

Pakistan: The battle for Malala

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A brutal attack on an innocent little girl has finally nudged awake our sleepy collective conscience. Will this be the long awaited moment of truth, or will Malala be remembered as just one of those endless sad events that have now come to be part of our daily existence?

Both claiming to be defenders of Islam, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the savage militants operating from what they term as Islamic Emirate of Waziristan, are locked in a bloody war of survival. What are the strengths, weaknesses, differences and commonalities of the two warring sides, and what are the chances of success for Pakistan? Let us look at a few key performance indicators.

Despite their convoluted mindset, the Taliban seem to know much more about what they are doing, who their enemy is and why they must attack a certain individual. The state, on the other hand, seems completely clueless. It was the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) who announced that they had carried out the attack on Malala and that it had nothing to do with education. Their spokesperson explained with great clarity that they attacked Malala for her pioneering role in preaching secularism and moderation. On the other hand, the closest the Pakistani parliament could come was to name the enemy as some "savages and beasts". Surely a chicken-hearted, inept and amorphous approach towards such a grave situation.

Both the Taliban and the government of Pakistan compete with each other in marketing their respective brands of Islam. The Pakistani state declares one group of people as non-Muslims, and is de facto tolerant when it comes to the killing of Shias, Ahmadis, Hindus and Christians. A notch up, the Taliban declare many more groups as non-Muslims and require them all to be killed. Pakistan would do well to withdraw from this race.

For the Taliban, use of weapons is the primary mode of conflict resolution. By distributing 1.2 million gun licenses in the last five years, Pakistan mimicked the Taliban's ideology of preferring violence over reason. More people are now killed every day by the wannabe urban Taliban of Karachi than those killed in North Waziristan. The barbaric zealots of Waziristan are the new role models for the spoilt Pakistani ruling elite. Even when travelling on urban roads, they drive the same type of obnoxious vehicles (often stolen or smuggled), carry the same kinds of weapons, use private armies and break all traffic laws only to imitate the lifestyle of the 'backward' Taliban. When a federal minister of Pakistan announces head money and appeals to his Taliban 'brothers' to undertake the task of killing a blasphemer, one wonders if the Pakistani state is any less violent than those accused of the same crime.

Administratively, the Taliban operate with a lean hierarchy, honest leadership, no foreign bank accounts, simple lifestyle, a high level of discipline and willingness to die for their cause. Pakistan, on the other hand, suffers from a dysfunctional political and bureaucratic system that rewards the 'status quo' and promotes fraud, corruption and mediocrity. Pelf and power are the only two causes that the rulers believe in; their only interest in Pakistan is to siphon away its resources. Their legislative interest is limited to laws that ratify contempt, corruption, dual nationality or past crimes. For just these reasons alone, the Taliban will win hands down in any future conflict.

Abhorrence to schools is not just a Taliban specialty. If the Taliban closed down over 400 schools in Swat, the state performed far more sadistically by creating 30,000 ghost schools. The Taliban do it with explosives, and Pakistan does it with misplaced generosity. About 2.5 billion rupees are siphoned out to ghost teachers and their bosses in the education department every month. Meanwhile 2.5 million Pakistani children stay out of school, waiting to follow in the the footsteps of the Taliban.

Provision of justice may be the most crucial selling point that sets apart the two opponents. Taliban deliver justice publicly and promptly - so that it also appears to have been done. They learnt this science without getting a \$350 million ADB 'access to justice' loan. The Islamic Republic of Pakistan has simply no clue on this subject. Poorly written laws, greedy lawyers, and compromised and incompetent judges join hands to ensure that justice is delayed, as well as denied.

Even a simple comparative analysis underlines the fact that an obviously dysfunctional state, led by a morally bankrupt and intellectually handicapped leadership cannot take on the Taliban. Its only option is to first reform itself. The religious injunctions introduced in our constitution by democrats as well as dictators should be struck down. The justice system needs surgical revamping. Every child should be able to go to a decent school. No citizen, regardless of rank or status, rich or poor, religious or secular must be allowed to possess or display weapons - licensed or otherwise. The law must be visibly and equally applied to all citizens. We cannot defeat the enemy outside unless we defeat the enemy within. Like charity, the battle for Malala must begin at home.

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P.S.

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