence official in Wana, who spoke anonymously because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

"The war planes targeted the places where Baitullah Mehsud's militants are active ... we have unconfirmed reports of casualties," he added.

The strikes were seen as preparation for a full-scale military operation into the mountainous region to track down and eliminate Mehsud and his network.



AFP cited a military official in Peshawar, who said that the Taliban stronghold towns of Sarwakai and Barwand, near the Afghan border, were targeted in the strikes.

Meanwhile, the Pakistani government is encouraging civilians who fled the northwestern Swat Valley during the military's recent operation against the Taliban there to return home and join the police force to help secure the area against the Taliban. Malik Naveed Khan, inspector general of police for the North West Frontier Province, told the Associated Press in a June 15 interview that to fight an insurgency, "the people have to be actively with you."

Khan said that approximately 6,000 civilians would be recruited into the police force, along with a force of 2,500 ex-military personnel. Pakistani officials will open recruiting facilities in refugee camps, where some 200,000 displaced Swatis and other refugees from surrounding districts are staying. The police official said the plan needs formal approval from the provincial government, but that "everyone is on board."

The AP report quote Kahn as saying that before the Taliban launched a violent campaign to take control of the valley in 2007, Swat was considered a "soft district," with low crime rates that required only 2,000 lightly armed police to protect a population of 1.75 million.

However, the more heavily armed Taliban militants targeted police, beheading them, shooting them, attacking their checkpoints and even forcing some officers' parents to swear on the Quran that their sons would stop their patrols. At least 120 police were killed and around 700 officers quit the force out of fear, explained Khan.

Pakistani army spokesmen have said the force has killed more than 1,300 Taliban fighters during its seven-week-old offensive in Swat and surrounding districts. However, many insurgents have fled to safer areas, and top Taliban commanders have not been captured.

A June 19 BBC News report quoted from an interview with Ahmed Mukhtar, Pakistan's defense minister, on the nation's Dawn News television channel. During the interview, Mukhtar stated that Pakistan's military offensive against Taliban militants entrenched in north-western Pakistan is nearly over, and that the army would now focus on South Waziristan, the stronghold of Baitullah Mehsud,



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Pakistan's Taliban leader. Mehsud leads Tehreek-e-Taliban, the Pakistani Taliban force to which a string of deadly attacks across Pakistan are attributed.

The statement coincides with the report cited above that jet fighters had targeted the places in South Waziristan where Baitullah Mehsud's militants are active.

"As soon as Baitullah [Mehsud] is spotted, he will be killed," Mr. Mukhtar said the interview.

In addition to Pakistani military operations against the Taliban, AFP reported that as many as three unmanned drone aircraft were reported to have dropped four missiles on a training facility for Islamist extremists in South Waziristan on June 18, killing 13 suspected Taliban.

"Intelligence reports suggest the Taliban have dug out a total of 13 dead bodies, some of them badly mutilated," an administrative official based in the northwestern capital of Peshawar said the next day. The report noted that while the U.S. military doesn't usually confirm drone attacks, U.S. military and Central Intelligence Agency operative in Afghanistan are the only forces that deploy the unmanned over the border to northwest Pakistan.

An article in the *Christian Science Monitor* for June 18 explored various factions coming under the heading "Taliban," and concluded that it has become "an umbrella term for numerous armed factions within both Pakistan and Afghanistan." The report also noted that while some of the Taliban within Pakistan are there solely to use the country as a base for attacks into Afghanistan, others, including Maulana Fazlullah in Swat and Baitullah Mehsud in South Waziristan, have launched attacks within Pakistan.

"We still aren't clear who the Pakistani military is fighting. Are they only fighting the Taliban who are actively fighting Pakistan, or will this go on to fight everybody who is with the Taliban and maybe fighting in Afghanistan?" the report quoted Moeed Yusuf, a security analyst at Boston University. "The public sentiment is surely with them at this point, but it's only with them for getting Pakistan back in order, not Afghanistan."

Presuming that the Pakistanis are only motivated by self-interest, they have good reason to be concerned about the inroads various Taliban factions have made within their nation. It is not only the northwest border areas that have been affected. A Bloomberg news report of June 19 revealed that the Taliban had even penetrated to Karachi, Pakistan's largest city and seaport located far to the south on the Arabian Sea. The article noted:

Even as Pakistan's military drives the Taliban from bases in the Swat Valley, 1,200 kilometers (750 miles) to the north, militants are holing up in Karachi, making it harder to rid the country of Islamic extremists. U.S. officials say the extremists pose a security threat in the nuclear-armed state and aid Muslim insurgents battling NATO forces in neighboring Afghanistan.

The report noted that while Karachi is a vibrant and prosperous commercial center with a population of 18 million, in the city's slums signs reading "Welcome Taliban" have sprouted. The conclusion of the report was that those vested interest in the city's commercial prosperity welcome the government's crackdown.

"The Taliban overshadow anything good," the report quoted Farrukh Khan, president of the 175-member Overseas Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry. "Most investors are taking it as a positive that there's a consensus in the country to tackle the Taliban head on."

Karachi has been a hotbed of terrorist activity since the September 11, 2001 attacks. It was here that



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Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl was abducted and killed in 2002. And the violence has not abated: At least 31 people were killed in violent politically motivated incidents in Karachi in the first week of June.

Pakistan has been a less-than-ideal ally in supporting the U.S. "war on terror," but its commercial ties with the West are strong and it has many reasons to stay on friendly terms with the United States and other Western nations.. And its leaders seem to have at least enough self-interest to prevent the Taliban from dominating Pakistan and imposing Sharia — strict Islamic law — on the nation as it did in Afghanistan.

Photo: AP Images



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