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# Looking beyond Waziristan

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just before the sports events. That is not unusual for the PTV. It is unfortunate that even our leading Pakistani National dailies have no trained and qualified reporters at Razmak and Wana, with the potential of becoming the eyes of an impending storm. It is reported that the casualties include one army major, one Captain and some other non Commissioned Officers and other ranks belonging to the Pakistan army as well as the frontier corps. Two Chechens are also believed to have been killed in this encounter while about three dozen Chechen men and women are believed to have escaped during the midnight operation. What were these Chechen families doing in Waziristan? Were they Al-Qaeda operatives? If so, was this operation planned at tactical or strategic level, in consultation with the US led coalition against International terrorism? In other words was this operation masterminded by Washington or was Pakistan pushed into it on the basis of local information.

The tribal areas of Pakistan adjoining the borders of Afghanistan and Iran have a very sensitive history. Since independence the Pakistan Penal Code and the writ of the Pakistan Government does not apply to these areas in the same manner as in the other Civil districts of the country.

This incident at Azam Warsak therefore assumes special significance. An important issue is whether this military operation was unavoidable? Could the desired objective not be attained with the approval and support of local tribal leaders?

This appears to be the beginning of a fresh campaign against the Taliban, the Al-Qaeda, and now also the Chechens and other elements of various Arab countries residing in Afghanistan.

During my visit to USA in April this year, I heard this assertion made by the White House and the State Department as well as various media channels that with the elimination of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, Phase 2 of the campaign against these terrorist elements would now soon be launched to hunt and crush the remnants of these terrorists and other centres of evil, wherever they exist. In this connection the names of Iraq and Iran were widely

mentioned. However New Delhi had launched a consistent campaign since Nine Eleven that the direction of the international anti terrorist campaign, after Afghanistan, should be turned towards Kashmir and Pakistan. All Indian guns were zeroed on this one point agenda. Needless to say how easily the International community led by USA fell into this Indian trap. At the same time the efforts to destabilise Pakistan on the domestic front increased many fold. Whether it was RAW or the Al-Qaeda or local backlash of militant Jihadi elements, indulging in acts of terrorism and suicide bomb blasts is an open question. But it goes without saying that a law and order situation was created in major cities of Pakistan. At the same time the enemies of Pakistan fanned unrest in the provinces of Baluchistan and NWFP. This situation demanded deployment of the Pakistan army and the civil armed forces like the Rangers and the Frontier Corps. In this backdrop, the Azam Warsak incident assumes the fulfillment of the India dream. The international war against terrorism has crossed over from Afghanistan onto the soil of Pakistan itself. By going into such operations as at Azam Warsak, the Pakistan army is being lured into military action of an indirect nature against the sentiments

of the local tribes. According to the crisis management cell of the interior ministry hundreds of Pakistan troops are spread over one hundred square kilometres of South Waziristan mountain area to hunt for the dozens of alleged Al-Qaeda and Chechens that have escaped the Azam Warsak midnight assault. The Press Secretary to the President of Pakistan and Director General ISPR has declared that the Azam Warsak incident has further firmed the resolve of the Pakistan government to chase and eliminate such terrorists from Pakistan soil and for this purpose Maj General Rashid Qureshi has sought more assistance from the Western countries namely US led International coalition against terrorism. In this game of Pakistan trying to prove itself to be more Catholic than the Pope, we have already netted hundreds of Taliban and Al-Qaeda and handed them over to the US authorities.

There are wider apprehensions that the scope and area of such operations is likely to expand. If Islamabad continues to be sucked into such operations, the allurements of the present honeymoon with Washington, might land us into a blind alley without many options of escape. There is therefore need for greater caution before Pakistan unwittingly finds itself caught in the Indian trap with our coalition partners watching as mere spectators.

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