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## The Taliban Can Be Stopped

**Gary Anderson**

The Taliban are not ten feet tall, and there is no horde of Taliban supermen overrunning either Afghanistan or Pakistan. That is not how they operate. We and the Pakistanis tend to try to put their “offensives” in our frame of reference, and then are continually surprised when massive applications of force fail to stop them, and only result in increased negative publicity and civilian casualties.

The reality of Taliban offensives is that they largely consist of their fighters walking into an undefended village, and announcing to the population that, “there is going to be a war here, if you don’t want to be part of it, leave.” Those who don’t want to be part of the war do depart and become internally displaced persons or refugees (in the case of those who flee across borders). Those who stay can either assist the Taliban or dig in and hope that they do not get caught in the crossfire.

The Taliban do bring a rough sense of law and order and swift justice that contrasts with the cumbersome and corrupt governance that all too often characterizes governance in the hinterlands of both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Lack of security and poor governance, not the Taliban are the real enemies in both nations.

Until we break this cycle of easy Taliban conquest and disproportionate response, we will continue to lose ground to the insurgents in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. This war must be won village-by-village in the countryside and neighborhood-by-neighborhood in the cities.

There is nothing new under the Sun and the solution to the problem is no exception. The way to secure these undefended villages is to create local self defense forces mentored by experienced national or Coalition Force soldiers and police in Afghanistan and their counterparts in Pakistan. This approach has antecedents in the Banana Wars early in the last century, the Marine Corps’ Combined Action Program in Vietnam, and several programs successfully executed in Vietnam. Embedding experienced security forces with local volunteers is a sound concept, but it is totally dependent on the quality of the embedded cadre.

Green Beret type forces are obviously the best choice, but they are relatively scarce assets. However, any high quality group of soldiers can do the job with some degree of cultural awareness and good interpreter support if they are properly prepared to assume the mission.

The Guardian program of local volunteers in Afghanistan is a good start, but it is too early to determine how effective it will ultimately become, particularly if the quality of the Afghan Army

and Police training cadres is not high. Pakistan is another matter entirely. It is apparent that the Pakistanis do not yet see the value of such an approach, and are using an all too conventional strategic and operational mindset, and suffering the expected setbacks that come with a business as usual approach in unconventional war.

Civilian interagency action can also shore up defenses in regions not yet under Taliban control. We tend to place civilian Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in areas recaptured from the insurgents. Perhaps it is time to form Provincial Pre-destruction Teams to shore up terrain with governance, rule of law, and economic advisors before that terrain is lost in the first place.

The problem of convincing the Pakistanis to adopt a Guardian-like approach may well be tackled by professional education. We should be bringing provincial Pakistani military, civilian, and police officials to the United States to do seminars with American military officers and civilians who have had successful experience in embedded operations. Another option is to send the experienced operators to hold such seminars in Pakistan. The same can be said of trying to get local Pakistani government officials into seminars with successful PRT members from Iraq and Afghanistan in stressing the value of non-lethal terrain denial.

General Patton was fond of saying that he did not like to pay for the same terrain twice. That sentiment is even more relevant today than it was in 1944.

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