

Pakistan's Counterinsurgency Operations: A Case Study of Swat

Authors : Arshad Ali

Abstract : The Taliban insurgency in Swat which started apparently as a social movement in 2004 transformed into an anti-Pakistan Islamist insurgency by joining hands with the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) upon its formation in 2007. It quickly spread beyond Swat by 2009 making Swat the second stronghold of TTP after FATA. It prompted the Pakistan military to launch a full-scale counterinsurgency military operation code named Rah-i-Rast to regain the control of Swat. Operation Rah-i-Rast was successful not only in restoring the writ of the State but more importantly in creating a consensus against the spread of Taliban insurgency in Pakistan at political, social and military levels. This operation became a test case for civilian government and military to seek for a sustainable solution combating the TTP insurgency in the north-west of Pakistan. This study analyzes why the counterinsurgency operation Rah-i-Rast was successful and why the previous ones came into failure. The study also explores factors which created consensus against the Taliban insurgency at political and social level as well as reasons which hindered such a consensual approach in the past. The study argues that the previous initiatives failed due to various factors including Pakistan army's lack of comprehensive counterinsurgency model, weak political will and public support, and states negligence. Also, the initial counterinsurgency policies were ad-hoc in nature fluctuating between military operations and peace deals. After continuous failure, the military revisited its approach to counterinsurgency in the operation Rah-i-Rast. The security forces learnt from their past experiences and developed a pragmatic counterinsurgency model: 'clear, hold, build, and transfer.' The military also adopted the population-centric approach to provide security to the local people. This case Study of Swat evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of the Pakistan's counterinsurgency operations as well as peace agreements. It will analyze operation Rah-i-Rast in the light of David Galula's model of counterinsurgency. Unlike existing literature, the study underscores the bottom up approach adopted by the Pakistan's military and government by engaging the local population to sustain the post-operation stability in Swat. More specifically, the study emphasizes on the hybrid counterinsurgency model "clear, hold, and build and Transfer" in Swat.

Keywords : Insurgency, Counterinsurgency, clear, hold, build, transfer

Conference Title : ICCTHS 2015 : International Conference on Counter Terrorism and Human Security

Conference Location : Zurich, Switzerland

Conference Dates : July 29-30, 2015