

Militancy - Pakist

By Syed Shoab Hasan

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**P**AKISTAN's security forces appear to have achieved their main objective in Swat with the capture of its administrative seat of Mingora. That region and the rest of the Malakand division now seem to be under the control of the Pakistan army. Some fighting is still going on in the mountainous rural areas - especially the Pechar valley, the militants' main stronghold.

Everyone on the list of most wanted militants - from Osama Bin Laden onwards - is said to be hiding in that area.

**Dissent and duplicity:** Swat's turn in the limelight may be entering its final phase, in fact some senior government officials believe it is already over.

The army now seems to be preparing itself for a new front as clashes erupt across the tribal region of Waziristan.

Baitullah Mehsud, supreme leader of the militant alliance Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), now awaits them.

As a prelude to that operation, Pakistan's intelligence agencies have been whittling away at his influence.

# Long war against

Increasingly he is faced with dissent and duplicity in his South Waziristan base.

A rival clan led by powerful pro-government leader, Turkistan Bittani, has been making inroads at his expense.

He is aided by Qari Zainuddin Mehsud, leader of the Abdullah Mehsud group in Waziristan.

Until his death, Abdullah Mehsud was, along with Baitullah, the main Taliban commander among the Mehsud tribe.

Some argue he had an even higher profile and

Baitullah's focus on Pakistan.

Another militant, Abdullah's cousin Qari Zain, has clearly said that his aim is to kill the TTP head.

In addition, Baitullah Mehsud's erstwhile allies, Maulvi Nazir and Hafiz Gul Bahadur, appear intent on sitting the latest fighting out on the sidelines.

They are the only two Pakistan Taliban commanders of similar if not greater authority and could have been powerful allies.

The militants in Swat may well lose the battle over the coming days and the future of Baitullah Mehsud appears increasingly uncertain. But unless the Pakistani government - and indirectly the international community - changes its tactics, the Taliban can still win the war

stronger relationship with Al Qaeda than his namesake and that he posed a greater threat.

Abdullah Mehsud was killed in Baluchistan's Zhob district in July 2007 following a fire fight with security forces.

**Greater authority:** Later, reports surfaced that information about his whereabouts had been leaked on Baitullah's orders.

The two men were known to have developed serious differences - especially concerning

So Baitullah Mehsud now appears not only surrounded by the army but also running out of allies.

The question then is what will happen to the Taliban in Pakistan if he is no longer in charge?

Many people believe the TTP may fracture and the organisation could end up being destroyed.

But there are other militant leaders such as Zulfiqar Mehsud - also known as Hakimullah Mehsud - waiting in the wings.

# t Pakistan Taliban

They are not connected with the TTP - an organisation widely thought not to represent all the Taliban in Pakistan.

Zulfiqar Mehsud last week told the BBC that two separate attacks in Lahore which killed 10 people were carried out by the Taliban in response to the army's operation in the Swat valley. He is also thought to be behind recent attacks on supply convoys bound for NATO forces in Afghanistan.

**Recurring pattern:** As far as the Pakistani Taliban's future is concerned in the

movement as a Pakistani phenomenon.

Starting out with a group of about 20 like-minded men in Waziristan in 2003, Nek Mohammad soon became the main front man for Al Qaeda's militants.

During this time he fought several battles with the Pakistan Army before eventually signing a peace deal with them.

But that was not to last and soon the army and militants were at war once again.

His death in a drone attack in July 2004 was

As far as the Pakistani Taliban's future is concerned in the event of Baitullah Mehsud's demise, past events provide an interesting barometer reading of what may lie ahead. One has only to look at what has happened recently in the Tribal Areas when a senior militant leader was killed. The most famous example is of Nek Mohammad

event of Baitullah Mehsud's demise, past events provide an interesting barometer reading of what may lie ahead.

One has only to look at what has happened recently in the Tribal Areas when a senior militant leader was killed or when the militants were said to have been defeated.

The most famous example is of Nek Mohammad.

He was the man who launched the Taliban

hailed as a "great victory" by the army who claimed to have "broken the back of the militants".

At that time he was estimated to have had about 5,000 followers.

Today, there are more than a dozen militant leaders who command at least that number of men and a few who have several times more.

The militants control territory throughout North West Frontier Province and every operation by the army has ultimately ended with

them losing territory.

In fact, there is a recurring pattern to the army's offensives.

Troops nearly always tend to be deployed following international claims that the area in question is newly under Al Qaeda's control and poses a threat to the country's nuclear arsenal.

The fighting often ends up leaving a largely aggravated population at the mercy of those from whom they were being rescued.

This in turn can create resentment against the government - if only a handful out of the 2.5 million people forced to leave Swat in the most recent fighting end up joining the Taliban, the militants would still receive hundreds of new recruits into their ranks.

For many people in the war-hit north-west there is increasingly only one choice, join the Taliban or leave their ancestral lands.

**Tactics:** That is maybe one reason why almost every family in Taliban-dominated areas has a member in the militant forces.

The young glamourise the militants and that - combined with the tribal concept of badal, or an eye for an eye - becomes binding on each family who loses a member in the war.

Every time the army drops a bomb or fires a bullet in the north-west it is in danger of stirring up resentment among some civilians which will create new enemies in future years.

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