HOW WILL PAKISTAN IMPLEMENT NEW SECURITY POLICY?

Earlier in the week, I wondered whether John Brennan had helped to shape the new counterterrorism policy that Pakistan is rolling out and whether it might be a ploy by Pakistan to capture some of the US counterterrorism dollars that would suddenly become available after a full withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan. Under such a scenario, the key event to watch for would be any action taken by Afghanistan against the Haqqani network or other groups that find haven in Pakistan but carry out their attacks only in Afghanistan. More details of the policy are now being revealed, and with them come some suggestions that the Haqqanis might not be targeted, but other major developments suggest that tighter cooperation with the US is occurring.

Tom Hussain of McClatchy seems to have been first to break the news (on Wednesday) that Pakistan may still choose not to go after the Haqqani network:

> Pakistan announced Wednesday that it was ending its 7-month-old policy of trying to reconcile with its Taliban insurgents and vowing to answer each terrorist attack with military strikes on the militants' strongholds in northwest tribal areas bordering Afghanistan.
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> But the government stopped short of abandoning its attempts to engage willing Taliban factions in a peace dialogue, underlining that Pakistan's national security policy remains focused on restricting attacks within its borders, rather obliterating the militants altogether.
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> That means that militants who use Pakistan for a staging base to attack

> U.S. and Afghan forces in neighboring Afghanistan will still be allowed to operate, as long as they observe a cease-fire in Pakistan.

He continues:

> Political analysts said the national security policy unveiled Wednesday offered an easy way out for militant factions that wanted to disassociate themselves from the TTP, however: They simply have to stop attacking Pakistani government forces.
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> That makes it likely that Pakistan won't take any military action against the Haqqani network, an ally of the Afghan Taliban that controls significant territory in the North Waziristan and South Waziristan tribal agencies.
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> The network is a major source of friction between Pakistan and the United States, which previously has accused Pakistan's security services of complicity in several of the network's high-profile attacks on Afghan government and U.S. targets in Kabul and elsewhere in Afghanistan.
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> Widely viewed as a projector of Pakistan's influence into Afghanistan, the Haqqani network has distanced itself from the TTP during the Taliban group's six-year insurgency by signing peace agreements, fronted by the local Wazir tribe, that predate the 2009 launch of counterterrorism operations.
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> Accordingly, it won't be targeted by the Pakistani military as long as it doesn't side with the TTP.

A very similar interpretation was offered by AFP on Thursday:

> “We will talk to those groups who are not against Pakistan,” he [Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan] told journalists in Peshawar, the main city of the northwest.
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> “We are in contact with groups that have never attacked Pakistan’s interests, we have dialogue for them.”
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> He gave no details of which groups he meant.
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> His comments could revive fears that Pakistan is maintaining a policy of distinguishing between “good” militants who can be used to further strategic goals abroad, and “bad” militants who attack domestic targets.
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> Pakistan has come in for strong criticism from the United States and Afghanistan in recent years for sheltering and patronising militants such as the Haqqani network, who attack NATO and Afghan forces across the border.

But recall that the rolling out of this new policy came after a series of high level meetings between US and Pakistani figures, so there is reason to believe that the US finds the plan worth supporting. It seems impossible to me that the US would support a plan that doesn’t eventually get around to attacking the Haqqani network. For further support of this point, consider that there have been no US drone strikes in Pakistan since Christmas. Also, Imran Khan’s PTI party yesterday ended its blockade of NATO convoy routes that was instituted after the drone strike that killed Hakimullah Mehsud (and the impending peace talks). These moves suggest to me that the US feels Pakistan is somehow taking on the targets the US would be going after with drones and that Khan will find a way to endorse the action. Will the US citizen target in Pakistan that the US is agonizing over

suddenly die a non-drone death?

In contrast to the huge public response of outrage in Pakistan over many drone strikes when there are civilian deaths, I've seen nothing so far about complaints of civilian deaths in the air strikes that have been carried out in response to recent TTP attacks. And it seems likely to me that there have been civilian deaths:

> The military started air strikes in tribal areas a week ago after suspension of peace talks with Taliban in the wake of TTP Mohmand claim of killing 23 kidnapped Frontier Corps soldiers.
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> PAF jets and army helicopter gunships hit militant hideouts in Mirali, Datta Khel, Shawal, Bobarh, Ghariom, Bara, Teerah and Thall.
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> According to military's claims, over 100 terrorists have been killed in the strikes, but there are no reports of any major militant figure having been killed in the attacks.
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> The army has claimed that strikes were very effective, precise and successful.

With over a hundred dead, it seems very likely that at least some innocent bystanders have also died. The question remains, however, whether details of who has been killed have been suppressed to hide a kill list that extends beyond the TTP and includes targets that the US would otherwise attack with drones.

Meanwhile, other details coming out about the security policy are very interesting (this is labeled as a news story at Dawn but certainly reads more like an analysis or op-ed):

> The government has set some tough targets for itself in the new security policy.
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> It intends to integrate mosques and

> madressahs to the national education system in one year, undertake legal reforms, construct a national narrative against extremist mindset in six months, improve intelligence-sharing and strengthen coordination between the Inter-Services Intelligence and civilian agencies.
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> /snip/
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> The new policy has traced non-traditional threats of violent extremism, sectarianism, terrorism and militancy in part to madressah-based education.
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> The document also refers to madressahs' foreign funding and inculcation of intolerant and violent religious attitudes.
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> As of September last year, there are over 22,000 registered madressahs in the country, excluding thousands of those which decided against going for registration initiated by previous governments. This will be another gigantic undertaking in which predecessors of Chaudhry Nisar have miserably failed.
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> Construction of a national narrative against extremism and militancy, according to the policy, should be the cornerstone of an ideological response to the non-traditional threats with the help of religious scholars, intelligentsia, media and educational institutions. In a society as fractured as Pakistan's, notably on religious lines, Chaudhry Nisar will have to pull off some miracle to develop the required national narrative. For an educationist, such an initiative needs decades not months to deradicalise people vulnerable to extremism.

That is certainly an ambitious set of goals. It is also worth noting in closing that theHaqqani network has madrassas in North Waziristan, so perhaps combating extremism there could be the basis on which the government would oppose them.